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RECIDIVATING FEMALE OFFENDERS IN OKLAHOMA

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JUANITA ORTIZ  
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A NEEDS ANALYSIS OF  
RECIDIVATING FEMALE OFFENDERS IN OKLAHOMA

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

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Dr. Susan F. Sharp, Chair

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Dr. Craig St. John

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Dr. Trina Hope

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Dr. Meredith Worthen

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Dr. Keith Gaddie

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depth of knowledge you wanted us to demonstrate, especially since it was the first essay exam I had ever taken. I wrote for the entire class period, filling up an entire large blue book, yet I did not feel confident that I had passed. I stressed for hours over my performance on your exam from that morning, so I mustered up the courage to go find you at your office that afternoon, to find out if I had failed my first essay exam and my first exam at OU. I knocked on your office and you did not answer, and I promptly proceeded to walk away sobbing, thinking I would be back next semester at my former college. At that moment, you rounded the corner, with your motorcycle helmet in hand, and asked what the hell I was doing crying in the hall. I mumbled that I had failed your exam and that I was destined to go back to my former school and fulfill the low expectations of my former professor there. Looking annoyed, you pulled me into your office and pulled my exam out of the pile on your desk. You scanned through it and told me I had done fine. Yet the next part of our conversation was what truly saved me at OU. You mentioned that you had noticed that I came overly-prepared to every class, and that I never missed a single day of class. You asked me what activities I enjoyed doing and what I was involved with outside of class. I stammered out that I didn't do anything in Norman but work, school work, and classes. You then proceeded to tell me that you wanted me to miss class and show up unprepared sometimes, based on the hobbies and fun you wanted me to start having as a college student. I remember walking out of your office shocked that a professor would tell me

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## **Abstract**

Prisoner reentry and recidivism are important issues in society today, as approximately 700,000 prisoners are being released each year. However, most of the criminological research tends to focus on male offender reentry and recidivism issues. This research will thus examine the needs influencing female offender recidivism, specifically in the state of Oklahoma. Face-to-face interviews of twenty-one female offenders in a maximum security prison were used to gain the data for this study. These findings will be analyzed in the context of mainstream and feminist criminology theories. Overall, female inmates in this study report experiencing issues with family relationships, institutionalization, meeting basic needs, paying debts, employment, housing, transportation, education, and health and medical needs.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Prisoner reentry and recidivism are serious issues currently in the United States, as close to 700,000 state and federal prisoners are released into society each year (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison 2007). Most of these prisoners are not prepared to maintain their freedom in society, as approximately two-thirds will recidivate within three years of their release from prison (Langan & Levin, 2002; Beck & Shipley, 1989). This is not a surprise, based on the many needs of reentering prisoners. The prevalence of problems with substance abuse, physical and mental health, employability, housing, and overall reintegration into society among released prisoners has been well-documented. Yet released prisoners are not likely to have had treatment or help with these problems during their incarceration. Furthermore, many of these prisoners are returning to disadvantaged communities that are not able to address these needs any more than the prison could (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006).

While reentry and offender recidivism are important issues in the United States today, most historic criminological studies have used males as the standard for consideration of criminological trends. While studies focusing specifically on female offenders have increased gradually over time, it is especially critical now to consider the unique experiences of female offenders being released, as they are increasing dramatically in representation among the incarcerated population. The

significant expansion of the female prison population thus warrants a deeper focus on what it is that brings women into crime, as well as what returns them to crime after imprisonment.

Research that will be addressed below demonstrates that female offenders have experiences and motivations leading to crime that must be considered in order to prevent their recidivism. Specifically, this research supports the criminogenic effect of the multiple victimizations that most female offenders report experiencing throughout their lives. Examining what led women into criminal offending could potentially indicate unique needs upon reentry that are not being addressed because of a failure to consider the distinctive backgrounds of female offenders. Female offenders returning to society with unmet needs face a higher likelihood of recidivism, thereby necessitating consideration on what brings women into crime and how we can prevent their returning to crime upon release from the criminal justice system. This research thus focuses on female offenders who have recidivated, in an effort to understand their unique experiences and challenges before, during, and after their incarceration.

More specifically, this research focuses on the reentry and recidivism experiences of female offenders in Oklahoma, as Oklahoma has the leading female incarceration rate in the United States. Programs have recently been introduced by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to address general reentry issues among the inmate population and even, on a smaller scale, among female

inmates. Yet this research seeks to contribute in-depth information aimed toward the creation and implementation of effective reentry programs for female offenders in Oklahoma.

This research thus involves in-depth interviews of twenty-one women in an Oklahoma prison who are incarcerated for their second or subsequent time. These women have also recidivated within three years of their previous incarceration. Finally, these women are between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four. This study examines these female offenders' experiences before, during, and after their incarceration, using feminist pathways and strain theory to better comprehend the causes of their criminal recidivism. The intent of this research is to discover patterns among these female offenders in areas of their lives that need addressing prior to their release from prison. Such an uncovering of these specific areas and needs will allow for better tailoring of transitional services for female offenders about to reenter society, with the intended subsequent outcome of reducing female recidivism in Oklahoma. While this study hypothesizes that these areas in need of special services for female offenders will be concentrated largely in substance abuse, health care, employment, housing, and rebuilding of relationships, the interview questions in this research are open-ended to allow for the revelation of unconsidered reentry needs among these female offenders.

This study begins with an introduction to female offenders and prisoners, exploring their demographics and other key characteristics and experiences.

Second, this research examines the reentry and recidivism literature and what it highlights as important needs for exiting offenders, despite the scarcity of coverage on female offenders specifically. Third, consideration will be given to feminist pathways theory and strain theory and their contributions to the question of why women are returning to prison. A discussion follows of the specific methods used in this study to gain information about the female offenders' experiences in prison and upon release from prison. Next, key areas of reentry needs are presented as identified from the interviews conducted for this study, with incorporations of these female prisoners' views on why they returned to prison. This study concludes with policy recommendations for reducing female recidivism.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Female Offenders**

Female offenders merit special consideration in discussions of prisoner reentry and recidivism, as emerging statistics show that females are significantly increasing in representation among the incarcerated population. At midyear 2007, there were 115,779 female inmates in state and federal prisons, or 7.2 percent of the nation's prison population (West & Sabol, 2009). This is a dramatic increase from 1995, when there were only 68,468 female prisoners (Harrison & Beck, 2005). Nor has this growth abated. Comparing the overall growth of female incarceration recently, Sabol, Couture, and Harrison (2007) report that the number of incarcerated females rose faster in 2006 than during the past five years. The numbers provided by these researchers are astonishing, as the female inmate population rose by 4.5 percent in 2006, whereas it had risen, on average, only 2.9 percent from 2000 to 2005. This transformed the growth rate of females in prison from an average increase of 2,878 female inmates per year to an increase of 4,872 female inmates in 2006. As of June 30, 2007, there has been an increase of 2,834 female prisoners under state or federal jurisdiction, or a 2.5 percent increase in just six months (Sabol & Couture, 2008).

Oklahoma is the state of interest in this research, as the Bureau of Justice Statistics' most recent report on prison populations shows that Oklahoma continues to have the leading female incarceration rate in the United States (West

& Sabol, 2009). Oklahoma has a female incarceration rate of 134 per 100,000, compared to the national female incarceration rate of 69 per 100,000 (West & Sabol, 2009). The most recent data from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections reveal a female inmate population of 2,744, or 10.7 percent of the total Oklahoma Department of Corrections inmate population. There were also 5,777 women on probation (23.5 percent of probation clients) and 582 women on parole (16.2 percent of parole clients) (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2010). The latest data about prior convictions show that fifty-seven percent of the females incarcerated in Oklahoma had no prior felony convictions, and 21 percent had one prior felony conviction (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group, 2008).

Oklahoma female inmates are housed in eight different facilities, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Oklahoma Female Facilities, Location, and Capacity**

Mabel Bassett Assessment and Reception Center, McLoud	93
Mabel Bassett Correctional Center (MBCC), McLoud	1,043
Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center (EWCC), Taft	783
Hillside Community Corrections Center (HCCC), Oklahoma City	250
Kate Barnard Community Corrections Center (KBCCC), Oklahoma City	164
Altus Work Center, Altus	110
Turley Correctional Center House, Tulsa	150
Oklahoma Halfway House, Oklahoma City	12
Center Point, Inc. Halfway House, Tulsa	32

Table adopted from Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group. 2009. *Female Offender Management Annual Report*, p. 26.

Looking at offenses committed, 40.6 percent of Oklahoma female inmates were incarcerated for drug offenses, with the next leading offense categories being forgery (7.7 percent), assault (6.4 percent), and larceny (6.3 percent) (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Operations, 2009). This is in comparison to the female percentages of those incarcerated across the United States for these categories of offenses: 27.5 percent for drug offenses; 10.2 percent for forgery; 8.5 percent for larceny; and 8.6 percent for assault (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009). There is consequently a noteworthy difference in the rate of female incarceration for drug offenses in Oklahoma as compared to the nationwide treatment of drug offenses among females in the criminal justice system. The Oklahoma Criminal Justice Resource Center (2004) explains this difference in the treatment of female drug offenders as due to the more



widespread use of state-supported alcohol and drug-abuse treatment programs, as well as drug courts, in lower-female-incarceration states as compared to Oklahoma. In other words, the lower-female-incarceration states are investing more into treatment programs against continued substance abuse, instead of immediately incarcerating their female drug offenders.

According to the latest information available from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (2010), the average age of a female inmate in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections is 37 years old. Looking at race and ethnicity, the female inmate population was divided as follows: White, 56.5%; African American, 25.7%; Native American, 13%; Hispanic, 4.5%; and Other, 0.1% (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group, 2009). This is in comparison to the national female inmate population, which is divided as follows: White, 45.5%; African American, 32.6%; and Hispanic, 16.1% (West & Sabol, 2009). (These national data did not provide information on the Native American or Other racial/ethnic categories that Oklahoma provided.) While Oklahoma's rate of incarceration for African American females is lower than the national rate of incarceration for African American females, this is most likely due to the lower representation of African Americans in Oklahoma, in general, as compared to the national representation of African Americans in the U.S. population. While African Americans represent

12.3% of the U.S. population, they make up only 7.3% of the Oklahoma population.

Having examined the demographics of female offenders in Oklahoma and across the United States, we can move on to consider females offenders' typical backgrounds, as documented through existing literature. Such an understanding of the events and experiences shaping female offenders' lives is critical to understanding these women's involvement in crime, as well as why they return to prison. As will be addressed below, women entering prison possess significant histories of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Incarcerated women also tend to have more serious substance abuse and health issues than incarcerated men and women in the general population. Incarcerated women are also typically undereducated and economically disadvantaged.

### *Abusive Histories*

We can begin to reflect on the experiences of female offenders by looking at their abuse histories as children and in adulthood. In terms of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, Belknap and Holsinger (2006) found that delinquent girls reported experiencing much more abuse than delinquent boys. They also found that delinquent girls were more likely than delinquent boys to report being deserted or abandoned by a parent. Delinquent girls were also significantly more likely than boys to report that they would rather be institutionalized in their

current place than to be living at home, speaking volumes about the living conditions that such delinquent girls face at home.

Further research confirms the predominance of victimization experiences among female offenders. An in-depth study of violence among criminal women found that all of the women in the sample had experienced physical or sexual violence, and some women had experienced both throughout their lives (Comack & Brickey, 2007). These women also reported such violence lasting from childhood into adulthood, transitioning from abuse by caretakers to abuse by romantic partners. The violence described in the research is shocking, including sexual assault by multiple family members or boyfriends and their acquaintances, beatings severe enough to hospitalize them, stabbings, and even repeated burnings (Acoca, 1998). Such violence was not only as the victim of violence, but also witnessing severe physical violence against their mothers as perpetrated by a male parental figure. In terms of violence experienced at the hand of romantic partners, this started at very young ages, typically in high school relationships (Sanders, 2003).

These findings are supported by Batchelor's (2005) research, which found that juvenile delinquent females attributed their criminally violent behavior to the abuse and violence they experienced at home, from their families. These girls expressed that the negative feelings that resulted from their abuse and experiences of violence at home resulted in their lashing out criminally.

Brown (2006) adds to these findings, arguing that adult female offenders in her research sample reported growing up with tremendous responsibilities and stresses at home, such as large amounts of domestic chores and childcare of siblings or other family members. The female offenders in her sample gave account after account about verbal, physical, and sexual abuse starting in childhood and continuing into adulthood with abusive partners. Such accounts of violence and abuse growing up and into adulthood are also prominent in Lamb's (2003) compilation of autobiographical accounts of incarcerated women. In fact, it is hard to encounter research on female offenders that does not support the relationship between abusive childhoods and adulthoods and their criminality (see Young & Reviere, 2006; Yourstone, Lindholm, & Kristiansson, 2008; Messina, Burdon, & Hagopian, 2006; Maidment, 2006; Raphael, 2007; Wesely, 2006 for further discussion of experiences of abuse from families and romantic partners among female offenders).

Unfortunately, the victimization that these female offenders experience at home or from loved ones does not necessarily end when they are incarcerated. Female juvenile offenders report routinely encountering emotional and physical abuse, and many juvenile offenders also report sexual misconduct by way of unnecessary strip searches, supervision of their showers, and groping and even sexual assault by male correctional officers (Acoca, 1998). Media reports have also uncovered account after account of incarcerated juvenile female offenders

experiencing emotional, physical, and sexual abuse during their detention. A recent article reported 1,343 abuse claims were confirmed in juvenile correctional centers within the past four years, with 1,140 of these claims being sexual abuse charges (Mohr, 2008). While this confirmed number of claims is small in comparison to the 13,000 claims that were made in total during this time period, experts worry that all abuses are not being reported by juvenile offenders, who fear not being believed, or by juveniles who are consensually engaging in sexual activity with adult correctional officers (Mohr, 2008). One juvenile correctional facility housing females, the Columbia Training School in Columbia, Mississippi, was found by the United States Department of Justice to have been excessively employing violence and demeaning tactics against girls for rule infractions, with actions ranging from hog-tying the girls, physically assaulting them, pepper-spraying them, and even forcing them to engage in extreme physical activity in intense heat until they threw up and subsequently offering them no relief (Boyd, 2003). Accounts of such extreme discipline and sexual, physical, and emotional assault have been documented around the United States (see Project NoSpank, 2004 for discussion of further cases of abuse in juvenile correctional facilities nationwide).

Sexual assault against incarcerated women has also been widely documented in the research (Belknap, 2007; Dumond, 2000; Amnesty International, 1999; Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, 1996;

Blackburn, Mullings, & Marquart, 2008). These researchers find that female inmates are often forced or coerced into sex by male correctional officers or administrators, who use the vulnerability and dependence of these women to take advantage of them sexually. Whether that sexual conduct involves verbal harassment, physical groping, or actual sexual intercourse, such male correctional officers or administrators use their power over these women to initiate and continue unwanted sexual advances. The victimized incarcerated women report feeling that they would not be believed or that they would jeopardize their necessities being met in the prison if they reported such instances of sexual assault.

Another way that incarcerated women experience unwanted sexual advances and assault is from other female inmates. Alarid (2000) explains how sexual actions against an inmate in a female prison can begin with sexual coercion, and that succumbing to such coercion can make a female inmate more vulnerable, in the future, to actual sexual and physical assaults. Wolff, Britz, and Shi (2006) found high rates of inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization (212 per 1,000), which was four times higher than the male rates of inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization that they found. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) similarly found high rates of inmate sexual victimization by other inmates, which resulted in depression and other negative feelings.

Such continued victimization of women, while incarcerated, can have further negative and traumatic effects on female juvenile offenders and adult female offenders. Heney and Kristiansen (1998) document how childhood victims of sexual abuse experience traumatic responses similar to their childhood victimization while in prison. Using Finkelhor and Browne's Traumatic Model of Child Sexual Abuse, these authors argue that female offenders re-experience traumatic sexualization, similar to their childhood experiences of unwanted sexual advances, with distressing experiences in prison, such as pat downs, strip searches, and forced nudity and handcuffing. Heney and Kristiansen (1998) also argue that female offenders who suffered childhood sexual abuse experience feelings of powerlessness and betrayal while incarcerated because they once again feel that authority figures who are supposed to protect them and care for them have failed them and even punished them for their self-defense or behaviors engaged in as reactions against abuse.

In line with the histories of victimization for female offenders documented through research, Sharp and Pain (2009) found that, of the females incarcerated in 2008,

- a. 67.1% had experienced child physical and/or sexual abuse;
- b. 41.5% had a father who was violent;
- c. 23.5% had a mother who was violent;
- d. 19.2% had been raped by peers in their childhood;
- e. 70.9% had been a domestic violence victim;
- f. 44% had been a rape victim; and
- g. 37.6% had been a victim of domestic violence and rape.

Juvenile and adult female offenders are thus predominantly characterized by lifelong experiences with abuse at home, from loved ones, and throughout their incarceration experiences.

### *Substance Abuse*

Incarcerated women also have significant histories of substance abuse. In terms of female offender substance abuse, Fazel, Bains, and Doll (2006) found

The figures for substance dependence in female prisoners are of particular concern...the relative excess compared with the general population is greater in women than men...this suggests that priority of service provision in this respect should be made for female prisoners (101).

These findings are supported by research conducted by the Urban Institute in Baltimore, Chicago, Texas, Ohio, and New Jersey (Baer et al., 2006).

Additionally, Conly (1998) states:

Women were somewhat more likely than men to have used drugs in the month before the offense that resulted in their incarceration and to have been under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense...Women were considerably more likely than men to have committed crimes in order to obtain money to purchase drugs. Women were also more likely to be serving sentences for drug offenses (4).

These women are typically introduced to drugs and alcohol by a boyfriend or family member (Belknap, 2007). Brown (2006) reported that female offenders in her sample typically began using drugs and alcohol in adolescence, and they continued substance abuse as adults in response to continued and increased exposure to drugs and alcohol from a spouse or romantic partner. Incarcerated



women also reported using drugs as a way to “self-medicate” against their abusive and economically desperate situations (Belknap, 2007; Belknap, 2003; Pollock, 2002). Despite the obvious need for substance abuse treatment among incarcerated women, such treatment is severely lacking in women’s prison facilities (Kelley, 2003; Mauer & King, 2007; Young & Reviere, 2006). This is in line with Petersilia’s (2003) findings. She asserts that it is troubling that the number of inmates receiving substance abuse treatment is declining. Petersilia (2003) notes that it is not a lack of desire to participate in these programs that is responsible for such low levels of participation. It is actually the incredibly long waiting lists for these programs that are keeping inmates from participating in them. Specific to female inmates, many reported that the waiting list for substance abuse treatment made their much-needed treatment nearly impossible (Laux, Dupuy, & Moe 2008).

These incarcerated women’s addiction to drugs is also important based on the impact of sentencing practices involving drug possession and sales. Specifically, Mauer and King (2007) explain that the “War on Drugs,” initiated in the 1980s, has resulted in the skyrocketing incarceration of women for drug offenses, despite their typically minimal roles in the drug trade in the United States. Steffensmeier (1993) best illustrates this trend, by showing that, in 1960, the female drug abuse arrest rate per 100,000 in the population was 8. However, in three decades (1990), that female drug abuse arrest rate reached 166 per

100,000 in the population. The latest research available from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Mumola & Karberg, 2006) showed that, in 2004, 59.3% of female state inmates and 47.6% of female federal inmates had used drugs in the month before their offense. In terms of Oklahoma female offenders, 64 percent of the inmates received from July 2007 through June 2008 were assessed as needing moderate to intense substance abuse treatment (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group, 2009). Female offenders thus have significant substance abuse histories, with this issue having great implications for their experiences in the criminal justice system.

### *Health*

Petersilia (2003) notes that inmates and releasees tend to have more health problems than individuals in the general population based on their “risky lifestyles, poor access to health care, and substance abuse histories” (p. 34). The National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) (2002) supports this finding, as well as revealing the specific differences between inmates and the general population in terms of health issues. The NCCHC (2002) finds that, compared to the general national population, inmates and prison releasees have significantly higher rates of infectious diseases, chronic diseases, and mental illness.

Yet incarcerated women are more likely than incarcerated men and individuals in the general population in society to possess significant health issues, based on “their increased likelihood of living in poverty, limited access to preventive medical care, poor nutrition, chemical dependency, and limited education on health matters” (Belknap, 2007, p. 208). The NCCHC (2002) states that incarcerated women have higher rates of diabetes, HIV infection, and heart disease than incarcerated men or individuals in the general population. Brennan and Austin (1997) also argue that female inmates have special health concerns, as compared to male inmates, based on their higher rates of injection drug use and hard drug use, as well as cervical and breast cancer and menopause. Maruschak (2008) verifies that female inmates are more likely than male inmates to have a current medical condition while incarcerated. Yet a review of the literature by Belknap (2007) and Anderson (2003) confirms that women are not getting adequate health care for any of these health issues while incarcerated.

However, these health tendencies for incarcerated women do not even cover the special health care needs associated with pregnancy and the female reproductive system. The Office of Justice Programs (2008) states that 3 percent of federal inmates and 4 percent of state inmates declared that they were pregnant at the time of their intake, yet only a little more than half (54 percent) received any pregnancy care (no specifics were offered as to what any of this consisted of). This is a concern, as most of these women have high-risk pregnancies associated

with their likelihood of having lived in poverty, been homeless, lacked access to health care, had poor nutrition, and possessed a chemical dependency (Daane, 2003). Baldwin and Jones (2000) found that pregnant inmates were not typically offered any prenatal or postnatal care, whether medically, nutritionally, psychologically, or educationally, compromising the women's physical and mental health throughout their pregnancy, delivery, and upon their separation from their newborn babies. The NCCHC (2002) and Acoca and Austin (1996) describe resulting complications of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), breast infections, transmission of STD's and HIV to newborn babies, and severe mental depression and anxiety from the lack of screenings and treatment, as well as the lack of pregnancy and postnatal care, for female inmates.

In terms of mental health, the NCCHC (2002) finds that incarcerated women have significantly higher rates of mental illness than incarcerated men or individuals in the general population. Specifically, incarcerated women have significantly higher rates than incarcerated men of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety. In her recent research on state and federal inmates, Maruschak (2008) confirms that incarcerated women were more likely to possess a mental impairment. Belknap (2007) attributes this situation to incarcerated women's typical histories of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; substance abuse; and lifelong victimizations. Despite the need for mental health care for incarcerated women, only about 20 percent of the women needing this care

actually receive it while incarcerated (Harlow, 1998; Teplin, Abram, & McClelland, 1997). It is thus the situation that women are not getting the health care services they gravely need while incarcerated (Young & Reviere, 2001; Moe & Ferraro, 2003).

In line with these findings on health and incarcerated women, 68 percent of Oklahoma female offenders had a history of or were currently being treated for a mental illness (Sharp & Pain, 2009). Seventy-three female inmates, on average, were prescribed psychotropic medications monthly to deal with mental health issues. In 2008, more than 530 incarcerated female offenders needing substance abuse treatment were on a waiting list for treatment programs (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group, 2008). Thirty-one children were born to offenders at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center from July 2007-June 2008, and there were an average of sixteen females pregnant during this time period. In terms of chronic illnesses, 12 female inmates during this time period were HIV-positive or had AIDS; 273 had asthma; 1 had cancer; 21 had cardiovascular issues; 9 had diabetes; 50 had Hepatitis C; 304 reported hypertension; and 80 had seizures (Sharp & Pain, 2009; Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group, 2009).

### *Educational and Economic Disadvantage*

The final characteristics of the typical female offender that will be explored are their educational and economic disadvantages. Brown (2006) argues that incarcerated women have very low educational attainment, very little or no job skills or employment experience, and high rates of economic dependence on males. The economic dependence on males occurs despite the fact that 34 percent of federal female inmates and 47 percent of state female inmates have never been married (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). Only one in four female inmates reported having been employed full-time prior to their incarceration (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). About one-third (37 percent) of female inmates had incomes of less than \$600 per month prior to their arrest, and approximately 30 percent were receiving welfare assistance at the time of their arrest (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). In a comprehensive study on educational attainment among the nation's state and federal inmates, 42 percent of female inmates had not completed high school or earned their GED (Harlow, 2003).

Women in prison are thus more likely than men in prison to have experienced physical and sexual abuse, from children into adulthood. Incarcerated women are also more likely to have experienced serious issues with substance abuse, physical and mental health, and educational and economic limitations and difficulties (see Richie, 2001 and Harlow, 1999 for further discussion of these trends). Bloom and McDiarmid (2000) summarize the female offender effectively:

Their most common pathways to crime are based on survival (of abuse and poverty) and substance abuse. Their greatest needs are for comprehensive treatment for drug abuse and trauma recovery, education and training in job and parenting skills, and safe and sober housing (12).

Their traumatic and harmful experiences are substantiated by female offenders as a major motivation toward their involvement in crime. The majority of the female juvenile offenders in Belknap and Holsinger's 2006 study reported that their abuse histories "had influenced their subsequent offending" (58). Many women in Comack and Brickey's 2007 study explained their criminal acts as being in reaction, or self-defense, to the victimization they were experiencing at the time of their crime. Ninety-two percent of adult female offenders in another study reported that their experiences as juveniles with violence in the home, in relationships, and at school were largely responsible for their initial involvement in criminal activities (Acoca, 1998). Siegel and Williams (2003) found that women who experienced child sexual abuse were more likely to engage in crime as adults than women who were not sexually abused. Furthermore, child sexual abuse female victims were more likely to be arrested for drug offenses and violent crimes as adults than women who did not suffer childhood sexual abuse. The anthology, *In Her Own Words: Women Offenders' Views on Crime and Victimization* (Alarid & Cromwell, 2007), offers account after account of how female offenders' victimizations were used to justify their transition into criminal offending. Also, due to their educational limitations and underemployment or

lack of employment, women are more at risk of offending based on economic difficulties (Heilbrun, Dematteo, & Fretz, 2008; Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008). In fact, women may turn to drug sales or property crimes as a desperate means of economic survival for themselves and their families (Moe, 2006; Golden, 2005).

Consequently, failure to understand and address these pathways into offending for women effectively translates into their being set up for failure, as the current study argues that recidivism is linked to these pathways. It is thus of the utmost importance that these pathways into female offending are taken into account in the consideration of the reentry experience for female offenders.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Reentry and Recidivism**

While there has increasingly been research conducted on female offenders and their experiences, very little research specifically focuses on their reentry experiences. Even less research exists on female recidivism and the factors that influence women's return to crime. Initial research into reentry experiences of female offenders documents an overall criminal justice system practice of taking programs designed for male offenders and putting them into practice with female offenders (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). While many of female offenders' reentry needs are similar to those of male offenders, the studies already discussed demonstrate the unique pathways of female offenders into crime and thus unique needs, as compared to male offenders. Such differences validate the need to consider female offender needs specifically and to create reentry programs accordingly. Here we will begin with an examination of the literature on general reentry needs. We will then move into a consideration of recidivism trends and the factors influencing its likelihood.

#### **Prisoner Reentry**

As mentioned previously, approximately 700,000 state and federal prisoners will reenter society each year (Sabol et al., 2007). Each reentering individual will encounter unique challenges and opportunities toward his or her

successful reintegration into society. Overall, however, the trends in prisoner reentry research show that these individuals will face difficulties in key areas of their lives once they leave prison and attempt to establish themselves in communities. These difficulties exist, in part, due to the lack of assistance that incarcerated individuals receive in addressing the issues with which they entered prison in the first place. Released prisoners will consequently enter society having to deal not only with the stigma associated with their criminal convictions, but also having to deal with problems present in their lives before and during their incarceration. The most documented areas of life in which reentering prisoners will experience difficulty on the “outside” include employment, housing, families, substance abuse, and health (Petersilia, 2003; Travis & Visher, 2005; Travis, 2005).

### *Employment*

Seiter and Kadela (2003) state that finding a job is an ex-offender’s greatest concern, as he or she has to contend with age upon release and few relevant job skills. This is further supported by research conducted by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (1990), which found that 74% of ex-felons cited finding employment as their first priority upon release. Oftentimes, such employment is a requirement for newly released prisoners to remain successfully paroled.

The impact of a felony conviction on an ex-felon's employability is well documented. Ex-offenders face already limited employment opportunities, as several states prohibit ex-felons from working in settings involving childcare, education, nursing homes and healthcare, security, and finance, regardless of educational levels or qualifications (Hahn, 1991; Dietrich, 2002; Harris & Keller, 2005). These ex-inmates also face extremely difficult experiences in their attempts to gain employment, based on "substance abuse problems, spotty work histories, poor educational backgrounds, physical and mental health problems, and bias against them" (Mukamal, 2001, 3). These individuals have additionally been stigmatized as "criminals" or "felons" by society, based on their criminal convictions, and therefore face a huge obstacle in gaining adequate employment upon release (Henry & Jacobs, 2007).

Another factor of importance emerging from the literature is wages paid—that is, the higher the wages, the less likely ex-offenders are to recidivate (Kling, Weiman, & Western, 2000). Yet ex-offenders are not likely to achieve adequate wages throughout the duration of their employment history. This may be due to the stigma that comes with being convicted of a felony; the time spent out of the labor market due to incarceration; or the lack of skills or low educational levels that are typical of ex-offenders (Travis & Petersilia, 2001). Western and Beckett (1999) looked at the penal system as a labor market institution and found that

incarceration increased the likelihood of unemployment among ex-convicts. In fact, they stated

With over a million men now in prison or jail, the results suggest that the penal system annually generates the equivalent of a full year of unemployment for more than 200,000 American men. In the long run, incarceration thus significantly undermines the productivity and employment chances of the male workforce (1052).

Western (2002) also found that incarceration reduced the wages of ex-offenders from 10 to 20 percent, and that incarceration also reduced the rate of wage growth by about 30 percent.

Furthermore, researchers have found that having a job lessens the likelihood that an ex-offender will recidivate upon release. Eisenberg (1990) found that an unemployed ex-felon was three times more likely to recidivate than an employed ex-felon. Harer (1994) sought to pinpoint the factors that might influence the recidivism of such offenders. Examining a cohort of released federal prisoners, he found that an ex-felon's employment highly reduced the frequency of recidivism for that individual. Specifically, Harer found that inmates who had jobs at the time of their release were about half as likely to recidivate as inmates who did not have a job at the time of their release (27.6% versus 53.9%, respectively). Thus, he argued that it was in the best interests of society and former offenders to promote employment opportunities for ex-felons. Piehl (2003) also documented the importance of work in improving the chances of reentering offenders not recidivating, suggesting that programs needed to be

implemented in prisons to prepare reentering offenders for “good” work, or work with decent wages and benefits, that could sustain individuals away from crime.

### *Housing*

Housing is also a critical issue facing newly released prisoners. A major obstacle to housing for returning offenders is the lack of financial resources with which they exit the correctional facility. No access to money makes it difficult for these individuals to make deposits on a residence, much less on utilities for that residence. While similarly impoverished non-criminal individuals can access federally subsidized or public housing, federal laws governing public housing authorities block many criminals from receiving housing assistance. These federal housing laws are so severe that they mandate the eviction of an entire family if a felon is discovered to be residing with them. So, offenders returning to families relying on federal housing assistance endanger their family’s housing situation if the family is willing to let them move in. This means that many may not be able to rely on their families for assistance during their own transition back into society. Furthermore, offenders’ loss of contact with family members during their incarceration may translate into not even having their family as an option to turn to for housing refuge. Finally, the stigma attached with a criminal conviction, as disclosed through increasing use of criminal background investigations in housing applications, makes it difficult for returning offenders to

gain landlords' confidence enough to grant them a residence (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001).

Indeed, housing issues are so problematic for returning inmates that that many face homelessness immediately upon their reentry into society (Travis et al., 2001). Lack of access to housing or to resources necessary to gain housing promotes recidivism and relapsing into other problematic behaviors like substance abuse and crime. These researchers therefore argue for the importance of offering affordable housing options to returning offenders to ease their path into a conventional, law-abiding way of life.

### *Families*

Reentering former offenders also face challenges involving family reunification. Imprisonment, especially longer terms, severely affects relationships between family members. The imprisonment of a family member affects

the family structure, financial responsibilities, emotional support systems, and living arrangements...incarceration, as a result, can drastically disrupt spousal relationships, parent-child relationships, and family networks (Bauer et al., 2006, 12).

Alienation can thus take place between a prisoner and his/her family (Austin, Irwin, & Hardyman, 2002). First, there are prison administrative policies that serve to restrict contact between prisoners and their families. Such prison administrative policies limit visitation to a short amount of time during specific

hours, often only on weekends. If prisoners' families cannot make it to visit during that small window of availability, then they face losing contact with the prisoner. The remote locations of most prisons in the United States also work against families maintaining contact with incarcerated members. The 1997 BJS survey of incarcerated parents found that most parents lived between 100 and 500 miles away from their last place of residence (Mumola, 2000). The distant location of these prisons brings obstacles to bear against families maintaining contact with prisoners, considering the expenditures of time and money that are involved with such visitation. Visits to prison are even more limited if the inmates' families do not have their own mode of transportation, as public transportation is not typically available to such remote locations. Finally, Austin et al. (2002) cite the prison visit experience itself as working against families staying connected while a family member is incarcerated. Even with families traveling to make it to visitation during very limited hours, the visitation itself involves high levels of supervision in very tight and uncomfortable settings with little privacy. All of these factors serve to limit families maintaining contact with prisoners during the incarceration term. These factors may exhaust family members emotionally, financially, and time-wise, making it a very complex decision for family members to sustain contact with an inmate (Christian, 2005).

The separation of family members is critically important in the case of incarcerated parents and their children, as more than 10 million children will

experience a parent's incarceration during their lifetime (Hirsch, 2002). In terms of currently incarcerated parents, Mumola (2000) found 721,500 inmates who were parents to almost 1.5 million children in the United States. The incarceration of a parent can have strong repercussions on a child's life as well. According to one study, an overwhelming majority of children whose parent was incarcerated suffered post-traumatic stress symptoms (Kampfner, 1995). Sharp (2003) details the effects of a mother's incarceration on her children, citing children's depression, decline in academic performance, and encounters with the criminal justice system. This research finds that these effects on children stem from the loss of their mother, the potential loss of their siblings, as well as the instability that they may face in their residential situation (Sharp, 2003).

Adding to difficulties experienced with the family for a reentering offender are the limitations that they face in terms of employment and access to social programs. While the marginalization that former offenders face in employment and legitimate income opportunities has been addressed above, a criminal conviction also limits access to social programs that might alleviate the economic situation that such individuals face upon release. For example, federal welfare laws ban certain ex-offenders from ever receiving food stamps, welfare assistance, or housing assistance (Mukamal, 2001). Former offenders often leave prison with minimal money and none of the basic essentials of food, clothing, and shelter. The inability to provide for themselves translates into an even lower



likelihood of being able to provide for their children, should they regain custody of them. If there is not a specific ban on receipt of public assistance for the reentering individual, a criminal conviction can make it more difficult to meet the requirements of maintaining such public assistance. Hirsch (2002) aptly summarizes the dilemma that former offenders face regarding welfare and criminal justice system obligations:

If they are eligible for benefits, parents with criminal records also face welfare department requirements concerning work, child support enforcement, and verification, which may directly conflict with the court-ordered probation or parole conditions or with other demands of the criminal justice or child welfare systems. As a result, parents may be forced to choose between doing what is required to get or keep welfare benefits and doing what is required to recover from alcoholism or drug dependence, retain or regain custody of their children, or stay out of jail (28).

Ultimately, then, maintaining connections with family, and children specifically, during incarceration is important to preventing a released offender's recidivism (Baer et al., 2006). Yet the separation of inmates and family members and the lack of programs available in most prisons to promote families staying connected threaten offenders' successful reentry. Furthermore, without employment and with limited or no access to public assistance, released prisoners are left with very few options to survive in an economically legitimate manner by themselves, much less when striving to take care of a family as well.

### *Substance Abuse*

Substance abuse is also an issue facing inmates while incarcerated and upon release from prison. Eighty-three percent of state prisoners reported prior drug abuse, and 24 percent reported prior alcohol abuse. More specifically, one-third of state prisoners reported using drugs at the time of their offense, and 37 percent of state prisoners reported using alcohol at the time of their offense. Combined, 52 percent of state prisoners reported using both alcohol and drugs at the time of their offense (Mumola, 1999). This study also indicated that female state prison inmates were more likely than male state inmates to have used drugs in the month prior to the incarceration and while committing their offense. In contrast, male inmates were more likely than female inmates to have alcohol abuse histories or to have been drinking at the time of their offense. Despite such trends in drug and alcohol abuse, only 10 percent of state prisoners had participated in any form of substance abuse treatment since their incarceration (Mumola, 1999).

The Urban Institute (Baer et al., 2006) accordingly promotes substance abuse treatment for inmates while incarcerated and after their release from prison, citing the higher rates of recidivism found for individuals abusing drugs and alcohol after their release from prison. Harrison (2001) similarly recommends therapeutic community substance abuse treatment that transitions from inside prison to the community with an offender's release, finding that such a

transitioning of substance abuse treatment reduces former offenders' criminal recidivism and relapsing back into substance abuse.

### *Health*

Returning prisoners also face overwhelming obstacles in meeting their health care needs while incarcerated and especially after their release. The National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) (2002) reports that inmate populations have higher rates of physical, mental, and chronic illness than the general population. In terms of communicable diseases, this research reported an alarming prevalence of inmates infected with HIV, AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, and hepatitis. This report also detailed high rates of diabetes, asthma, hypertension, and serious mental illness among inmate populations.

The Urban Institute's *Returning Home* research series has produced findings substantiating these concerns (Baer et al., 2006). This research found high rates of chronic physical and mental health conditions among responding inmates, accompanied by low rates of medical treatment while incarcerated. Furthermore, inmates were unlikely to receive help meeting their medical needs in their transitioning back into society, especially lacking health insurance upon their release from prison (Baer et al., 2006).

In the face of such grave findings, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) (2002) addressed the public health threat of hundreds of thousands of prison inmates being released back into communities each year. Without having received adequate treatment in prison or without having secured a treatment plan after their release into the general population, the NCCHC (2002) warned that returning inmates were a problematic source of communicable diseases. Additionally, inmates with untreated mental and substance abuse issues may pose a danger to themselves and others in society. Finally, underdiagnosis and undertreatment of illnesses and health conditions could potentially overburden the public health care system's resources, as these released inmates require more specialized and intensive attention to deal with their worsening physical or mental conditions (NCCHC, 2002).

However, despite its importance for public health, scant efforts exist in the criminal justice system to help meet inmates' medical needs upon their reentry into society. Without serious efforts to improve transitioning health care for inmates from prison to society, Hammett, Roberts, and Kennedy (2001) make similar warnings to the NCCHC's (2002) warnings, that society's public health system faces a huge threat with these inmates' reentry. So, the lack of treatment while incarcerated, coupled with the lack of access to treatment or medication after release, present real threats to successful reentry for an offender and to a smoothly functioning public health system.

### Female Offender Reentry

Turning now to existing research on female offender reentry, several specific needs have been documented through multiple studies (Jacobs, 2000; O'Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001; Severance, 2004). Conly (1998) points out that women prisoners have more problems than men in prison. They have to deal with pregnancy while incarcerated, have higher rates of HIV infection than incarcerated males, have much higher rates of physical or sexual abuse prior to incarceration than incarcerated males, have a higher likelihood than incarcerated males of being the only parent of dependent children at the time of their incarceration, and have a lower likelihood of being arrested for a violent crime.

Additional research shows that many of these female offenders are living below the poverty rate at the time of their incarceration and following their release (Severance, 2004; Jacobs, 2000; Holtfreter, Reisig, & Morash, 2004; Olson, Lurigio, & Seng, 2000). Women also have higher rates of substance abuse and mental illness than male offenders. These distinctions among female offenders, as compared to male offenders, are important in considerations of successful reentry for women, as having experienced adverse events is correlated to engaging in crime, as well as an increased likelihood of experiencing further mental and physical health problems (Messina & Grella, 2006; Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005).

Considering female offenders specifically, Anderson (2003) states

Women in prison have higher rates of substance abuse, antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and histories of sexual and physical abuse than their male counterparts. Women frequently engage in self-mutilating behaviors, are verbally abusive, and report numerous suicide attempts (51).

Overall, Anderson (2003) reports that female inmates are more likely than male inmates to have recurring and more severe mental health issues, based on their lifelong experiences of victimization. This higher likelihood of mental illness among female inmates is further troubling in light of research showing that, while men respond to mental illness outwardly against others, women respond to mental illness in more self-harming or even suicidal ways (Covington, 2002).

Additional research points to further factors that intersect with sex to explain higher rates of mental illness, HIV/AIDS and STDs, and chronic disease and illness among certain populations of criminal women over others. Specifically, Anderson, Rosay, and Saum (2002) found that Hispanic criminal women had higher rates of mental illness and chronic disease and illness than White criminal women. They also found that each additional year of age “increased the odds of mental illness by 80.7%” (61). This research further discovered that Black criminal women had higher rates of HIV/AIDS and STDs than White criminal women. Education and employment were also found to be explanatory in this research, with each additional year of education and employment reducing the rate of HIV/AIDS and STDs among these women.

Another study examining the influence of female inmates' life experiences on their high rates of HIV and STDs found that incarcerated women with histories of abuse were more likely to engage in problematic risky sexual behavior such as sex without protection, sex with multiple partners, and sex while under the influence of drugs and alcohol (Fogel & Belyea, 1999). The prevalence of such serious health conditions among female offenders merit creation and implementation of programs addressing these needs. Yet the underdiagnosis and undertreatment of these issues in prison and after release potentially contribute to unsuccessful reentry efforts, as disintegration mentally and physically for an offender can lead to failure in all other aspects of life as well (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005; Baer et. al., 2006; Belknap, 2007).

Reentering female offenders face further specific health care needs during their incarceration and release. Biologically, women need gynecological services, as well as services related to pregnancy, breast health, and menopause. Female inmates also require minor modifications and items to deal with menstruation. Yet Ammar and Weaver (2005) argue that

Basic requirements of adaptation to prison life such as more frequent access to showers when women prisoners are menstruating, providing sanitary towels, or general orthopedic care for women who are undergoing menopause are rarely provided (68).

Pregnant inmates also necessitate consideration of their condition for suitable clothing, work assignments, and prenatal care (Daane, 2003).

Aside from the tangible adjustments required for female inmates in the criminal justice system, female prisoners also report negative conditions in their medical treatment while incarcerated. Overall, female prisoners often voice discomfort over having to see a male gynecologist, and they complain of a lack of compassion and respect from health care providers (Ammar & Weaver, 2005). Additionally, when they do receive health services, women are not likely to receive quality healthcare in correctional facilities: “In the area of reproductive and breast cancers, prisons fail in prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, continuity of care, alleviation of pain, rehabilitation, recovery, and concern” (Cooper, 2002, 2). This research uncovered lack of treatment or follow-up care for women with breast cancer, cervical cancer, and ovarian cancer, as well as misdiagnoses. When treatment was offered, it often involved traveling in severe pain to facilities hours away from the remote location of the prison. Treatment tended to be delivered with women shackled to medical beds, surrounded by correctional guards during procedures. Upon release to the correctional facility, inmates also reported difficulties in getting their pain medication or other prescribed after-care medication from correctional staff. They consequently had to endure agonizing pain and side effects that could have been avoided with easier access to their prescribed medication (Cooper, 2002).

Other research has reported similar findings, especially in terms of health care provided to pregnant inmates (Anderson, 2003). Major shortcomings in the



care of pregnant inmates include lack of prenatal and postpartum care, as well as the lengthy and dangerous transporting of women in labor to outside facilities, because most prison facilities are not medically equipped to handle the delivery themselves. Another issue is the lack of preparation that incarcerated new mothers receive to deal with their separation from their baby, along with how to deal with that child upon release (Anderson, 2003).

Daane's (2003) research, focusing on inmate pregnancy supports the prevalence of substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and major health issues among incarcerated women. Yet this research also emphasizes the effects of pre-prison homelessness and poverty, along with the experiences and stressors of incarceration, on an inmates' pregnant condition. However, incarceration may be favorable, to an extent, toward an inmate's healthy delivery of a baby, as inmates may receive better prenatal health care and nutrition while incarcerated than they would have received on their own in society (Daane, 2003). This study also cites research showing that women in prison while pregnant and delivering have significantly poorer birth outcomes than women in the general population. This led the author to recommend that programs be created while the mother is incarcerated to promote healthy birth outcomes and mother-child relationships, thereby working to avoid the negative medical and social consequences for a society dealing with unhealthy children, women, and parental relationships (Daane, 2003).

Aside from health care issues, reentering female offenders also face unique family reunification issues. While male inmates also face challenges in reuniting with their families, they are more likely to return to their intimate partner, from before their incarceration, upon release (Leverentz, 2006a; Arditti & Few, 2006). In Arditti and Few's 2006 study, more incarcerated mothers reported having separated or divorced their children's father during incarceration than having remained married during incarceration. Presence or absence of an intimate partner during incarceration and upon release from prison is important, as they can often provide social and financial support that is missing for many exiting prisoners. Yet this support is more likely to be absent for females leaving prison, as compared to male inmates leaving prison.

Another difficulty that incarcerated mothers face with family has to do with the placement of their children upon their incarceration. Incarcerated fathers are more likely to have left their children with the children's mother upon their own incarceration (Mumola, 2000). Yet the incarceration of a mother comes with a higher likelihood that a child will be left without a parental presence (Mumola, 2000). Consequently, the explosive growth of U.S. female incarceration in the last two decades has brought about a greater potential of children being left without a parent in their lives. While the incarceration of a parent is traumatizing for a child, the presence of the other parent can help to alleviate such a negative situation by providing some parental stability in their lives. However, women

offenders are more likely to face a reunification with their children in the absence of the other parent's moderating of the situation during their incarceration and upon release. This presents tremendous challenges to women seeking to reunite with their children, especially in light of the fact that female inmates are less likely to see their children while incarcerated than male inmates (Bloom, 1995).

Specifically, Mumola (2000) found that 64 percent of incarcerated mothers in state prisons and 84 percent in federal prisons reported living with their minor children prior to their incarceration. This is in contrast to 44 percent of incarcerated fathers in state prisons and 55 percent in federal prisons who reported living with their minor children prior to their incarceration. Indeed, incarcerated mothers were three to three-and-a-half times more likely to have been the only parent in the household at the time of their incarceration. This research reports that less than one-third of incarcerated mothers' children lived with their fathers, as compared to approximately 90 percent of incarcerated fathers' children living with their mothers. Incarcerated mothers' children were much more likely than incarcerated fathers' children to be living with a grandparent, other relatives, a foster home or agency, or with friends or others.

Research in Oklahoma has reported similar findings, with the female prisoner's parent being the most common placement (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001; Sharp, Hartsfield, & Wolf, 2008). In fact, incarcerated mothers preferred their children to be placed with the children's maternal grandmother. Mothers

who did not have the option of family members to leave their children with during their incarceration reported great deals of mental distress over not knowing who was taking care of their children or even where their children might be residing (Forsyth, 2003). Female offenders therefore face an increased likelihood of problematic and even questionable reunification with their children upon release.

Augmenting family problems for reentering female offenders are challenges in securing employment and housing, as oftentimes these women cannot regain custody of their children without meeting stiff state social service requirements. For example, in their study of reentering women, Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) found women reporting “extreme difficulties” in regaining custody of their children:

...If she had an alcohol or drug abuse problem prior to her incarceration, she must show that she has actively participated in a rehabilitation program or has been off drugs and/or alcohol for a period of time. A woman on parole must show that she has sustained employment, can financially support her children, has a permanent and appropriate residence, and is no longer involved in any criminal activity (48).

Meeting such requirements for regaining custody of children is challenging for reentering offenders, as finding employment upon release from prison is challenging to most individuals, regardless of sex. And, if employment is found among reentering offenders, it is typically in low-paying, secondary-labor-market positions (Western, 2002). As discussed previously, female offenders typically possess very low levels of educational attainment and employable skills, which

combines with the stigma of a felony conviction and prison time served to further disadvantage them in their job search upon release from prison. Such experiences in locating employment can lead to disillusionment and apathy about working in the legal job market, especially in the face of huge profits and smaller workload in the illegal job sector (Rose, Michalsen, Wiest, & Fabian, 2008). Female inmates are further disheartened in their efforts to succeed economically and to support their families in the face of all of the fines that they encounter upon their release from prison (e.g., restitution, court costs, parole supervision fees, etc.) (Arditti & Few, 2006). It is thus incredibly challenging to meet the economic requirements imposed on female offenders that have to be met in order to reunite them with their children.

Reentering offenders also confront limitations in securing affordable housing, based on the economic difficulties of leaving prison with little or no money and not being able to secure employment immediately upon release from prison (O'Brien, 2001). While some women are lucky enough to secure housing in a transitional residential setting (e.g., halfway houses) upon their release, most female offenders are typically returning to the neighborhoods from which they were arrested and convicted—typically impoverished, run-down communities with little resources to offer toward employment and overall reintegration needs (Leverentz, 2006b). Lacking money to put toward deposits, rent, and utilities, these women are also likely to live transiently with family, intimate partners, and

friends, or else be homeless before they can secure enough money to acquire a place of their own (Leverentz, 2006b; O'Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001). Securing safe and affordable housing, away from many of the old connections that brought them to crime in the first place, is consequently another significant need among reentering female offenders.

Yet these critical needs for successful reentry of female offenders are not typically addressed prior to their release back into society. Furthermore, even if some of these issues are dealt with while these women are incarcerated, no transitional services are normally offered to them upon their release. As incarcerated women are typically lacking healthy social networks of support in the community, they are returning to prison at high rates (Reisig, Holtfreter, & Morash, 2002). Successful addressing of these issues for female offenders is arguably directly correlated with prevention of recidivism (Visher & Travis, 2003). We will now consider the research on recidivism and, to the extent possible, research on female recidivism specifically.

### Recidivism

Looking specifically at recidivism across the nation, the risk of recidivism has been found to actually be highest during the first year of release (Petersilia, 2003; Langan & Levin, 2002). In the most comprehensive study of recidivism in the United States, Langan and Levin (2002) found that 67.5% of 272,111

prisoners that were released in 1994 were rearrested for a new crime within three years of release. This was an increase from the Beck and Shipley 1989 study of 108,580 persons released from prison in 1983, which found a 62.5% rearrest rate within three years of release. However, a note should be inserted here about the dangers of accepting such high rates of recidivism at face value. Beck (2001) argues that recidivism figures are problematic because there are varying definitions among reporting entities about what is counted as recidivism and what is the time frame used to measure a recidivism statistic. Recidivism has been reported at rates that exceed 50 percent over three years nationally, but this is a high estimate because California, which has a rate of two-thirds recidivism over three years, is overrepresented in the most popular national citation (Langan & Levin, 2002). Meanwhile, many states like Oklahoma report recidivism rates of one-fourth over three years, while some states like Florida are in between, and the 2000 Corrections Yearbook finds a 33.8 percent recidivism rate after three years (Camp & Camp, 2000). These disparities in recidivism rates are thus the result of correctional policies and not characteristics of the offenders.

Having qualified recidivism statistics and now focusing on sex, Beck and Shipley (1989) found a reincarceration rate of 42 percent for men and 33 percent for women within three years of release. This increased in Langan and Levin's 2002 study, as they found higher rates of recidivism for both males (53 percent) and females (40 percent).

Yet not much research exists on female recidivism specifically. The most recent research on female recidivism was completed by Huebner, DeJong, and Cobbina (2010). They followed 506 women released from prison in one state, over the course of eight years, and they found that 47 percent of these women were reconvicted or reincarcerated during the study, with most women reconvicted or reincarcerated within the first two years following their release.

Deschenes, Owen, and Crow (2006) analyzed the 23,562 females in the Langan and Levin 2002 recidivism dataset. Their research found that almost 60 percent of these females were rearrested within three years of their release. This study discovered that the higher the number of prior arrests, the higher the rate of recidivism for female offenders. This research also determined that women incarcerated for drug possession and property offenses had the highest recidivism rates, whereas women incarcerated for violent offenses had the lowest recidivism rates.

In terms of female recidivism in Oklahoma, The most recent data on this topic shows a 14.7 percent three-year recidivism rate for Oklahoma female offenders, from 2006-2009, compared to a 25 percent recidivism rate for Oklahoma male offenders during this same time period (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Operations, 2009). 2008 data on the subject show the difference between female and male prisoners in their survival rate after their release, or the rate at which each group managed to stay out of prison. These data



show a 77.5 percent survival rate for female inmates after 53 months of release for 1,339 female prisoners, compared to a 67.31 percent survival rate for 7,157 male inmates after 53 months of release (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Management Group, 2008). Recent research on recidivism among adult offenders released in Oklahoma between 1985 and 2004 confirmed this finding, with men 31.2 percent more likely to recidivate than women (Spivak & Damphousse, 2006).

So, why are inmates returning to prison at such high rates? If incarceration is meant to serve as a deterrent from crime and anything else that would bring a person back to prison, then why are so many released individuals returning to prison within three years of their release? In fact, research on the effectiveness of prison as a deterrent against future offending has suggested that prison has no effect on reducing criminal recidivism, and serving time in prison is actually positively correlated with recidivism (Gendreau, Goggin, & Cullen, 1999; Lynch, 1999; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; Maruna & Toch, 2005). The failure of prisons to turn out conforming citizens has been attributed to their “alienation of offenders” from the outside world, through longer sentences behind bars; tightened rules and security preventing interaction with outside individuals and communities; and irrelevant programs and trainings that do not promote success and survival upon their release from prison (Maruna & Toch, 2005, 171).

Petersilia (2003) addresses disturbing trends working against prisoners' potential for successful reintegration. First, two-thirds of prisoners released today have not received any vocational or educational services while incarcerated. Secondly, only a quarter of inmates in need of substance abuse treatment receive any treatment, and this treatment is overwhelmingly at the hands of inmate self-help groups instead of intensive therapeutic efforts. Third, prisoners are not receiving physical health, mental health, and reintegration services prior to or upon their release. Essentially, then, the United States today practices a system of justice and incarceration that is retributive in nature, stigmatizing offenders for a lifetime and cycling them through crime, fear, withdrawal, isolation, weakened community bonds, and more crime in the long run (Travis & Visher, 2005; Petersilia, 2003; Pranis, 1997; Becker, 1963).

So what works to guard against recidivism in released prisoners? Ultimately, the most effective approaches, as will be detailed below, appear to be in line with Braithwaite's (1989) restorative justice model. Braithwaite, through his reintegrative shaming theory, argued that shame can act as an effective agent of social control. Braithwaite makes the case that there are two types of shaming: disintegrative and reintegrative. He states that disintegrative shaming occurs when offenders are permanently stigmatized by society, thereby creating a class of outcasts. These outcasts, prevented from re-entering society through conventional activities, are pushed into non-conventional and oftentimes criminal

activities in order to survive and maintain a level of self-respect by “rejecting their rejectors” (Braithwaite, 1989, 14). This type of shaming is consistent with the stigmatization and isolation reported by reentering offenders, and Braithwaite argues that it is conducive to future involvement in crime.

A recent study in Florida supports this assertion (Chiricos, Barrick, & Bales, 2007). Judges in Florida are allowed to withhold a felony conviction for individuals sentenced to probation. Comparing these individuals to those who did receive a felony conviction, the authors found that labeled felons were more likely to recidivate in two years as compared to those who did not receive the felon label. Another study, specific to female reentering offenders, finds that these women feel extremely harsh judgment and limited acceptance and opportunities in their communities upon their release from prison (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Because such feelings of shame and ostracism are conducive to recidivating, these authors argue for increased reintegration efforts among communities in the form of community education and increased opportunities for reentry for these female offenders into employment, community affairs, and reunification with family (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

Braithwaite’s second type of shaming, reintegrative shaming, occurs when offenders are allowed back into society through societal rituals. Unlike disintegrative shaming, this type of shaming is crime-reducing. Braithwaite (1989) states that

Crime is best controlled when members of the community are the primary controllers through active participation in shaming offenders, and, having shamed them, through concerted participation in ways of reintegrating the offender back into the community of law abiding citizens (8).

He argues that a society based upon reintegrative shaming teaches individuals that noncompliance with its moral laws infringes on others' autonomy and will therefore lead to social disapproval. This plays upon an individual's need for acceptance and companionship. Societies based upon disintegrative shaming, on the other hand, lead to forced compliance with the laws based on individual interests, thereby leading to higher crime rates based on the ideology of individualism (Braithwaite, 1989).

Braithwaite (1989) states that much effort is devoted to labeling offenders as "criminal" through disintegrative criminal justice practices in place, while little-to-no effort is devoted to allowing such individuals to shed this powerful "criminal" label. Reintegrative shaming works by providing prior offenders with gestures and ceremonies of forgiveness and reacceptance. He argues for criminal justice policies of work release, community service, and study release, with individuals and communities relevant to the offender present in the sentencing, punishment, and reintegration stages of the offender (Braithwaite, 1989).

Bazemore (1998) also argues for the implementation of a restorative model of justice, in comparison to the retributive model of justice practiced today in the United States. Such a restorative model of justice involves a "three-

dimensional collaborative process” with victims, communities, and offenders working together as contributors to the restorative process (Bazemore, 1998, 771). Such a restorative model addresses victims’ needs for emotional, physical, and monetary reparation, while allowing the community to feel safer as a result of their increased involvement in the justice system. Offenders are also allowed to recognize the impact of their crimes through mediated interaction with their victims, and these offenders are given the opportunity to provide restitution and apologies directly to the victims and communities they have injured. Such a restorative model of justice shifts crime control away from the criminal justice system into the hands of the community, which seeks to assist victims in their healing while also ensuring that offenders are held accountable for their crimes and allowed to make amends (Bazemore, 1998).

So, in a society based on reintegrative shaming and the restorative justice model, offenders would not automatically face imprisonment and the subsequent permanently stigmatizing status upon release that is the standard societal response to them today. Instead, such offenders might be allowed to complete restitution, community service, and victim-offender mediation instead of incarceration. Whether placed in prison or in the community, these offenders would have the opportunity to absorb the impact of their crimes on their victims and their communities, while still having the opportunity to make amends with their victims and their communities. Such offenders would therefore have the

opportunity to gain back a conventional identity and self-respect through involvement in conventional activities. Furthermore, if placed in prison, programs and individuals from local communities would work with offenders to help them gain skills and knowledge relevant toward their success upon release back into society. These offenders would subsequently escape societal isolation and stigmatization that could soon after lead to their recidivism.

#### *What Helps to Prevent Recidivism?*

The limited research findings available on recidivism and, specifically, female recidivism, concur with restorative justice recommendations of addressing offenders' needs while keeping them accountable to others. First, in terms of mental health needs among offenders, Swaminath, Mendoca, Vidal, and Chapman (2002) found that mentally ill offenders faced lower recidivism rates through pretrial diversion into treatment compared to incarceration. This conclusion is significant, as pretrial diversion can help the individual while protecting society and costing much less than incarceration.

Looking at mental health needs among incarcerated offenders, intensive treatment through therapeutic community programs contributes to lower recidivism rates among released offenders (Mitchell, Wilson, & MacKenzie, 2007; Mosher & Phillips, 2006; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Farrell, 2000). Therapeutic communities involve separating the participants from the

general prison population, to create a bond among participants and to shelter participants from criminally-conducive attitudes and behaviors. Participants of therapeutic communities help to run the program, and they are held accountable to each other and themselves for behaviors and expressions that might cause them to relapse criminally or in any other negative way. This community is intensive through its segregation of participants from the general inmate population, but also based on its long-term treatment, typically a year in length (Mitchell et al., 2007). The intensive therapy in these communities helps inmates to deal with past experiences that may be at the root of their criminality, in the environment of support and input from similarly situated individuals.

Another successful approach to reducing recidivism has been Cognitive-Behavior Therapy. The National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists (2008) defines Cognitive-Behavior Therapy as

...based on the idea that our thoughts cause our feelings and behaviors, not external things, like people, situations, and events. The benefit of this fact is that we can change the way we think to feel/act better even if the situation does not change.

Landenberger and Lipsey (2005) found that individuals who participated in Cognitive-Behavior Therapy were 1.53 times less likely to recidivate as compared to those who had not participated in this therapy. Yet these authors found that the effectiveness of these programs in reducing recidivism were contingent on the quality implementation of the program and on the addressing of anger control and problem-solving skills during the therapy (Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005).

In line with the retributive style of the American criminal justice system, boot camps have also been implemented across the nation as a tool intended to deter women from future crime through structure and discipline. The focus is thus not on rehabilitation, but on scaring women away from crime through their harsh experiences in boot camp. Boot camps have not been found to actually lower recidivism rates (Mitchell et al., 2007; Mackenzie, Bierie, & Mitchell, 2007).

Examining substance abuse needs and the reduction of recidivism, drug courts have been found to be an effective alternative to incarceration. According to Huddleston, Marlowe, and Casebolt (2008),

Drug courts represent the coordinated efforts of justice and treatment professionals to actively intervene and break the cycle of substance abuse, addiction, and crime. As an alternative to less effective interventions, drug courts quickly identify substance abusing offenders and place them under ongoing judicial monitoring and community supervision, coupled with effective, long-term treatment services.

Aversion from incarceration through drug courts produces significantly lower recidivism rates in terms of criminal involvement and substance abuse (Wilson, Mitchell, & Mackenzie, 2006; Spohn, Frenzel, Martin, & Piper, 2001; Banks & Gottfredson, 2004; Lattimore, Krebs, Koetse, Lindquist, & Cowell, 2005; Gottfredson, Najaka, Kearley, & Rocha, 2006). A comprehensive study on 17,000 drug court graduates around the United States found that only 16.4 percent had recidivated (Roman, Townsend, & Bhati 2003). Treatment of offenders



through drug courts, instead of through incarceration, is beneficial based on the intensity of the treatment that they receive through the development of personalized plans that effectively target and address the needs that may be conducive to their substance abuse and criminal offending (Wilson et al., 2006; Spohn et. al., 2001; Banks & Gottfredson, 2004; Lattimore et. al., 2005; Gottfredson et. al., 2006). Drug courts benefit society, as well, specifically in the form of immense economic savings involved in offering intensive services to offenders, versus the costs involved with incarcerating them and dealing with their expected recidivism in the future (Lattimore et. al., 2005; Huddleston et al., 2008). Approximately 70,000 offenders are being served through drugs courts across the United States (Huddleston et. al., 2008).

Yet many substance-abusing offenders are still sent to prison instead of going through drug courts. These individuals' likelihood of recidivating and future substance abuse can be lowered through substance abuse treatment programs in prison (Farrell, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2007; Hiller, Knight, & Simpson, 1999). Individuals in need of substance abuse treatment who did not receive it or who did not complete it were more likely to recidivate and relapse than individuals who did complete treatment (Huebner & Cobbina, 2007). While substance abuse relapse and recidivism are reduced through in-prison treatment programs, even greater success can be achieved when these programs are continued upon release, or by offering transitional care and follow-up (Hiller et

al., 1999; Vigilante et. al., 1999; Farrell, 2000; Zanis et. al. 2003; Mosher & Phillips, 2006; Spivak & Sharp, 2008).

Several comprehensive studies of the effect of participation in educational prison programs on recidivism have also found lower rates of recidivism among participants. Wilson, Gallagher, and Mackenzie (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of thirty-three separate studies reviewing the effect of prison education, vocation, and work programs on recidivism. They found that individuals involved in these programs had lower recidivism rates than nonparticipants, as well as lower unemployment rates. More specifically, they found that educational programs had a greater effect on reducing recidivism than the work programs. Gaes (2008) reviewed existing research on the relationship between prison education programs and recidivism. He also concluded that prison education program participation is related to lower recidivism rates, as compared to recidivism rates among individuals not participating in prison education programs.

Steurer and Smith's (2003) study of the effect of correctional education on recidivism was a landmark study, as it used the largest sample to date (3,170 released inmates from Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio) to study this research question. These researchers found lower rates of re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration for educational program participants as compared to non-participants. While both educational program participants and non-participants

were likely to be employed (attributed to a strong economy at the time), the educational program participants were found to have reported higher earnings than non-participants.

Finally, Torre and Fine (2005) conducted an extensive study of the impact of education on female recidivism, as well as on other aspects of life for released female prisoners. Their research involved 65 inmate interviews, along with other qualitative and quantitative efforts to supplement their contributions. They found that women who had not received college programs in prison were almost four times more likely to recidivate than women who had participated in college programs. Torre and Fine (2005) also found that women who had participated in college in prison were more likely to return to their community and volunteer and offer services and support to other offenders and their families. Finally, these researchers found that educational services reduced recidivism to the point of justifying it as an alternative to increasing recidivism and increasing expenditures tied to that recidivism (Torre & Fine, 2005).

### *Prevention of Female Recidivism*

Most of the studies mentioned previously in the exploration of factors helping to prevent recidivism used samples of men only or men and women combined to examine recidivism (exceptions are Vigilante et. al., 1999; Mosher & Phillips, 2006; Farrell, 2000; Torre & Fine, 2005). However, as discussed

previously, women have unique needs, compared to male offenders, that validate special consideration of what they need to succeed upon their release from prison. Several studies have produced important findings about female offender experiences and what can help to prevent their recidivism upon release from prison.

Holtfreter, Reisig, and Morash (2004) found that being in poverty significantly increased a woman's likelihood of re-arrest. This poverty status is important, as it is fundamentally influential in success in other areas of reentry needs: housing, clothing, food, transportation, and regaining of child custody. Recognizing this, these researchers argue that helping women to access state-sponsored assistance programs would do much to alleviate a significant amount of female recidivism. Yet this study cites recent changes to welfare policies in the United States, which prove to be disparately detrimental to female offenders, as compared to male offenders. Specifically, Holtfreter et al. (2004) state that the ban against individuals with drug convictions receiving welfare assistance has disproportionately affected female offenders, as they are increasingly being targeted for drug crimes. These researchers argue that social policies need to be put in place that liberate these former offending women away from dependence on men for economic support and instead push them toward "government-sponsored childcare and job assistance programs for poor, unemployed women" (Holtfreter et al., 2004, 203).

Jacobs (2000) delves deeper into the problems that released female prisoners will encounter with welfare policies in the United States. Not only does she mention the federal ban on welfare for drug-convicted offenders, but she also addresses the federal ban on any students convicted of drug-related offenses of receiving any grant, loan, or work study financial aid for college attendance. Adding to the economic difficulty that these women face upon release are the delays that applicants will experience in receiving public benefits—weeks, if not longer. Jacobs (2000) further addresses the difficulty of attending treatment while trying to adhere to job requirements. Additionally, policies against offering public housing to drug-convicted offenders stand in the way of women securing safe, affordable housing. Finally, Jacobs (2000) expresses concerns with outdated and irrelevant treatment programs that are available to women upon release. Jacobs (2000) states that, “The overwhelming obstacles they face are a formula for relapse and recidivism” (48).

In order to address these needs, this researcher argues that we need more interagency cooperation to create policies and programs that promote success among these recently released female offenders. Jacobs (2000) also maintains that we need to specifically eliminate public benefit, housing, and education bans against drug-convicted offenders. This research also argues for the streamlining of application processes for public benefits and health care for released female offenders, to alleviate their significant wait time for these much-needed services.

These research efforts highlight very real concerns among recently released female offenders, and many of these female offenders cite their failure to meet these needs as motivating them back to crime. Severance (2004), through her interviews with incarcerated women, discovered that these women expressed great anxiety at the thought of going home and dealing with multiple anticipated needs. These needs included employment, substance abuse relapse, reuniting with their children, food, clothing, shelter, and community acceptance, despite their felony conviction. This research argues that providing immediate help with basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, as well as long-term assistance with employment, education, and substance abuse treatment, is instrumental in preventing recidivism among female offenders (Severance, 2004).

Richie (2001) finds the same needs mentioned among her sample of incarcerated women, yet she also had health care, mental health issues, fear of violence, and education expressed as concerns among her sample. Richie (2001) maintains that women need “wrap-around services” that will assist women not only while incarcerated, but also upon their release from prison. She also argues that local communities and individuals need to be educated on how to deal most effectively with this returning prisoner population, in order to avoid stigmatizing and isolating these women out of conforming behavior and into criminal activities. Finally, Richie (2001) also asserts that the released female offenders themselves must undergo empowerment training to become more self-sufficient

and successful. These findings and recommendations for preventing recidivism are duplicated by O'Brien (2001) in her findings as well.

It is therefore the case that research on female offender reentry is limited, yet studies investigating female recidivism are even scarcer. Both female offender reentry and recidivism must be considered together in order to best tackle women's desistance from crime after release from incarceration. Failure to attend to women's needs upon reentry increases their likelihood of recidivating. This research consequently considers the reentry needs of recidivating incarcerated women in Oklahoma, in order to work toward the prevention of female criminal recidivism. The next section of this study lays out the theoretical framework.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

This study is based upon feminist theoretical perspectives, in an effort to comprehend the experiences and needs of currently incarcerated women.

Feminist criminologists have made significant theoretical contributions to the study of criminology, by showing how problematic it can be to try to generalize research findings predominantly derived using male subjects to females as well. Many feminist criminologists argue that such overgeneralizing ignores women's motivations behind decisions about whether or not to commit crime, about what crimes to commit, and about how to commit crimes. This has been referred to as the "generalizability problem" (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). They also emphasize the significant lack of research regarding the role of masculinity and femininity in influencing the experiences of both men and women, which subsequently interact with other influences such as race, sex, and class to motivate criminal actions or lack of such actions (Flavin, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Naffine, 1996).

These scholars further call attention to the fact that criminal justice policies and practices aimed at punishing men simultaneously have the potential to hurt women, as the incarceration of men puts undue economic and social pressures on the women in their lives who are left, in the aftermath, to care for the children and the household. This is in the face of decreasing social services



available to such women in our society. And, when women are in fact considered in criminal justice policymaking, such policies have the potential to discourage women from seeking help for their problems, as they fear criminal reprisal for their actions. So, it is not a “gender-neutral” approach that feminist criminologists are proposing in policymaking and even research, but instead an approach that considers the multiple influences that play into decisions of whether or not to commit a crime, such as the effects of gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation (Flavin, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Naffine, 1996).

The feminist perspective additionally emphasizes the importance of examining how it is that researchers come to know what they know, or the study of epistemology. While mainstream criminologists subscribe to the positivist, value-free methods, many feminist criminologists challenge their strict adherence to such methods. These feminist criminologists subsequently use standpoint methods to try to truly understand the victims’ and offenders’ perspectives. They achieve this by using qualitative and quantitative methods in their research, and by reflecting on how the researcher himself/herself influences the methods, data collection, and findings. They also tend to involve their subjects more in the research process, as compared to mainstream criminologists. Feminist criminologists accept that their research is not necessarily value-free, and they challenge whether any research can ever truly be value-free, defending the merits

of their methods by arguing that such ways allow them to better know the experiences of their subjects (Flavin, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Naffine, 1996).

The ultimate argument of feminist criminology is that a theory must address two important issues in order to adequately address the gender issue. First, it must be able to address the different offending rates of male and females, often referred to as the “gender gap” or “gender ratio” problem. Second, a theory must be able to explain both male offending and female offending, or the “generalizability problem” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

While feminist scholars agree on these major tenets, several theoretical approaches exist to address these concerns. One way to deal theoretically with women and crime is to use mainstream criminology for both women and men and to customize such theories based on gender and sexuality, using mainstream theories in a gendered way. This involves the different operationalization of concepts based on the different genders and sexualities being represented theoretically. This approach attempts to adapt existing mainstream criminological theories, which have historically addressed only men, to address women and their criminal experiences as well. (Flavin, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Naffine, 1996).

A very relevant example of this theoretical approach to women and crime is Broidy and Agnew’s (1997) application of General Strain Theory to the

examination of women's involvement in crime. This research found that women and men actually experience different types of strain, which helps to explain the different levels of involvement in crime. Men are more likely to experience strain that leads to involvement in property crime and violence. Yet women are more likely to experience strain that leads to self-destructive behavior like drug use. Also, while both men and women experience anger as an emotional response to strain, men are more likely to use crime as a way to neutralize their anger, while women are more likely to simultaneously experience guilt and depression along with their anger. Such emotional responses are more likely to lead to self-destructive behavior like substance abuse and eating disorders for women.

This research thus takes the components of General Strain Theory and customizes them to males and females, in order to better understand their differential experiences with strain and crime. Sharp, Brewster, and Love (2005) also examined General Strain Theory as applied to males and females and produced findings corroborating Broidy and Agnew's theoretical perspective. Finally, Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) hailed the use of mainstream criminological theories in explaining both male and female criminality, specifically when it comes to explaining involvement in less serious crime. They found mainstream criminological theories useful in explaining general offending patterns for both males and females and in explaining the gender gap of crime.

Yet they also acknowledged the need for a gendered theory of offending to explain more serious criminal involvement for men and women.

Other scholars studying women and crime argue that the use of mainstream criminological approaches in the study of women and crime is problematic. To illustrate this, Chesney-Lind (2006) points out how recent newspaper accounts of female criminal involvement have simply “masculinized” such women as joining the criminal world of men, instead of looking at the unique perspectives and experiences of females involved in crime. Scholars such as Chesney-Lind thus advocate for the second way to deal theoretically with women and crime: using separate feminist theories to explain the unique perspectives and experiences of women in crime (or even women who choose not to be involved in crime). This approach argues that women have historically been marginalized in the mainstream study of criminology, as such research has tended to consider only men in the study of crime, and that this practice continues today (Sharp & Hefley, 2007). Male experiences in doing crime have then been used to explain all crime experiences, including women’s experiences with crime. Yet women and their experiences with crime must be considered differently based on the differential socialization and treatment that they have had under the system of patriarchy that exists in our society. So, people advocating the use of separatist feminist theories have argued that separate theories are needed to consider the different motivations, consequences, and experiences that exist between men and

women in crime (Flavin, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Naffine, 1996).

Flavin (2001) and Daly (1997) both explain in their works the contributions made to mainstream criminology through feminists' introduction of standpoint methods. Such standpoint methods are critical to truly understanding the female victims', offenders', and criminal justice workers' perspectives. Scholars utilizing standpoint methods argue that women occupy a dominated position in society, which only they have the capacity to truly understand, based on their unique experiences and socialization. So, by allowing these women to tell their own stories, we better understand the motivations, victimizations, and overall experiences of women and crime. Naffine (1996) also shows the importance of having separate theories for our understanding of women and crime, by presenting the perspective of prostitutes in India to illustrate the great difference in perceptions about female sexuality between men and women. Without the utilization of standpoint methods to gain such perspectives, we would be uninformed as to such women's true experiences in our society and with crime.

The final way to deal theoretically with women and crime involves intersectionality. This is the current emphasis in feminist criminology today. It involves the studying of the intersections between race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and other critical social constructs to best understand the multiple influences on women and their involvement with crime, whether as offenders,

victims, or workers in the criminal justice system. Burgess-Proctor (2006) and Potter (2006) illustrate the contributions that intersectionality can make to the study of women and crime. Both authors emphasize the existence of structural and cultural influences on women's experiences with crime, and thus stress the importance of considering these multiple dynamic dimensions in order to truly understand women's experiences with crime. Current feminist theorists acknowledge the need for intersectional considerations of the multiple social influences on women and their involvement in crime (Flavin, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Naffine, 1996).

Based on these approaches, feminist pathways theories argue that women's involvement in crime is based on their experiences with multiple marginalizations in society (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Brown, 2006; Belknap, 2007). Incarcerated women overwhelmingly possess lifelong histories of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; traumatic family experiences growing up and in adult relationships; and significant alcohol and drug abuse issues (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). Furthermore, incarcerated women are also likely to be experiencing economic marginalization through higher unemployment and poverty levels, as compared to men in society (Heimer, 2000). While incarcerated men also experience their own disadvantages leading to crime,

Men's lives are far less likely to be defined by sexual abuse, exploitation, and violent victimization by a loved one. Nor are men's major life events marked to the same extent as women's by

pervasive sexism and patriarchal oppression (Brown, 2006, 138-139).

The pathways into crime for women are well-documented in the literature (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005; Bloom et al., 2002; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Holsinger, 2000; Littleton, Breitkopf, & Berenson 2007).

Also, significant differences between male and female juvenile offenders have been documented in terms of how they are affected by abuse. In her research, Mallicoat (2007) found that boys' abuse typically consisted of being exposed to domestic violence through their parents. Girls, on the other hand, reported experiencing the abuse personally, physically and sexually. This same research found that probation officers did not consider these girls to be criminally dangerous and oftentimes did not see the criminal justice system as the adequate placement for these girls' needs. Instead, these officers tended to recommend placement into mental health treatment and to discourage placement in the criminal justice system. Overall, the causes of these girls' involvement with the criminal justice system were traced back to problematic family relationships, abuse, substance abuse, low school attendance, and running away from home (Mallicoat, 2007).

Understanding the pathways that bring women into criminal offending, the question still remains of why women commit crime, and why they differ in the types of crimes that they commit as compared to males. Following Naffine's (1996) and Flavin's (2001) advice to think outside of a single theoretical mindset

in order to more fully explore a question, mainstream theories can be used in conjunction with feminist pathways theories to address female criminality. While several theories have been put to the test in explaining female criminality, General Strain Theory (GST) has been found to provide the best explanation for the involvement of women in crime (Van Wormer & Bartollas, 2007; Katz, 2000). While earlier strain theories focused on blocked economic opportunities as the source of strain, they overlooked other types of goals and more specific types of strains that could vary by gender, race, or class. GST expanded the focus on strain to include factors like child abuse, child neglect, racism, and sexism (Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Belknap, 2007). Overall, GST argues that individuals can experience three types of strain: “the failure to achieve positively valued goals, the loss of positively valued stimuli, and the presentation of negative stimuli” (Agnew, 1992; Broidy & Agnew, 1997).

In terms of the first goal, the failure to achieve positively valued goals, Broidy and Agnew (1997) argue that women see successful relationships as a key goal, and they will do whatever it takes to make those relationships work, including involvement in crime. Women and girls will steal, sell drugs, prostitute themselves, and commit other types of crimes to gain and maintain the love of family, romantic partners, or friends (Acoca, 1998; Miller, 2001; Belknap, 2007; Leverentz, 2006a). Also, if women have economic goals, they face difficulty in achieving them based on the increasing “feminization of poverty” brought on by



divorces, single parenthood, and unemployment or underemployment. The latest data from the Census Bureau show that female-headed households with no husband present had a poverty rate of 28.3 percent in 2006, compared to the overall poverty rate of 9.8 percent for all families in the United States and 13.2 percent for male-headed households with no wife present (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2007). The challenge to survive economically is consequently also presented as a strain that leads women to commit crime.

The second type of strain that can lead to women's involvement in crime is the loss of positively valued stimuli. Again, according to strain research, women place an emphasis on successful relationships. So loss here can involve the loss of romantic partners, family members, friends, or children (Leverentz, 2006a; Naser & Visher, 2006; Wilkea, Kamatab, & Cash, 2005). Also, the loss can involve the loss of freedom, as women face very restricted lives in terms of where they can go (for safety or acceptance reasons), what they can do, how they can dress, etc. (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Such strain can lead women to engage in crime in realms where they are allowed to function, such as shoplifting or child abuse.

The final type of strain that can help explain female criminality is the presentation of negatively valued stimuli. Such negatively valued stimuli for female offenders involve emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and

discrimination in a patriarchal society. Broidy and Agnew (1997) specifically argue that, while all women may not respond to these strains through crime,

...Women are more likely to respond to strain with crime (or other deviant adaptations) when nondeviant coping mechanisms are ineffective or unavailable, when they have criminal/deviant opportunities, when they are low in social control, and when they are predisposed to crime/deviance (18).

This research further adds that women's racial and economic marginalizations can further amplify the strains and tendencies toward crime.

Having considered female offenders' pathways into crime and the types of strains that can also lead them into crime, it is also important to examine how such experiences can influence their level of success once they are released back into society. This is a valid concern, as 96 percent of the current 25,141 incarcerated individuals in Oklahoma will be released back into society (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2007, 2008).

These factors do not bode well against recidivism for these reentering female offenders, based on feminist pathways' explanations of female criminality occurring through abuse and traumatic lifelong experiences. These factors also do not indicate successful reintegration for these female offenders through General Strain Theory, especially through the second type of strain that can lead to women's involvement in crime: the loss of positively valued stimuli. As women place a large emphasis on successful relationships, their experience upon release

with strained relationships can prove to be immensely stressful and thus conducive to crime.

Formerly incarcerated female offenders are also leaving their incarceration with tremendous financial expectations of them. Even before they have a chance to start their lives outside of the prison, these female offenders face daunting debts associated with court costs and other sanctions received before their incarceration. Oklahoma Department of Corrections (2007) research recently found that, on average, offenders are leaving prison “owing an average of \$3,500 in fines, fees, court costs and child support. The average offender releases from prison with approximately \$350 in available funds.” In addition to this debt, they are also expected to maintain an economically independent and legitimate livelihood through employment to support themselves and their children. Such employment is also required to acquire and maintain housing for themselves and their children. Specifically, in Oklahoma, an ex-offender with no dependents needs to earn an annual salary of \$15,877 in Oklahoma County to support herself, and that figure is as a single individual, without the cost of children (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2008). So, if children are involved, that figure increases.

These are requirements of success outside of the criminal justice institution, despite the challenges that released offenders will face in securing employment (Petersilia, 2003; Oklahoma Criminal Justice Resource Center, 2004). Yet the Special Task Force for Women Incarcerated in Oklahoma, created

in 2003, has stated: “The Task Force has discovered very few efforts in Oklahoma to provide structured support for male or female offenders attempting to establish healthy lives post-release” (Oklahoma Criminal Justice Resource Center, 2004, D6). Theoretically, feminist pathways theories and General Strain Theory both point to economic marginalization as a fundamental motivation for women’s involvement in crime. Such financial hardships thus do not suggest successful reintegration for typical female offenders reentering society.

Feminist pathways theories thus focus on the experiences of women from childhood and into adulthood that have influenced their involvement in crime. General Strain Theory argues that, while women are less likely than men to commit crime, when they do commit crime, such actions are based on gender-specific strains and available responses. Also, their desistance from crime upon release from incarceration depends on the strains they experience when they are released from prison. It is consequently important to understand not only the pathways that women follow into criminal offending, but also to have an awareness of the strains that women are facing, especially women who are further marginalized through race or poverty. This study accordingly examines the experiences of women before, during, and after their past incarcerations to understand what events in their lives brought them back to prison.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to focus on Oklahoma female offenders' reentry needs, in order to promote the creation and implementation of effective reentry programs for this population. By focusing on what had led to the recidivism of re-incarcerated women, it was hoped that suggestions to improve re-entry chances could be developed. This research, taking a feminist standpoint perspective, aimed to interview twenty-five women incarcerated in a maximum-security prison in Oklahoma. The target population for this sample was currently incarcerated female offenders who were incarcerated for their second time or more, who had recidivated within three years of their prior incarceration, as most existing research on recidivism uses the three-year time span after release from prison as the standard measurement of recidivism survival. The final qualification for participants was that they be between the ages of eighteen through sixty-four.

Understanding the sensitive nature of the information that would potentially be provided by the subjects, a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality was requested from the National Institute of Health. Specifically, the nature of the questions in this study allowed for the presentation by subjects of information about themselves and others that could be private and/or criminal—in other words, information that could be harmful to themselves or others if it were ever to be associated with them. The Federal Certificate of Confidentiality was thus seen

as critical to the success of this study, to assure the subjects that their information would be protected against forced disclosure. This was especially a concern as the Oklahoma Department of Corrections generated the list of potential subjects and therefore would have some awareness of the small pool of potential subjects. The Federal Certificate of Confidentiality was granted through the National Institute of Health, based on these justifications (see Appendix A).

Once the Federal Certificate of Confidentiality was gained, a list of fifty qualifying female inmates was requested from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. This sample was small and not statistically selected, but all of them represent the conditions found to be of importance in existing literature. The women in this sample were screened for the desired qualifications of having recidivated within three years of their last incarceration and of fitting within the age range of eighteen through sixty-four years of age. This list of fifty female inmates was requested with the intention of achieving the twenty-five interviews for this study out of these fifty possible women, as it was understood that some women would not be willing or able to participate in the study. The fifty women provided through the Department of Corrections' list were contacted with a recruiting letter by mail, sent to them at the prison (see Appendix B). This letter informed the potential subjects of the purpose of the study and the date range in which the interviews would be conducted. These recruiting letters were sent a month in advance of the planned interviews, to allow for processing of these

letters through the prison mail system. A total of twenty-one female offenders agreed to take part in this research, falling four short of the desired twenty-five interviews at the outset of this study.

The research process involved traveling about an hour, each way, to the remote location of the women's maximum security prison. As the interviews were to be recorded on a digital recorder, that, along with all other materials for the study (informed consent forms, list of interview questions, list of potential subjects, writing pad, and pen), were turned over for inspection upon arrival at the facility. A pat-down by an officer was also required before entry into the inmates' public quarters. While the initial arrangements with the prison administration allowed for at least two interviews to be conducted a day, security measures and time constraints in terms of the prison schedules of security counts, lunch, dinner, and activities essentially limited the interviews to about one a day. This research thus involved seventeen trips to the prison facility.

Before going through security measures, I was allowed to request the guards' calling up of the inmate that I wished to interview. After clearing through security measures, the correctional guards sent out the inmate requested upon arrival from the Department of Corrections sample list. Waiting for the next potential inmate to interview ranged in time from about five minutes to over two hours, if a security count was taking place. The prison administration allowed for the interviews to be conducted in the main visitation area of the prison.

Unfortunately, this was a public meeting area, where prison staff and inmates felt free to converse among themselves and with each other, making it a challenge to get a quality recording of the interview while keeping voices low enough to maintain confidentiality. Consequently, whenever possible, interviews were conducted in a separate child play area within the visitation area, as it had doors that screened out some background noise. During the calling of inmates by the guards for the interviews, it was discovered that nine of the fifty women in the list of potential subjects were no longer on the prison grounds. They had either been paroled out or transferred to another facility.

Upon an introduction of the researcher to the potential subject, the subject was asked if she had received the recruitment letter. The subject was then asked if she had any questions about the recruitment letter. After providing answers to any questions at this point, the subject was asked if she wanted to participate in the study. If she declined to participate, she was thanked for her time and sent back into the prison. Twenty of the fifty potential subjects declined to participate at the initial introduction. Nine of these twenty women who declined to participate did so because there was a misunderstanding by a prison guard, who informed them that they would have to sit in a hall while an inmate was being interviewed and wait their turn to be interviewed. That ensured at least an hour of waiting for their turn, if they were the next person. If they were not the next person to be interviewed, it would be hours before they were interviewed.



Additionally, there was no guarantee that they would even be interviewed that day. Despite pleading with the guard to bring them back individually at a later time, these nine inmates were kept in the hall long enough for them to decline to participate in order to return to their activities and to their living quarters.

Fortunately, this was an isolated incident, so the remaining potential participants were called out individually from that point forward. Eleven of these twenty women who declined to participate stated reasons of not meeting the criteria of the study, not being interested in the study, and being involved in an activity at the time of the interview and not wanting to reschedule the interview.

If an inmate agreed to participate in the research, she was led to a table and given the informed consent form (see Appendix C). The subject was given ample time to read over the consent form and to ask any questions before agreeing to participate in the study and beginning the interview. In instances where the subject expressed not understanding the consent form, it was read to her by the researcher and explained until she understood all of the components covered in the form. The subject was asked to select, within the consent form, whether or not she consented to being quoted directly and being audio recorded. Every subject who participated in this study consented to both of these requests. The subject was then asked to sign and date the informed consent form, and she was given a copy of the informed consent form to keep for her own records. Twenty-

one woman out of the fifty listed on the potential subject list provided by the Department of Corrections consented to participate in the research.

At this point, the subject was asked to provide a code name under which she would be known for this research, to avoid her being identified by name. After she provided a code name, she was informed that the interview would begin and the recorder would be started. She was then read the first question from the list of questions compiled for this research (see Appendix D). This list of questions was created based on the needs cited in existing literature on their experiences before, during, and after their incarceration. While this list of questions provided some structure to the interview, the subject was allowed to elaborate on her responses to the point that she occasionally answered a question without having been asked about it. In those situations, that question was not explicitly asked again. As shown on the list, the questions for this interview were open-ended in nature to allow for the subjects' elaboration on their experiences, without any impediments as to how far they could discuss their situations. They were allowed to respond to each area of questioning as long as they desired. The intention with this method was to allow for the expression of these female inmates' perspectives and experiences, in order to get a true understanding of what these women encountered in prison and out in society that led them back to prison.

Upon conclusion of the interview, the recorder was turned off and the subject was thanked for her time. She was asked if she had any further questions before she left, and those questions were addressed before she was sent back into the prison living quarters. The interviews ranged in length from twenty-eight minutes to two-and-a-half hours, with the vast majority of them lasting a little over an hour. At the conclusion of the interview process, all twenty-one interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Upon transcription, the interviews were intensively hand-coded into relevant categories.

### *Demographics*

Twenty-one female offenders who were currently incarcerated in a maximum security prison participated in this research. They ranged from twenty-five to fifty-six years in age, with an average of 38.6 years. The sample included eight Black women, five Native American women, and eight white women. Interestingly, three of the women who identified themselves as Native American were officially coded in the prison and Oklahoma Department of Corrections records as White. For this study, the researcher classified them racially based on their classification of themselves.

The average survival time that these women were able to stay out of prison after their release from their most recent prior incarceration was 687.1 days. The range was from 279 days to 1,006 days out of prison. The participants'

demographics are shown here in Table 2, using the code names that they provided at the beginning of their interview process.

**Table 2. Subject Demographics, Alphabetically By Code Name**

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Days Out of Prison</b>
Amanda	42	White	981
Amos	56	Native American	818
Angel	28	Native American	352
Anne	35	Black	783
Bad Girl	47	Black	321
B-dog	35	White	531
Beth	38	White	575
Beverly	32	Black	550
Bree	34	Black	530
Cody	37	Black	370
Dirty Lucy	49	White	656
Laci	46	White	916
Lone Wolf	34	Native American	859
Missy	30	Black	605
Pooty	29	Native American	1084
Shoshone	55	Native American	867
Sweet	35	Black	900
Tamara	25	White	686
Vanda	39	White	279
Vivian	49	White	760
Young	35	Black	1006

**Average Age:** 38.6 years  
**Average Days out of Prison:** 687.1

These women's experiences will serve as the basis of this study. Each participant confided to the researcher her experiences with reentry into society, eagerly expressing her desire to help other women avoid the factors that brought her back to prison. These women's concerns and experiences will thus be explored now.

## Chapter 6

### Analysis

The hand-coding of the interviews in this study substantiated the existing research in terms of the major areas of concern and need among incarcerated women. The two spheres of life that were the most distressing to the women in this research were relationships with their children and family and challenges with reentry into society after prior incarcerations. These women also shared serious issues that they encountered with programming and health care offered in the prison system. These issues will be examined now.

#### Family and Relationships

The major area of concern expressed among female offenders in this study was the possibility of reunification with their family and loved ones, especially their children. Vanda summarized these sentiments perfectly, with her statement: “Anytime you do time, your family does time right along with you.” Adding to this, Vanda stated

Well, my daughter, it hurt her, because she was without a mom all the sudden. My dad, it hurt him, my mom. They had seven kids, and I was the only one to ever get in trouble, in prison. It hurt them...It’s hard for them as it is for you. It sure is.

Beverly shared a similar view.

When you’re away from your family like that, your family don’t know how to take you. You have to re-bond with them, you have to, you know, re-establish your bond with your family, you know.

Getting to know my daughter again, and, getting to know the world again. (Beverly)

Pooty had her son after her first incarceration, yet she got incarcerated when he was seven months old. She explained how difficult it was to be torn from her child.

Oh man, that was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. There's no contact in Oklahoma County Jail, so I watched my baby from seven months until thirteen months old through glass. And he didn't understand why mama wouldn't hold him. I was a stay-at-home mom. I encouraged my child to do stuff. I read with him. I did the flashcards and stuff. I was a new mom, and I loved it. So my baby was around me, for the first seven months of his life, every single day. And it was hard for him to understand. "Where's my mom?" He came to see me every weekend up there for 15 minutes, and it was really hard. My first visit here, I cried. (starts crying) And I see him every week now. We have a relationship. It hurts, to watch him grow up. I get mad, I get angry, because I'm not there. I blame myself for not being there.

In the worst-case scenario, Laci had resigned herself to the fact that her incarcerations had cost her any relationships with her children and family.

I lost my kids when I came to prison. My children were like 8, 6, and 5 and 2. The two-year-old, I haven't seen him since he was three. That's been ten years, I haven't seen him in 10 years. I don't know where he's at. I can't find him. My other three children, I have two girls and a boy, they were split up by welfare. So they grew up away from each other, so they don't even know each other. I've seen them like four or five times since I've been locked up. And that's five or six years since I've even seen them. So I'm not their mom. I'm their mother, because I gave birth to them, and they love me and I love them. And I tried to have a relationship with them, but they're grown now... The relationships are gone. I was married, whenever I came to prison, I lost a husband. After a couple of years we got divorced, because we grew apart... But prison affected everything. I haven't seen my dad for several years... 10 or 15 years. That's bad. That's bad. It

[prison] destroys relationships. It destroys your family. It destroys everything.

### *Interacting with Children after Long Absence*

Due to the length of time they had been away from their children, based on their incarceration, many women expressed being completely perplexed about how to interact with their children upon their release this time.

During my incarceration, God, it was the hardest thing for me to see them. My first incarceration, I did not get to really see them for the first five months. When I finally got to the halfway house and got to see them, oh my God. I was crying everyday when they'd come visit me. You'd know in the movies, when your kids just hold onto you and just cry and just cry? (starts sobbing) And they just wouldn't let go of me. And my baby girl, she'd just see her baby sister cry like that, and she'd cry. She don't even know what she crying about. But they were just hurting so bad. (Missy)

She's [Tamara's daughter] is real cautious of me. I write her every week, but she's cautious of me all around, because I guess she's afraid of being hurt. Because, initially, that's what I did. I hurt her. [Tamara—incarcerated when her daughter was three years old.]

My daughter was two years old when I started going to prison. And I've been in and out of her life every since. She's 16 now. And my son, I had to leave him when he was 3, and he just turned 8, so I don't know how to be a mom, and it scares me. They don't know how to be around me.... I don't know them. I don't know what they like, what they dislike. I just know that they're mad, they're angry and confused. My daughter was playing with my son whenever I got out, and he ended up getting hurt. And I got onto her and said, "What are you doing to him? Why are you treating him like that?" She was like, "Well, what do you care? You ain't ever been in our lives. You haven't ever been here for me or my brother." That was the reality of it. (Young)



I didn't know what to say, she [her daughter] was, uh, real young, she was three years old when I came to prison. When I got out, she was eleven, you know, so I'm like, "Wow. This is crazy." You know, so I didn't know what to do, 'cause I'm like, I've been in jail, I've been in prison all this time, I've been away from her. I didn't really know what to say to her, or how she was gonna respond to me, so it was kind of hard. (Beverly)

It's so hard to say, "I love you" and get him [her son] to believe it, because he could say, "If you loved me, mama, how come you went to prison?" And I don't have an answer for that. I really don't. It's hard to explain to a child that you've been a drug addict all your life and that you've been abused and molested and that you've been abused and beat by men all your life and stuff like that. It's hard to explain that. They don't understand. Even if they're grown, they don't understand that. So there's no excuse. There's really no excuse at all. I can't say, "I love you, but..." You can't say "but" after "I love you" to somebody. (Laci)

### *Difficulties in Disciplining Children*

Because of the length of their absence from their children, some mothers reported difficulty in disciplining their children. Beverly's daughter was three years old when she entered prison, and she was eleven years old when Beverly was finally released from that incarceration.

Um, my relationship with my daughter was totally different because she hadn't seen me in forever. Um, she know that I was her mom, you know. She knows that I love her, but as far as like, um, if she did something wrong, how am I to discipline her? You know, what do I say to her, you know what I'm saying? And, I wanted to shower her with gifts. I wanted to make her feel loved, I wanted to just, I wanted everything to be right. I didn't want to scold her, you know. Whereas before, um, I would never let my child do something that I know she wasn't supposed to do, you know what I'm saying? I would discipline her, and, like, let her know, "Hey. This is not right. I'm not going to allow you to do this." But when I got out of prison it was different. It was like,

“Whatever. Whatever you want to do, just know that I love you, I don’t want to hurt you anymore than I’ve already hurt you being away from you that long.” You know?

Anne also reported resentment from her son when attempting to discipline him.

With my son, he was real distant. He was mad still. He was trying to figure out why I was gone, and why I kept getting in trouble, trying to stay in prison. Why? ‘Cause he kind of went off on me. “How can you be a mom to me, and you’ve stayed in prison all this time. You kept getting in trouble. You can’t tell me what to do. You’re not my momma. I know you my momma, but it’s gonna take me time to forgive you.” And I dealt with that and the silent treatment from him for a couple of months, until finally my sister, my sister said, “Just give him time to come around.” ...And he finally told me he forgave me. And now I’m back in here again, and now they’re [daughter and son] angry with me again...right now none of my kids are talking to me.

Interviewer: How are you going to deal with your children when you get out of prison?

Anne: I gotta find out where they at again. I gotta start all over again, like Google stuff on the internet and search for them. I’m gonna have to look for my kids again and see if they gonna talk to me, you know.

### *Effects of Mother’s Incarceration on Children*

Some women also described the difficulties that their children experienced with their mother’s incarceration. Young’s children endured painful feelings and reactions based on their mother’s incarceration.

My aunt told my son, he was six at the time, “You better not let your mom out of your sight or she’s probably never gonna come back.” And being like I hadn’t ever been in his life since he was three years old, he took that seriously, so it was a traumatic thing

for whenever I came home, that, if I left, he would scream, he would grab my leg, and it would be traumatizing to him, and I couldn't stand listening to him like that...my grandma didn't want my son riding with me without a license. I respected that, so I'd have to tell him, "You can't ride with me. I don't have a driver's license." But a six-year-old don't understand that. And being as my aunt put that little bug in his ear about me not ever coming home again, it was a traumatic thing for the both of us, me hearing him cry like that and knowing that I'm just going to go and fill out a few applications and come right back home, he just didn't understand that. So it was a fight, and my grandma was like, "I'm taking him to a psychiatrist" and I'm like "There's nothing wrong with him. There's something wrong with ya'll for telling him stuff like that. He's just six years old." So it was angering to me to have my son act like that and him not understanding and never gonna be able to understand, until he got older, I just felt like it would do him better if I just left. And I don't think it did, because they would just tell me he would stand at the window and watch for me to come back. And that's heartbreaking, you know. (Starts sobbing). And I guess I take, um, everything in an emotional way, I'm real sensitive about things like that.

...And my daughter, it affects her emotionally, mentally, and physically. She's, um, bulimic, not to the fact that she's making herself sick, but she stops eating, and her weight is down, and sometimes she dehydrates herself and she just gives up. Some days she just doesn't care. Some days she doesn't go to school. Me not being in her life since she was two, in and out, in and out, has really taken a toll...she has problems keeping friends. The group that she now hangs out with is the gothic kids. I guess they're all angry individuals...I guess she's now a loner in school. Sometimes she talks to boys and, uh, being as she's 16, I guess they come at her one way, and she's being receptive to that. She's gotten in trouble in school about it, and that's what we're dealing with now.

Young's son experienced further devastation from the loss of other key individuals in his life, which occurred during his mother's current incarceration. He was raised by his great-grandparents, and his great-grandfather recently passed

away. Also, his mother's husband died recently as well. While this was not his biological father, this man had made an effort to take Young's son on outings and to buy him gifts occasionally. Young's son thus took these deaths very hard, and he grew very scared of losing any other loved ones in his life. Young stated

He asks my grandmother, "What's gonna happen to me if something happens to you?" Because he understands that she's older. And, uh, anything can happen... There's a lot of unanswered questions he doesn't know how to deal with. It's really concerning my grandmother. She doesn't know what to do and how to handle him. He's just so angry and rude to people. He's just so angry at the world, because of the things that have happened to him and what's happening. He doesn't like it... He has no social life. He doesn't like other kids. He's a grumpy little boy going to school. He doesn't want nobody saying "hi" to him or "good morning." He's just drawn in...

Beth's son also underwent tremendous anxiety and anger from his mother's incarceration, which manifested itself through severe separation anxiety once she returned from prison. Beth reported that her son was so terrified of her leaving or being taken away from him again, that he slept on the floor next to her bed every night after she returned from prison. She tried to put him into bed with her, but he refused, as he did not want to risk sleeping through her leaving or being taken away. He shared with her that, by sleeping on the floor next to her bed, he was sure to wake up if she tried to leave or if she was taken away. Beth also reported that, with her current incarceration, her son is having serious anger issues, lashing out at everyone around him. She stated that she really wanted to

get him psychiatric counseling, as such actions are in such opposition to the quiet and peaceful-natured child he used to be prior to her incarcerations.

Amanda also discussed the negative effects her incarcerations have had on her daughter.

Well, my daughter was there when they arrested me, and she cried and was just really upset. I went to prison, and she ran away for two years. She was gone for a little less than two years. And I talked to her twice in two years, and I didn't really know exactly where she was. I knew that she was hanging out with people that we hung out with, but I didn't know where. It was really hard.

#### *Separation from Family Physically and Psychologically*

Women also described growing increasingly separated from their family while serving time in prison. One of the major factors involved in that increasing separation, associated with incarceration, was the lack of contact taking place between these women and their families. Young's brother, who has custody of her daughter, will not let them communicate with each other on a regular basis because he is so angry with Young's repeated incarceration. Young stated that she writes her children letters, but she never gets any replies from them. She does get a letter from her grandmother every three months, updating her on her son's situation. She also stated that she does not want to ask them to visit her, because of money concerns.

Vivian said that she did not get to see or talk to her children for four years, as her husband's family would not bring them to see her and would not let

them talk to her. She also tried to write them letters, but her husband's family would not give her children the letters. Beverly's daughter's father prevents her daughter from communicating with her at all. Vanda also stated that her daughter lived about 2-1/2 hours away from the prison, so she did not get to see her often. Lone Wolf was not able to regularly communicate with her children because her parents, who were keeping her children, did not have a phone. She also did not want them to visit, because her family lived so far away from the prison. Missy was not able to see her children because of the distance she lived from her mother, who had custody of her children. She also stated

I never get to call home, because they don't have a collect phone...My mom, she works 12-14 hours a day, every day, so it's really hard for her to come up here, especially with me only having one visitation day, and it's on Sundays...I see them every few months...

When these women were able to talk on the phone to their families, they mentioned that it was pretty difficult to squeeze in conversations with everyone, as they are limited to 15-minute maximum phone calls.

Shoshone had a different reason for not having her family visit very often. She said that while her mother visited her every two weeks, she did not like for her or other family to visit her in prison because she did not want them subjected to the strip searches that were common among visitors for the inmates.

That separation often led to some of these women being eventually forgotten by their loved ones. These women commonly expressed the sentiment that they were “out of sight, out of mind.”

‘Cause like when I went to prison everybody forgot about me, you know what I’m saying. My mother, she stood by me, but as far as anybody else, they had forgotten about me. I didn’t exist to them, you know what I’m saying...things happen, the world keeps turning, when we’re in here, everything’s at a standstill in here, but as far as the world outside, it keeps turning. But, yeah, relationships is really different. My sister was supportive of me for like the first part of my incarceration. And then she just kind of fell off. And now I have like no contact with my sister at all. Um, I have contact with one of my brothers, and he’s in prison as well, and we correspond, he writes me all the time. But my other brother, he’s like, you know, I’m basically a nuisance to my family, you know, I shouldn’t be here, and that’s how he look at it...(Beverly)

Well, I was in a relationship when I went in, and it affected it because he didn’t stick around. He left. He wrote me for a while, and then he quit writing. (Amanda)

Women also reported resentment from family members and children about their having returned to prison, which oftentimes served to sever the relationship and to limit the assistance that these women could access from family. Amanda explained that it took a long time for her daughters, her mother, and her sisters to finally communicate with her after this incarceration, as they were so angry with her about returning to prison. Vivian stated that one of her sons has not talked to her for during the two decades she has been incarcerated. Other women described similar experiences.

And my family had to take on all my responsibilities, and it affected hard my family. It wasn't a good effect, because they don't believe in me no more. It's like nothing that I do or did is enough for them anymore. I wasn't the smart granddaughter, the intelligent niece anymore. I was just the bad person, the one that didn't have any sense no more. And nobody trusted me, and nobody would help me. That's just how it is...it's been like that ever since with them. (Missy)

My brother told me that I took the easy way out. That I wasn't being out there and living life and working hard and trying to provide. I just come in here and get three free meals a day and a place to live and no bills to pay...And my brother just feels that instead of trying to adapt, that I just took the easy way out. And it affects him hard...He talks bad about me to her [Young's daughter]. "I don't want you to be like your mom" and stuff like that, and it hurts her feelings...And it hurts me that he does her like that...So it's hard on me because I'm going to be mad at him, because I want it to be different. But in reality it's my fault because I'm not there. It should be me handling it different, not making him do it different. (Young)

"You shouldn't be here [prison]. You're a disgrace to our family. That's not cool. You know, it's okay to make one mistake, but you go and make another mistake and get back in prison, you know, what do you want us to do?" You know what I'm saying? It's like, I can't call and ask them for money, I can't, you know, ask them for nothing. You know, like, if I need some shoes, I can't call my sister or my brother and say, "Hey. I need this, that, and the other." It's just, I guess you can say it's different. I don't even have a relationship with my sister anymore, and when I was growing up, me and my sister used to be real tight. But now, it's like, she doesn't know me, you know? (Beverly)

So the weekend I got out, I called my brother, because I loved my husband, but I just didn't want to be around that [her husband was doing drugs]. So I called my brother and said, "Look. You've got to get me out of here, because I'm using again. I'm getting ready to get in trouble. I don't want to go back." And he wouldn't help me. (Vivian)



Beverly also stated that, while her mother had initially supported her while she was in prison, she lost her mother's support upon her release because her mother couldn't understand her homosexual preference that she acquired while incarcerated.

Yet there were also a few women who expressed that serving time in prison had actually brought them and their families and/or their children closer than they were prior to their incarceration. Angel shared that, prior to her incarceration, she and her father, who had always been close, had not been on good speaking terms. However, when she went to prison, she felt inclined to write him a letter seeking to reignite their relationship, and they bonded together from that point forward. Angel thus felt that her incarceration actually helped her relationship with her father, as he is relieved that she's in prison, where he can at least know where she is, versus her days on the street prior to her incarceration.

Missy and Beth also felt that their incarceration had served to strengthen relationships with family members.

I think it gave me and my children a greater bond, a more stronger bond, for the fact that I really realized that I was a mom. I mean, I knew it, but I really came to realize that I was a mom and how much I hurt them, you know. (starts crying) (Missy)

It's very strange. I think it's [her incarceration] actually strengthened my relationship with my mom and my husband. (Beth)

### *Placement of Children*

Another significant concern for these women was the fate of their children while they were incarcerated. A few of these women did not have custody of their children prior to their incarceration, based on their unstable lifestyles and substance abuse. Young would leave her children with her grandmother, as she did not want them to see her high on drugs. Lone Wolf left her children to be raised by her parents, as she also did not want them seeing her high on drugs and drunk. Angel also left her children with her parents, because she felt it would be better for her children to have stability versus being exposed to her drug abuse.

However, most of the women in this study had custody of their children prior to their incarceration. Upon their incarceration, most of these women's children were placed with grandparents or the incarcerated women's siblings. Yet several women had lost custody of their children while incarcerated, through questionable means that they were helpless to resolve.

I lost my kids when I came to prison. My children were like 8, 6, and 5 and 2. The two-year-old, I haven't seen him since he was three. That's been ten years, I haven't seen him in 10 years. I don't know where he's at. I can't find him. My other three children, I have two girls and a boy, they were split up by welfare. So they grew up away from each other, so they don't even know each other. I've seen them like four or five times since I've been locked up. And that's five or six years since I've even seen them. So I'm not their mom. I'm their mother, because I gave birth to them, and they love me and I love them. And I tried to have a relationship with them, but they're grown now...The relationships are gone. (Laci)

... I don't even know what's happened to my youngest son. I don't know where he is. I miss him. I can't find him. I haven't seen him since he was three years old. I can't find him. I've

looked everywhere for him, and I can't find him. I'm praying he'll find me someday. (Laci)

When Anne was incarcerated this time, her brother took custody of her eight-year-old son, who had been sexually molested by his father during one of her past incarcerations. However, Anne eventually found out that her brother had given her son up to a shelter, without notifying her, because he could not handle her son's acting out that came from his having been sexually abused.

So I've been dealing with that. Excuse me for crying. I've been dealing with that for the last couple of months, and I've been praying to God to give me peace about that, that somebody in my family, or his dad, will get him out of the shelter, because I don't want him to get lost in that system. 'Cause once they in the shelter, they can get lost in the system real easily, and I don't want that for my son...but I don't know how they do it now, since he's in Enid's jurisdiction now, I don't know how they're gonna do it now, you know. And I've been waiting and waiting to see, and I've been praying and praying to God to let my cousin write me, so I can know what's going on, to see if they've got my son out or anything. So I can ask her to do what she's gotta do, to not leave my baby in there. I haven't heard from them yet.

During her first incarceration, Beverly's family had taken custody of her daughter, as her daughter's father had not regularly been involved in the child's life. Beverly's family moved to California, yet they made an effort to bring her daughter back to Oklahoma to visit her, in prison, every six months. During that time, Beverly was also able to talk to her daughter and to communicate with her by mail. However, Beverly's daughter's father eventually went to California, claiming that he wanted to take his daughter for a visit to his home in Texas. That is the last time that Beverly heard from her daughter, years ago, as he had custody

papers served to Beverly in prison and has since prohibited Beverly and her daughter from communicating. So Beverly feels that her daughter's father essentially stole her daughter from her family and her, and she was not able to get anywhere in contesting the sole custody application filed by her daughter's father.

Tamara also experienced difficulty in regaining custody of her children upon her prior release from prison. They were placed into Tamara's mother's custody through the state's child protective services, even though Tamara's relationship with her family was not a good one even prior to her incarceration. Her family had kicked her out at fifteen years of age when she had her first child, so they were upset about that situation. They were further outraged when she was incarcerated. So, upon Tamara's release, her mother did not immediately allow her to see her children. Tamara then turned to the state's child protective services system to regain custody of her children, but she found the system to be very unreceptive to the returning of children to recently-released-from-incarceration mothers.

It was hard that I didn't get to see my kids. I didn't get my kids back. It's like DHS didn't even want to work with me at all to help me get my kids back or nothing. They're just like, "You've been to prison. You're no good. We don't want your kids around you." And that's pretty much how it was.

Tamara's family eventually allowed her to see her children, but only after 1-1/2 years of trying, and only one time, as she was re-incarcerated within two years of her prior incarceration.

### *Abuse of Children During Mother's Incarceration*

Several women also expressed major anxiety over abuses their children had experienced during their prior incarcerations and the continuation of these abuses during their current incarceration. These women felt angry and helpless about these situations, as they were frequently unable to get any information or updates from state child protective service agencies or from family members or friends about the initiation or progress of any investigations around these children's claims. The majority of the abuses experienced by these women's children involved sexual abuse. Beverly's daughter had been molested by her new stepmother's older teenage sons. However, despite Beverly having reported this situation while she was out of prison, her daughter had been placed back into the care of her father and stepmother. Her daughter was thus living again with her sexual abusers.

...My daughter had experienced a lot of things while I was in prison. She was molested, I mean, uh, repeatedly. And she still lives in the house with these people that is doing this stuff to her. And she has trust issues, you know what I'm saying. I don't know if they're still molesting her, because I don't have any contact with her, you know. So I can't, I don't know. Since I've been here, I got a letter from Child Protective Services saying that, um, they were doing an investigation. They was telling me that there was molestation issues, and this was the third occurrence...They said they was doing an investigation, the investigation would take 30 days, and that they would get back with me after the investigation was over. Well, I've called this man, I've written him, and he hasn't gotten back with me. Um, I've left messages, and I haven't heard anything else about it. I've written to a address where I last knew she was at, um. Her daddy, he don't let her write me back,

and I know that they are still there, because, either, if they moved, they forward their address, you know what I'm saying, 'cause it hasn't come back to me, so I know that they're getting the mail.

Interviewer: So, who's she living with?

Beverly: Her dad. But he's remarried, so he has a wife. She has eight other kids, and she has sons that are like 16, 17, and 15, and those are the boys that are molesting my daughter [14 years old].

Anne and Laci's children were also sexually molested during their prior incarcerations.

Anne: ...when I was gone, he [her son] was molested too, while he was in foster care, before his grandmother got him, when I came to prison the first time. And he used to take it out on animals, and kills animals and stuff like that.

Laci: They [her children] were so young, and before they had to be split up, I couldn't put them into foster care. I just wouldn't do it. I'd been in foster care before, when I was little, and I'd been molested and all kinds of stuff. And I didn't want that to happen to them. But it ended up happening anyway. My daughter was molested by a deacon at her grandpa's church. He took her and my son, and he ended up molesting her anyways. And I feel so guilty about my daughter being molested, because I've been molested almost my whole life...With my kids, I swore I would never do that, and I never did. But I still put my daughter in a dangerous situation where she got hurt, and she has nightmares at night to this very day. If I had not come to prison, she would not ever have been put in that situation. I should have been there to protect her. And I feel very responsible, and I can't help her...I'm trying to get her to go to counseling and stuff, because I lose it when we start talking about, and I just want to kill him, and that's the truth.

Vivian stated that her children had horrendous experiences in foster care homes while she was incarcerated.

One of them was working my kids real hard in the house, to where they'd have blisters on their hands and were bleeding. And another one, I think my daughter was about 10, but they made her put on a bra and stuff it with Kleenex. It was just weird stuff.

These were people from a church. I couldn't go out and see their house. They'd come and meet me, and I would talk to them and find out as much as I could. But you can only find out so much. But my kids would tell me. But they were always getting moved. The first time, when their grandmother was taking care of them, she got tired of taking care of them, so she took them to this half-brother and whenever he found out he couldn't get a welfare check on them, he was going to take them to DHS. And they were in North Carolina. So they called me at prison and I had to find a way to get them moved over here. So that's when they went to the church places... I'm not sure what all was going on, but I know the school called DHS and my daughter went to a shelter. So then I had to find somebody else to go get her from the shelter. Somebody that they knew, before, while I was gone in the beginning, a neighbor, my kids told me about them, and so I found them, and I called them, and they came and got her because I was getting ready to get out. Evidently, the husband hit my daughter with a real thick board, and the school called DHS and they went and got her.

Several of these women were so desperate to protect their children that, after their interview recording was over, they asked if the researcher could contact the Oklahoma Department of Human Services to see if she could find out anything about their children's cases. These women were informed by the researcher that communication of this nature did not fit under the allowed parameters of this research. While most of the women who requested this additional effort from the researcher stated that they understood my limitations, one woman pressed on and burst into tears, stating that she had recently heard from her child that her son, who was living separately from this sibling, had not been getting fed by his guardians, and he was too young to seek out food for himself. At that point, the researcher felt required, under mandatory reporting

laws about suspected child abuse, to get that child's name and address and to report that suspected abuse through the anonymous phone line available statewide in Oklahoma for reporting such information. Yet the researcher emphasized to this incarcerated woman that she would not be able to gain any further information to update her about this situation.

#### *Relationships with Husbands/Boyfriends*

These women's incarcerations also had significant effects on their relationships with men who were either their husbands or boyfriends. Considered here are only those romantic relationships that were mentioned as significant for these women. Young had been married prior to her current incarceration, but her husband died during this incarceration. Beth reported always having a strong relationship with her husband, and she stated that her incarceration had served to make their bond tighter. As reported above, Laci's husband and Amanda's boyfriend had left them during their incarcerations. Vanda had a boyfriend when she went to prison, but she let the relationship end as soon as she was incarcerated, as she stated, "He beat me, so it wasn't a good relationship anyway." She also stated, "Every relationship that I've been in, I've had three serious relationships, and they've all beat me. I've had to fight in all three of them. It wasn't a good deal."

While it is important to consider the effects of these women's incarcerations on their relationships with these men, it is also important to note



how such relationships also worked to bring some of these women to prison. As Laci stated, “A lot of women in here didn’t do nothing wrong; it was just the men they were with. And they bring them down, because they loved these men. And that’s true.”

During her interview, Laci further mentioned that she had been molested and abused by men her entire life, leading to her use of drugs as a coping mechanism.

(Crying) Now, before, it’s like my mom did me, you know? Dope is more important than they [her children] were to me, and that’s the truth. I was just so much into that sickness that I didn’t have time to give them [her children] what they needed. They had everything in the world, but that’s not what they needed. They needed me, you know what I’m saying? And I feel so guilty about my daughter being molested, because I’ve been molested almost my whole life. I’ve been molested since I was little. My mom would trade me for drugs. I was better than money because they’d give me back, you know what I’m saying? I was traded to all kinds of men and even women for dope and stuff. With my kids, I swore I would never do that, and I never did.

Laci also felt guilty for having exposed her children to her boyfriends’ abuse of her.

I think I did them [her children] an injustice, even having them at that point, because I was never mean to them, and I kept them fed and stuff. But I had men around me who were abusive to me. They’d see me get beat up, stuff like that. They’d see me have to work two jobs just to pay for everything with the sorry men I had. I wasn’t there all the time, because I was working all the time, so I wasn’t there.

Laci stated that, based on her experiences with sexual molestation and abuse, as well as physical abuse, she had started to use and produce drugs, which led to her incarceration.

Vivian was married prior to her last incarceration but had tried to get away from him when she was last released from prison. Yet her family would not help her, so she went back to him. He was using and producing drugs every day, so she eventually slipped back into that habit. She returned to prison for drug possession and production. Her husband went to prison for the same charges during her current incarceration.

Shoshone was in prison for killing a man who she said was extremely abusive. She received four years on a manslaughter conviction. Yet she prolonged that sentence when she escaped, based on her view that she was wrongly convicted.

I escaped, when I went to lower security, because I felt it was an injustice there. For domestic violence, and several times I had reported it to the police, and they never did anything. So it was in self-defense, but because it was a fatality, I was charged with manslaughter. So I didn't see the reasoning or the justice behind that. So I was really angry.

Shoshone eventually was released on parole from the manslaughter and escape charges, but she was ultimately re-incarcerated for a parole violation, based on her driving under the influence (DUI).

Tamara was also re-incarcerated based on an abusive relationship. When she was most recently released, Tamara had no family or friends to turn to for

assistance. Her ex-boyfriend, who had always been supportive and loving toward her, had previously offered to help her after her release from prison. She thus called him, and he picked her up from prison. However, he was not the same person. As she put it, “I walked straight into a domestic violence situation, and I didn’t know that’s what was going to happen.” Because she had no options, Tamara endured the abuse: “He started abusing me. But I was living with him until I came back to prison this time. I stayed there the whole time, in that environment. I figured it could work itself out.” This boyfriend beat her into early labor, so her baby was born 2-1/2 months early and subsequently died of SIDS. However, she was initially investigated for the baby’s death, even though she was asleep in her room and there were multiple friends and relatives that her boyfriend had let live there in her home. When Tamara talked about being beat into early labor and throughout her discussions about her abuse, she showed no emotion, appearing to have normalized such events for herself. When asked if she had ever thought about leaving this abusive boyfriend, she responded

I did, but it was like I didn’t have the resources to do it. Wherever I would go, he would follow, because I got pregnant and he said, “You’re not leaving me. You’re not taking my child. I’ll kill you.” And I was just too fearful to even leave the situation. I would go with my mom and my dad. I didn’t go very often, though, because he would beat on me and my kids was there and I didn’t want them to even see what I was going through.

This same abusive boyfriend was into the production and selling of drugs. One day, he and Tamara were moving, and they were pulled over by the police.

Afraid that he would be caught, her boyfriend told the police that there were drug seeds and stems in the back floorboard of her car. He told the police they were all hers, and, since she had a record already, they let him go and fully charged her with the offense. She was thus convicted and re-incarcerated on these new charges.

Young was also abused, but not by her husband—her abuse had occurred when she was 10 years old, by her male cousin who was four years older than her.

I just never said anything to my family, because it happened to me once before, me saying anything, and it just felt like it didn't matter. It wasn't, I guess, when things happened to my mom when she was little, I guess my grandmother just like put a blind eye to it. I guess that's how she was raised. So, you know, the first time I said something, and the thing was that he was never to come back around, but I felt like they condoned it, like it was my fault.

This situation came back to haunt her during her most recent release from prison, as this cousin, who as an adult had become an unemployed drug addict, came to live with her and her grandmother. She was living with her grandmother because that was the only placement that had been approved by her probation officer.

Young begged her grandmother and her aunt (her cousin's mother) to not let him stay there, citing serious personal issues with him, but they disregarded her pleas and let him stay there. He tormented her at work, by calling her repeatedly, to the point that she was fired from a job at which she had been able to achieve good promotions. She was thus unemployed and at home with this cousin, who then

exposed her to the drugs he was using. She returned to prison for a parole violation, based on a dirty urine analysis.

### *Children's Needs as an Influence toward Crime*

While the abuse the women in this research suffered as children and as adults oftentimes factored into their substance abuse and other criminal behaviors, a couple of women in this study specifically mentioned having committed their crimes to meet the needs of their children. Missy stated, crying, that her main motivation for her crimes was to secure basic necessities for her children.

Things that I did do, I did it for my kids. Because I can't let them go without. And if it's all because I made a mistake, because I messed up, I messed up for them. If I can't get it right, if I can't get it the way that it's supposed to be, at the time, I would do whatever it is that needed to be done to get them what they needed, what they had to have. I mean, there was no issues that I had, like drugs. No habits or nothing like that for me. If my kids needed clothes, I'm gonna get them clothes. Even if I ain't got no money, I'm gonna get them some clothes. Stealing or whatever I had to do. If they needed shoes, whatever I had to do. If they needed food, whatever I had to do. Which, they never needed food, I always had that for them. But whatever it was that they needed, I was going to get it.

Missy later elaborated on the specific crimes she had committed in order to provide for her children, including the crime for which she was currently incarcerated.

Well, when I was talking about having to do everything necessary to take care of my kids, I've had to steal. In fact, I'm in here right now on a robbery case, and it got that bad. I had no money, and I had no means of transportation. I had nothing. And I went to get us money. It was almost winter time. I didn't have no electric in

my house, and there was no food or nothing. The kids needed to eat. And I went to go get money. From a check cashing. I want to say that there is not one day that I do not regret doing what I did...And I regret that everyday. Everyday. (starts crying). I was stealing, I tried to rob. I sold drugs. Stuff I had to do. So we need help once we get out there, so things don't have to go to that level ever for anyone to provide for their kids.

Lone Wolf also stated that she committed crimes not primarily to support her drug and alcohol addictions, but to help her parents to provide for her children, as well as to grant her children any nonessential items that they desired.

They [her children] basically know me when I'm buzzed or drunk. But they know I'm mama, and their mama will do whatever it takes to get there to see them and help them, if my mom and dad didn't have money. If it took me tricking with a guy to get money, then I'd tell my mom and dad I borrowed the money, instead of telling them the truth. If they wanted them \$100 shoes, then mama's going to go and get the money to get you shoes. My drinking was bad, but if I had like my last \$60 and my kids wanted something, then I'm going to do for them and I'm going to have to go without or I'm going to have to go find something else for me.

Such motivations for criminal offending, involving provision of basic needs for these women's children, seem simple to address in order to prevent recidivism. If these women cite such needs as the major impetus behind such actions, then helping them to legitimately provide for their children's needs would appear to be the way to curb future offending among these women.

#### *Solutions Offered by Female Inmates for Problems Involving Family and Relationships*

In discussing their concerns and issues involving their families and relationships during their incarceration and upon their release from prison, these

women also presented ideas on what they believed would help to address these situations and experiences. These women often offered these solutions in response to the question of what type of programs would have helped them to avoid prison, showing the impact of these relationships on their criminal offending. Also interesting was that these women focused their solutions toward improving their relationships with their children, not their other family members or romantic partners. Most of the women who offered such ideas emphasized the need for counseling and programs allowing continuous interaction of incarcerated mothers with children, to help them maintain relationships with their children during and after their incarceration. These women argued that such counseling and interaction programs were especially critical in helping their children to deal with the abandonment they felt from their mother's incarceration. Such measures could also allow women to overcome their own feelings of guilt for leaving their children, as well as provide these women with supervised training in how to be better mothers than they were prior to being in prison.

There should be programs for families, for women and their children, no matter the age. 'Cause, even though their children can be 20, 21 years old, they still have issues, 'cause a lot of these women have been incarcerated their whole lives. I really think there should be a structured program for mothers and their children. It should offer counseling. It should offer like group therapy. Just like some sort of family activity, different levels. Just let everyone get their feelings out. Let everyone say what they have to say, you know, to get it out in the open and get it discussed. To get it over with. So counseling for the kids and the mom together and apart. (Missy)

Counseling would have been good. For me and even for my kids. For the kids, counseling about what they go through when I'm gone. They don't get any counseling while I'm not there. They don't offer them any. I only get counseling in drug programs, and usually it's group. At 12/12 drug program, I got a little bit of individual counseling there, but it's only a 28-day program. So counseling for me and the kids, to help them deal with me being gone and to help me deal with different stuff, like not being there and not being able to do for them or me having the three babies when I'm out there. I took a parenting class three times, and they helped teach me how to talk to my kids. But that's about it.  
(Vivian)

Parenting programs out there, or even in here, even in here, you know? Because I talk to a lot of women, saying, you know, "While you're in here, interact with your kids as much as you can. Let them know that, even though you away, you still think about them, you still love them. Because once you get out, they need to know that, because it's like, you're not gonna know what to say to those kids." We need some kind of parenting classes. They need to teach parenting skills, you know what I'm saying, on how to interact with your child, you know what I'm saying? 'Cause kids go through different phases, you know what I'm saying, and if you haven't been a parent, then you don't know how to be a parent. You know, some people say it comes with a book, some people say it don't, you know what I'm saying. I mean, experience is good, but it's some things that can be prevented if you know, you know what I'm saying? So I think parenting is important. (Beverly)

I think they need to have programs where they interact with their kids more. There's not enough encouragement. They don't encourage women and children in here. They have CAMP programs—Children and Mothers Program—once a month. Every third Monday from 2-5:30. At old Mabel Bassett is used to be Tuesday through Thursdays from 12-5:30, every week. From eight times a month, to once a month, that is a big difference. And it's still hard, you know? I can't raise my child once a month, from 2-5:30. I'm happy to see him. I'm not gonna want to sit and talk about anything like that. I'm just gonna be happy to see him.  
(Pooty)



Finally, Bree made a good argument that effective programming in prison must take into account relationships with children, through her discussion of what she would define as a good drug program.

A program that would have been willing to take me from prison with my children, if I asked for my children to be there. You know. Or a program that would just be willing to work with me. 'Cause some people, they'll put you in a group setting, and they'll talk to the whole group, but sometimes somebody might need that one-on-one. A good, understanding program. A program where people care. Really, I say a drug program, but a program, period, because some of us have been locked up, we don't know how to be mothers. We don't know how to be mothers. Just because you give birth to a child don't make you a mother. I mean, it makes you a mother, but it doesn't make you a mother, because you don't know how to be a mother. You've never been around these children. Put me in an environment where I'm living with children, you know. You're helping me be a mother.

### *Summary*

This section has demonstrated the strong impact of relationships with children, parents, siblings, and romantic partners on women's criminal offending. The incarcerated women in this research expressed anxiety about the possibility of reuniting with their loved ones, especially their children, after their extended absences brought about by their incarceration. These women also shared the difficulties they faced in being able to parent or discipline their children after such an absence from their lives, based on their children's resentment and anger toward them. These women's interactions with their children were oftentimes not made easier through the support of family members or romantic partners, based on their

own feelings of resentment toward these women; their prior abusive relationships with these women; or else their abandonment of these women.

In terms of relationships, these women (at least those who were mothers) emphasized their children as their main priority and concern during their incarceration. They were often justified in their concerns for their children's well-being, as some of their children had experienced horrific abuse, primarily sexual in nature, during their prior and/or current incarcerations. Yet these women were often unable to secure any information about their children's safety or placement from loved ones or the state child protective services system.

Through their experiences during prior and current incarcerations, these women learned and acknowledged that they needed support during their incarceration and after their release from prison to transition into gaining custody of their children; establishing and maintaining a stable relationship with their children; and providing for their children legitimately. The women in this research thus pleaded for counseling and programs to achieve these ends.

## Reentry

### *Institutionalization, Frustration, and Discouragement*

Every woman interviewed for this study encountered significant delays and challenges in adapting to freedom after her release from prison. These women had grown so used to the prison environment and the emotional isolation

they cited as necessary to survive in prison, that even things we would consider basic overwhelmed them. Socializing, eating in restaurants or even keeping food in the home presented challenges. Others found themselves overwhelmed by silence or by social situations. In fact, even leaving their room or their home paralyzed many of these women. Essentially, these women had been institutionalized from their time in prison. Anne commented

After prison the last time, it took me a while to adjust, because I was gone twelve years, and it took me so much. There were times that I wouldn't even come out of my room, 'cause I was used to being locked up in a room, that my family used to make me come out and just mingle a little bit. 'Cause I was institutionalized for so long, so it was hard for me to adapt...

Beverly also experienced difficulty with transitioning back into society.

This led to associating primarily with other offenders, a violation of parole. Even spending time with family posed problems.

To get totally back to myself, it took at least a good year. Yeah, to get, yes, my mental state of mind together...to get myself together totally and completely it took me a good year, you know, and I mean, that's everything... It took me a while to get in the feel of things, and meeting different people. Like when I first got out, I just only wanted to hang out with people that I had done time with, because it was, that's where it was comfortable for me, you know. Those were the people that understood me, understood where I've been and what I was going through, you know? So those groups of people was comfortable for me to hang out with, although I knew that me being on parole, I'm not supposed to hang out with those kind of people. But, I couldn't adjust to people that didn't know where I came from or what I was going through and what was going on in my head, you know. I didn't feel comfortable. I felt out of place. So it was just really different, you know, like entering back into society, um, I was like kind of scared...um, I didn't like to be where there was a lot of people around. I would

just get real weirded out, you know. Um, eating was different. My mom, she took me to a restaurant, and she's like, "What do you want?" And I'm looking at the menu for like 20 minutes, 'cause I just don't really know what I want. You know, finally, I'm just like, "Just get me a burger and fries," you know, because I guess my taste buds were so adherent to this food in prison, that nothing out there really sounded good, or looked good, you know, I just didn't know. It was completely different. The change was like, "Bam!" And even though I had been a part of that society, I had been in here so long. And, see, five years in prison seems like ten years, you know what I'm saying? So, it was like, just, different, everything was different. Even from something that little, like eating in a restaurant, was different to me.

Others, like Amos, just wanted to be by themselves. This could be due to feeling uncomfortable around people who might judge their pasts. Or, it could be that after being locked up for years with no privacy, Amos treasured having her own space.

I got me a dog, and it was me and my dog. No people...I don't mind being by myself now. I don't think it's a healthy thing, the way I am. But that's just 10 years of incarceration. But I see that with a lot of people that spend a lot of time in here...We need help with everything coming out of prison, and I don't know where to go or who can help.

Even for those offenders who spent only a short time in prison, transition can be difficult. Beth discovered that having peace and quiet was actually frightening.

It was a shock. And I was surprised. Because I was only gone for six months. I felt that the change in noise level was very frightening to me. Here, it's a dull roar all the time, and there the quiet kind of frightened me. I felt very paranoid. I felt extraordinarily afraid of the police for no reason. I could be walking down the street, or at church, and if I saw a policeman, I just burst into tears. Also, you know how they have the count

times here? I wasn't aware of it, until I got home after about a week and a half, I noticed that I felt very strange at certain times of the day, almost a panic attack. And it was count times, and it took a while for that to wear off. I also hoarded food. I went back to my mom and my husband and my two kids. And we went shopping the first time, and they bought groceries. Well, here, we're supposed to ask, "Please can I have this? Can I have that?" I hid food in my upstairs bedroom. And my mom found it and said, "Honey, we'll go back and get more if we need to." And so that was something else. It was unconscious. Prison was so different. Loud noise behind me. If I heard something, I would just jump. Because here you have to be so aware of what's going on, so that would bother me. The food, I did not pay any attention to it, and I wouldn't have had my mom not said, "Honey, you don't have to hide food in the house. There's going to be food for everybody." Just here you get used to hiding and holding on to what you've got, because if another roommate doesn't take it, then an officer might come in and check you down and then take it. So it becomes a way of life, and I don't think you realize it until you're thrown out there, and it's just completely different. It's just the opposite. I was in prison last time for just six months. This time I've been in prison three years so far, and I can't imagine what it will be like when I get back out.

It is logical that these women would report such shocks and difficulties during their transitioning back into society. These women moved from a total institution, where every action and interaction was heavily monitored, to an environment where they were able to exercise most of the freedoms that they were denied while incarcerated. The transition from total structure to no structure was difficult for several, such as Laci.

You don't have to really fend for yourself. They [prison officials] tell you when to get up. They tell you when to go to sleep. I mean, everything is pretty well structured. But when you get out, there's no structure. Boom! So you go from total structure to total chaos. And that's a big step. And so for people that have been in prison for any amount of time, it is scary.

However, what is interesting is that these women found these sudden freedoms to be intimidating, and their reactions to that apprehension included isolation and overall emotional volatility. In fact, women in this study reported that a large part of surviving the incarceration experience involved them becoming hardened and stoic in their emotions and overall interactions, as any evidence of weakness or vulnerability was easily preyed upon by other offenders and even by prison staff. Unfortunately, daily adherence to such a demeanor and conduct made it difficult to shed these characteristics once they reentered society. That translated into their taking that protective shell back into their interactions with others in the real world upon their release. One prisoner, Pooty, described the thought process in detail:

Being in prison, you get in a mindset. This isn't "Oz" and this isn't "Prison Break," nothing like that at all. But it does have its own evilness in here. And you see the true nature of women. The ugly side. So you become stoic, you become hard. You can't show anything. You would think there would be a whole lot of weakness in here, but you can't show it. They're like wolves. They prey on that. So you have to stuff a lot of stuff inside. So when you go out, instead of going to somebody and saying, "Look, I'm scared. I'm not ready for this. Can I stay with you? Can I do this?" You don't. You put inside your mind that there's people in there that would love to be out here, so suck it up and deal with it. And it was scary. So I kind of just tried to figure everything out myself.

This prisoner went on to describe the failure to mature while in prison.

I am a firm believer that you're preserved in prison. If you come in here at 17 and you stay for 20 years, you may have aged in years, but in your mind, you haven't had life experiences to grow

you up. So you're still kind of in that 17-year-old mentality, and I was still in that 17 year old mentality. When I got out, I felt like lost. This is my life experiences. This is where I became a woman. So I didn't know how to function like a normal 25-year-old out there. And I wasn't going to ask anyone for help. I didn't have anybody to ask for help, that could understand why I needed help. The scariest thing is not knowing where you're gonna sleep, how you're gonna eat, and stuff like that.

In prison, anger is a tool for self-protection. However, on the outside, it can be self-destructive. One prisoner, Beth, talked about the difficulties making a transition into a world where anger and violence were not the norm.

I've been telling my husband and my mom, I'm really quite afraid of what it'll be like when I come home. Because now Mabel Bassett is a higher security prison than Eddie Warriors was. There's a lot of violence here. I noticed that I was quick to violence out there, and I had never been. I had never been a violent person. My husband and I, I had been home about three days, and we went to Crest. And we're in our car, and our two children were very small then, they were in the car seat, seatbelted in. And a girl, there were cars behind us, a girl pulls out, to back out, and my husband starts honking. She's on the cell phone, so she's not paying attention because she's just talking on the cell phone, and they hit us. And it's just a girl. She hits us. And I was immediately angry. I mean really angry. And I ran up to her car and I was like, "How dare you do this? Why are you on your cell phone?" And my husband had to drag me away and say, "Honey, calm down!" What got me excited was that I was worried because she hit us and we had the children, in fear for the children. And it was such a minute thing, that prior to being in prison, I would have said, "Hey, lady. That's not really good to be on the cell phone." But I guess you get more prone to violence in here. And I'd never been around it.

Many of the women in this study thus expressed intense fear of returning to society after their current incarceration, based on their recollection of what

their experiences had been with their prior releases from prison. It was interesting to observe that most of the women did not seem excited to leave prison, as they shared the realization that they were likely to be released back into society with no transitional assistance, resources, or support. They were also, oftentimes, being released back into the very conditions that had led them to commit crime in the first place. One prisoner even felt that family and friends would not want her around unless she was engaging in the same behaviors, as the following exchange demonstrates:

Cody: You want your life back, and right now, I want my life back, but I'm afraid to go home... I just don't want to know nobody, I don't need to go around no, uh, community people, uh, not even my family. Because, see, they can be doing good, and as long as they can't be using you, they'll let you go. They don't want nothing to do with you when you're doing good. They only come around when you're doing bad...

Interviewer: So, if you returned to the community in which you were living, it would be easier to go back...

Cody: Oh yeah. That's what happened to me...

Cody was not unique. Other prisoners recognized that returning to the environments where they initially got into drugs and crime was a recipe for disaster.

Young: It was like this last time I went home, it was going back to the same old environment. I mean, it was a family thing, it wasn't all just my husband, it was a family thing, this drug deal thing. So, it was kind of hard to get out of that type of circle, I mean, um, it was just the same old thing. Then my uncles started getting out of prison, and they're falling right back into the same circles, so it was a lot of madness going on that time that I got out.



Anne thought she might need to leave the state to stay out of trouble.

I just can't stay in Oklahoma. I want to get away from trouble here. I think that's the best thing for me. I need to go to somewhere I've never been, to a new environment, new people, something that's gonna help me accomplish my goals and dreams, because that's something I want to do.

A number of prisoners dreaded being released. Dirty Lucy was afraid she would not be able to refrain from using drugs:

It was scary going back, because I know that I have a problem, and I know that there's plenty of drugs out there. And they're just waiting for me, calling my name...Just being afraid of what I'm going to do when I get there. I'm more afraid of myself than I am of what's out there. I'm not afraid in here.

B-Dog dreaded having to start over on the outside:

And now, right now, I'm supposed to be getting' back out and I'm not even looking forward to it. Because I know I'm fixin' to go out there and I have to start all the way over...

For those of us on the outside, technology changes are easier to absorb.

We have watched the world move to more automation a step at a time.

However, for Pooty, being thrown into an environment far different from the one she left behind was frightening.

It [leaving prison] was very scary. It was very intimidating...The world moves fast. It's slow in here. It sounds funny, but I got carsick. There were so many lights. Toilets flushed by themselves. That was scary to me.

Not only did the changes in the world bother Pooty, but she also dreaded the unknown. She talked about going from an environment where all her

needs were taken care of to having to take care of herself in a strange and unfamiliar world.

That was scary because, as bad as I wanted out of here, they provided everything for me. And when I got out, I provided them for myself. That was the plan. It was the unsureness of what was going to happen to me. Where was I gonna go? What was I gonna do? After seven years, it wasn't familiarity. I didn't have that. I was scared I wasn't gonna make it. I was scared to...I don't know.

It was obvious that these women realized that they were being released back into environments and situations that would promote their failure upon release from prison. These women openly expressed their worry at being placed back into the very communities that contained the exact people and problems that had advanced their criminal involvement. These women were pouring out the factors that had led them back to crime and back to prison, to a researcher that had known them for only a few minutes. It was therefore hard to imagine that they had not expressed these factors and concerns to one of the professionals who worked with them regularly in the system. The fact that these women are released with no transitional assistance and no preparation, despite the fact that they will readily identify their issues and needs to anyone who simply asks, seems almost malicious.

Lone Wolf described what it was like to be released, with no idea of what to do and no resources.

Really, basically, all the times I went out, I went out to nobody. I had mom and dad, and they got my kids and stuff, but when I'd get out, I'm on my own. When I got out, it's exactly what some of the

women say. They give you \$50 and take you out there and just throw you out to the bus. I never rode a bus before, until I came out here and I got out in 2004. I got out, they took me to the bus station and just left me there. Not knowing how to do a bus ticket, not knowing how to do nothing. I was just there. I had \$50, but I had to ask somebody what to do. I'm from the country. I'm from a little town, and I'd never rode the bus before. So I had to have somebody come and help me to tell me how to do things so I could get back to Tulsa, you know? You had to buy a bus ticket with the \$50 they gave you. And I think the bus ticket was \$50, from here to Tulsa, so it was all of it right there.

She was not the only prisoner who immediately found herself struggling.

Laci: Let's see. Get out, get a \$50 check. They take you and drop you off at a bus station. They send you back to the county that you fell out of, where you got arrested and convicted of. But a lot of people aren't even from that county. A lot of people have been arrested and in prison for so long that they don't have anything in that county. And so they send them there, and they leave them at a bus station where they don't know what to do. There's nobody there anymore for them, they don't know anybody anymore. They don't have no place to go. They're afoot.

The system appears to have no qualms about releasing these female offenders without ensuring that they have somewhere to go and that they have a safe way to get there. The criminal justice system in Oklahoma also does not seem to be interested in how these women will meet their immediate needs upon release from prison. Overall, there is no indication, from the reports provided from these women, that there is any effort by the system to verify that these women will have access to any form of a support system. Lacking such basic emotional and physical necessities immediately after leaving prison, these women are left with few options conducive to their success outside of the system. Two

women poignantly describe how they ended up re-offending, after being released with no support and few options.

Bad Girl: I came back to prison because I didn't have no home to go to. I didn't have no money. I didn't really have nowhere to go, so I made some money on the street. Prostituting and selling drugs, and I got to the point where I was using them, to keep me outside so I could make my money. So I had somewhere to lay my head at... The only things around me are to go out there and start selling drugs or prostituting. Because I don't have the things I need to put me into a decent apartment where I can go out to my job and pay my rent. You can't find no cheap place unless you go to the projects, and don't nobody need to be out there where all that dope is. I know I don't. I could probably make it in a little hole in the wall, I don't care where it's at, as long as it's not in the projects. If you put me in the projects, I'm going to get around that mentality and I'm going to start selling dope. Out of prison, they pretty much force you back out into that atmosphere. Yes ma'am.

Vanda: You need help with food, clothing, transportation...Just to stay away from the old people. You can't get out of prison and go back to the same crap, 'cause when you do, you're gonna wind up right back in prison. You gotta change your thinking, your old friends, and get new ones... You've got to have a future to look forward to, and a lot of women don't because they have nothing. They don't have nobody. If you have nobody, you're going to go back out there alone, by yourself, back to your old ways. Because that's all you know. That's all you've got. Because there is no help out there. There's no help. There is no help. For women that have nothing, there is no help. They take you to a bus station, they buy you a bus ticket, and then you're on your own. A lot of the women that don't have nobody, they're on their own.

It is subsequently the case that these women know what they need when they leave prison. They are eager to share those needs and their prior reentry experiences with anyone who expresses an interest. Yet they soon realize that

they are expected to meet these needs on their own, as assistance toward a successful transition back into society is not likely to be made available to them.

When asked about programs she participated in after her release, Bree was quick to answer that she participated in nothing.

None. None. Didn't know where to go, and, really, at the time, didn't want to know. I was doing my own thing, and I was going to do it my way. There was nothing offered to me. Nothing. No reintegration, no "let me show you how to dress for success. Let me teach you how to talk in an interview." Nothing. It was, "Here's your discharge papers. Sign right here. Go get this person to sign off on it. Here's a \$50 check. Do you need a bus ticket?" That's all I got. They put me on a bus, when I was down at Eddie Warriors, which is in Taft. They put me on the bus. I rode the bus back to Oklahoma City. Got off at the bus station. Downtown Oklahoma City.

Interviewer: Was there someone there to get you?

Bree: No.

The researcher had a similar conversation with Cody about her release.

Interviewer: So, when you leave here, they just open the doors?

Cody: They take you to the bus station or you can have someone pick you up. So basically, if you ain't got nowhere to go... But there's no support. Basically, we need support.

Such a realization by these women understandably leads them to feel frustrated and angry. They are left to cover all of the requirements for daily living, as well as any requirements imposed by the criminal justice system for parole, with the meager funds with which they tend to be released from prison. The impossibility of such expectations causes them to struggle with how they can

attempt to meet all of these obligations. Two women spoke about their anger and frustration with the lack of support

B-Dog: It's just like, just, they're just kickin' us right back out there again. You get discharged and you get a \$50 check. You know what I'm saying. Then if you on parole you have to contact your parole officer within 72 hours and you have to go pay him \$40 dollars a month, when all you got in your pocket is \$50. You don't have a place to stay, you end up goin' to a homeless shelter and then down there you're back down around the drugs, and everything, you know what I'm sayin', so you're not fightin' to pay for that, that parole fee, you're fightin' to start gettin drunk and get high again... Now here I am, fixing to go right back out here with \$50 to my name and nothing. So, what, what...I mean, it's sad to say, but I've always thought, well, what can I do with \$50 besides go and get me a drink, get some cigarettes, go sit somewhere, go sit in a restaurant or something like that. 'Cause I don't have nothing. There's nobody there to help me...I gotta try to survive. So, I don't know.

Laci: Oklahoma just pushes you out there. "Oh well if you don't have nowhere to go. Sorry about your luck." A lot of people go out sick and stuff like that. Pretty soon, if you're hungry, angry, cold, and tired, you're going to do something to survive. A lot of people turn to drugs or to criminal things, because they don't know anything else.

Aside from frustration, anxiety, and anger, these women ultimately reported feeling strongly discouraged upon being released from prison the last time. These women work through what little programs are available in prison to improve themselves emotionally, educationally, and vocationally. They construct plans and goals, albeit oftentimes on their own, to get out of prison and succeed through legitimate employment and safe, stable relationships. However, soon after their reentry into society, they realize their intentions to succeed in society

are not enough to do so. Lacking the necessary tools and supports, they grow disheartened in their positive efforts and pursuits, as Beverly describes:

...You get very discouraged, you know what I'm saying. You get very discouraged. And I believe that discouragement is what leads people to reoffend, you know what I'm saying, 'cause like, when we be up here, we don't want to come back here, I promise that. That's not our thought. "I'm gonna go out here and commit another crime and come back." You know what I'm saying? When we leave prison, our intentions is to stay out, you know what I'm saying. You know, when we leave, we want to leave and do good. We want to be productive in society. We want to be normal, you know what I'm saying. But you get discouraged, because you have so many people telling you "no." Things don't happen when you want it to happen. You gotta wait, you know. I was out for two and a half years, and it wasn't until that second year that I was able to get me a car, you know what I'm saying, build up my wardrobe, you know. It took me a long time to build up my wardrobe. I didn't want to go nowhere looking scrubby, you know what I'm saying, because I still got an ego, I still got my pride, you know what I'm saying, um, I just needed, I guess you can say, counseling. You know, I needed somebody to help me in building my self-esteem and my self-worth, you know what I'm saying, because when people would turn me down on jobs, when things wasn't going right for me, when things wasn't happening for me, I started to lose my self-worth, you know what I'm saying. I started to, like, beat myself up for not being able to do this, you know what I'm saying. I know that I'm a strong individual, but because I'm a convict, I can't get a job, I can't do this. The system is designed to fail, you know what I'm saying, so all I need to do now is go get me a dope sack and hustle, you know what I'm saying, and, basically, that's what happened... I left from this yard right here, maximum-security yard, you know, they just kind of threw me out there. Ain't nobody gave me nothing. The warden gave me a lecture on "Don't come back. Do good." And that was it, you know, and pushed me out the door with the money I had on my books, you know. I think then

I had, maybe, like \$200 on my books...I was tripping on getting out there and not knowing how to live in that world, you know?

Based on the reentry experiences these women revealed, the process of reentry begins with attempts to overcome the institutionalization they have undergone during their incarceration. Such institutionalization can powerfully affect their abilities to function normally, in terms of leaving their bedrooms, leaving their homes, and acting appropriately in interactions with others. These women are typically left to themselves to navigate the transition from a total institution to freedoms in society that they find overwhelming.

At the same time that they are overcoming the shocks associated with leaving prison and reentering society, they are also expected to successfully secure for themselves a system of social support that lacks any connection to prior relationships or factors that were conducive to their committing crime and entering prison. Oftentimes lacking such a social support system, these women are supposed to obtain, immediately upon their release from prison, the resources necessary to acquire essentials for survival, such as food, shelter, and clothing.

In the face of such insurmountable expectations, these women experience a fundamental sense of discouragement and apathy toward following a life away from crime. Such experiences then lead them back to crime. Pooty described in detail what the women need, not just in physical support but also in skills to survive successfully:



Pooty: I went straight from razor wires everywhere to none at all. And I didn't know how to do anything. I had a crash course in life as soon as I touched down. I needed all my skills. I needed a reintegration program...I needed a place to stay. I needed clothes. I needed transportation. I needed a home... You cannot just set a person out into the world after living in a closet for so many years and expect them to make it. They're not gonna make it. That's like putting a dog, after keeping him caged up in a little bitty kennel for ten years, and releasing him out there. He's not gonna know what to do. You fed him everyday. You changed his dirty paper. You've done everything that he needed to be taken care of. On top of that, he's got all this pent-up rage and frustration and whatever else he's got in there. And you expect him to make it? Well, I'm frustrated because I don't know what to do. I'm frustrated because I don't know where to go. So, you know, I needed all of that, and I think everybody needed all that to make it. You need to know that there are other options. You need to be able to know how to handle your feelings and your frustrations and your fears. You need to be able to go through it. You need to have discipline before you ever get out there. If a person's gonna be released back into society, reintegrate them. Don't just put them out there, because you're gonna get them back in here, you know?

### *Challenges of Reentry*

From what these women communicated during their interviews, the major challenges toward succeeding upon reentry began immediately at their release from prison. Most of these women were released into society with no money, no secure housing, and no plan for success. Laci gave a compelling description of how unsupported release quickly leads back to crime:

What's \$50 gonna do? It's going to get you a cheap motel for one night and maybe something to eat, like McDonalds, and then what are you going to do? What are you going to do to survive? Women are very resourceful, so what are they going to do to survive? If they have to, they will sell themselves, they will get

back into the drug thing, or they'll get back into writing checks, or they'll let men prey upon them, because they know that.

The most immediate needs following the release of these women from prison were food, clothing, shelter, and personal hygiene products. Overall, except for two women who were able to return to their financially supportive families, all of the women mentioned needing these basic necessities.

It was consequently reported as a huge decision, for many of these women, about how to spend the \$50 with which they were released from prison. Many women reported having to decide whether to rent a cheap motel room and have enough for a fast-food meal, which would only cover one day of their life after release from prison. In the face of not knowing when their next meal might be, some women chose to sleep outside on park benches or under bridges or in ditches in order to save their \$50 for food, for as long as possible. One woman, Pooty, tried to be as resourceful as possible to stretch the small amount of money she received once she was released from prison.

I actually went and bought me an ice chest, lunch meat, bread. I was homeless, living out of my backpack... I ate sandwiches and drank juice and water. I did really bad for like two weeks, wearing the same clothes. (Note: In order to escape this situation, she got back in touch with her former drug supplier and started selling drugs, until she had enough money to pay motels weekly.)

Several women, such as Vivian, Bad Girl, and Lone Wolf, talked about how they had to use sex to meet their basic needs. Vivian had encountered a man while hitchhiking, before her prior incarceration, and she had used him for

financial support before, during, and after her incarceration. Bad Girl also engaged in sex with a man for his assistance with rent, food, clothing, and money. Lone Wolf would hitchhike and accept rides with male strangers in order to get food and shelter. In order to have their way with her, they would supply her with drugs and alcohol as well, so, oftentimes, she would regain consciousness alone in strange rooms, on the side of roads, or even in fields.

I would then catch a bus and I would think that it helps me think more and what I'm going to do next. I might go to the creek and wash off, wash my hair, change my clothes, and take off walking down the road. And usually when I'd take off walking down the road, somebody would pick me up and usually, 45% of the time, it's a single man, and they're just looking to have a good time and drink and stuff. And they'd buy me food or beer or whiskey, whatever. And I'd talk with them. And some would just buy it for me and just send me on my way. Some just wanted something else. And if I wanted to eat, if I wanted to drink, then I had to do what I had to do.

Also, many women talked about being released from prison with ill-fitting clothing or clothing that was not suitable to the weather conditions upon their release. In terms of the ill-fitting clothing, women reported having gone into prison a smaller size than they were when released, based on the lack of nutritious food and exercise during their incarceration. Some women, such as Cody, also reported needing clothing based on the length of time that they had served and the change in what was appropriate to wear based on their changes in age:

“How am I going to do this, how am I going to do that?” I had no clothes, my clothes was too young for me, I was a younger woman then, and I was older now. I had all that kid stuff, you know, that your grandma dresses you in, you know, me being always

grandma's baby. I had grown into a full-grown woman now, so that clothes couldn't cover and was uncomfortable. I was also worried about food... But you leave prison without any money. Just the money you have on your books. You get your savings or \$50.

Regarding the suitability of their clothing based on the weather conditions upon their release, Vivian described having clothing that was smothering during hot seasons or not warm enough during cold seasons, as they might have been incarcerated during an opposite season of weather.

So, if you get out December 31 and it's cold outside and you don't even have a coat, you're standing out there freezing, at the bus stop. And you're hungry, and you don't even have money for something to eat. It just goes on and on and on. They give you \$50 when you leave...So we get released with \$50 and the clothes I'm wearing. Yeah, what I got on right now. With the "inmate" stamp back there.

The women in this study thus encountered serious concerns and challenges when they were previously released from prison, and those experiences often proved to be overwhelming enough to lead them back into crime and, eventually, back to prison. In fact, some women like Amos and Missy expressed relief at having been re-incarcerated.

Amos: I don't even know if you'll understand this, I was relieved...Cause I was tired of wondering, I was tired... tired of struggling. I was just tired, and once I got right with everything and I was provided everything when I got put in jail, I do my time better now.

Missy: I was really upset that I was back here, but at the same time, I was kind of, not happy, but relieved, because I was going through a lot out there. Not having a job, not going to school, barely making it with my children.

While the issues these women faced were generally discussed above, we will now consider these issues separately, or at least as much as possible, as it is difficult to untangle the effects of one challenge on other experiences. Aside from meeting their basic immediate needs, the major issues that these women faced upon their reentry, which they expressed were conducive to their returning to crime and their eventual re-incarceration, were related to paying debts, employment, housing, transportation, educational opportunities, and medical needs. All of these issues are associated largely with a lack of money and stable, legitimate financial sources. The magnitude of these challenges is understood, based on the aforementioned fact that most of these women reported being released with \$50 from prison as their pathway to succeeding in society.

### *Paying Debts*

Throughout the course of the interviews, numerous women reported difficulties upon reentering society with paying debts that existed either prior to their incarceration or based on the crime that caused their current incarceration. That is, these women accumulated these debts before they were sent to prison the last time, before this current incarceration. Such fines and fees could be related to prior offenses, traffic tickets, medical bills, or debts accrued trying to survive. Otherwise, these women amassed these debts based on fines and fees connected to their offending that put them in prison the last time. (The challenges associated

with debts before these women's prior incarceration is emphasized here only because those are the experiences these women can look back on, to report the effect such debts had on their survival outside of prison).

While challenges centering on finances came as no surprise to the researcher, this specific issue of problems arising from debts was new and surprising, as the existing literature on women and reentry has very little to say about how debts, fines, and fees facing reentering women can affect their likelihood of recidivism (Arditti & Few, 2006; Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2007, 2008). However, based on these women's reports, encountering such debts upon their release from prison is pretty daunting, discouraging, and can even lead rational individuals to forgo their freedom in order to alleviate such financial obligations.

The biggest debt challenges encountered by these women upon their reentry into society were associated with criminal justice system fines and fees. These fines and fees were connected to meeting parole requirements, staying out of prison, and trying to satisfy requirements for essentials like getting a form of identification or a driver's license. While the women realized the importance of meeting these financial obligations, they were understandably overwhelmed with what they faced and how they were going to pay these debts.

Young shared the tremendous financial pressures she was under the last time she was released from prison. She had so many traffic tickets that she could

not even keep track of them. She also did not know how many different felony convictions she actually had, because she said it was so routine for her to be in trouble. Based on her different convictions and traffic tickets, she had lost her driver's license and was required to go through supervision meetings with her parole office, as well as counseling and drug classes, that she had to pay for and complete before she could regain her driver's license.

And, um, I'd have to go see her [her counselor] and pay her \$75. I'd paid for my license, it was costing me \$600, and I paid all of it. And, before I could even go get my paper from the counselor woman that was contacting my parole officer on what our meetings was about, I started falling off and I quit seeing her, which kept me from getting my license because I wouldn't go see her to pick up my last paper, after I paid \$600 to get my license back...If you ever get a drug charge, you lose your license, and you have to go to these classes, and these classes are high. They do have one class that's in here, that if you complete it, it knocks quite a bit of your license fee down, to where you pay like \$175, instead of like \$600 without that. It's over a 3-month period that you have to go to these classes. And you have to see a counselor and talk to them before you can obtain a certificate to get your license. It's a long process.

Interviewer: So, how do you pay for it?

Young: It's not all at once. You make payments. Each class, you go into that class and make a payment. And when you go to counseling you pay her. It's just over a period of time, you get it paid off. And I had fines in two counties, and Tulsa County wants no less than \$75, and I have fines of about \$8,000, combining Tulsa County and Creek County. So each month, you have to pay the \$75, and when you go to Creek County, they want \$50. And then you have to turn around and pay for your, to get your license back. And then you have to pay for a babysitter if you have kids to go to these classes and counseling. If you don't get housing and you're trying to get your own place, you have to pay for that. And

then, um, let's see, my counselor and my probation fees, I think \$40 a month.

Pooty and Dirty Lucy also discussed the expectations by the criminal justice system that released women stay on top of their parole supervision costs and the fines and fees associated with their crimes.

Pooty: That's one of the stipulations, to be on probation. If you don't have a job, you have to have some type of proof that you have income, because we have dues to pay every month. \$40. If you have court costs, you have to have them paid off. You have to be paying them. You have to show that you're paying them. That's something else that they expect you to do immediately upon release. So you have to find a job.

Dirty Lucy:...When I get out after these 8-10 years, that is exactly what I have to do, go pay off the \$800 worth of fines. These are fines for victim compensation fund, and then they charge you to send off the drugs to have them tested. Uh, yeah, all that stuff. Court costs. And now they charge you to stay in the county jails. Yes, you have to pay so much a day to be in jail. Yeah. Usually where it would have been \$200, maybe \$400 at the most, it was \$800 and something dollars. Yes.

To a lesser extent, some women also faced debts from things like accessing health services without insurance during their prior release from prison. Cody serves as an example of the decisions that must be made by an offender laden with serious debt getting out of prison this time. Prior to her current incarceration, she had to go to the emergency room for a cut on her foot, because she had no insurance during her time out of prison. While she was paying off that debt before this incarceration, she knows that this debt is just growing while she is currently in prison, because it is not getting paid during her incarceration. Yet she



has a plan to go straight to jail after prison, as each day served in jail earns her money towards her debts.

Cody: So as soon as I get out, that will keep me from progressing. What I plan to do when I get out is to go straight to jail and make some of this stuff up. I have to. It's the only way I can get it paid to move on with myself, to move on. Before I can get a job or not, basically I can get paid in jail and not have to pay for a house or food or stuff like that. I can't do it all. And I've always not had any kids, right? And I can't do it all, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: So you say that when you get out of prison you have to go back to jail...

Cody: To pay things off. Because I was driving a car with insurance, but I was driving drunk. You get \$75 a day in jail. That's the smartest thing I can only know to do. Even though I don't want to be in jail for Christmas or any holiday. For some reason, I'm always in jail or prison, the last twenty years, during the holidays.

Interviewer: So, are you in lots of debt?

Cody: A couple thousand.

Interviewer: So how long would that take you to be in jail to pay off?

Cody: \$75 a day, let's see, maybe six months to a year. You get money for being locked up. Now they're trying to get to where you have to pay to be in there. So it's getting harder to pay things off. But if you get tickets, you can sit in jail, and you are going to get \$75 taken off, you know what I mean? So, me, I'm going to be basically turning myself in, I need to get that money so I can move on, get my license and things, you know? So I don't have to worry, because that's a big burden to me.

It is thus evident that these women comprehend the enormity of the financial situation that they face, even if they were lucky enough to get a

minimum-wage job after their release from prison. It must also be considered that the existing debts greeting these women upon release from prison are going to added to the newly arising costs, upon incarceration, of additional criminal justice system supervision/monitoring fees, as well as providing for oneself and, possibly, one's children.

Amos described such an experience, which is daunting even without the discussion of children here. She had secured such a job, but she still could not meet all of the costs associated with fines, fees, and living expenses. She expressed the impossibility of making ends meet.

A hundred dollars to the court house. My parole fee was forty dollars a month. My rent was two fifty a month, and you took seventy-five dollars off for the other things, 'cause I painted and everything, my gas bill, he [landlord] paid the water stuff. I had car payments 'til I paid it off...I was making minimum wage when I was trying to do this. And then, see I get mad and I get kind of bummed 'cause, it's kind of like, before you were in trouble, I understand that, but still, you know, I need help now.

Based on these accounts of debts owed before their incarceration or after this incarceration, it is not surprising that these women tend to report failing to meet these financial obligations, thus facing either voluntary jail time to pay off these debts, or else confronting these looming debts upon their release from prison this time. In connection to the other issues associated with financial difficulties (meeting basic necessities and costs related to children), it is not a huge jump to see how these debts can contribute to recidivism among these women, as Bree's story illustrates.

I got out July of 2004, on parole, and like by somewhere around September, a friend of mine was like, “Hey. Do you want to make some money?” I was like, “Of course. You know I do.” I got kids, I got parole fees, I gotta go to mental health classes, I got to pay for drug testing, I gotta pay for this. I just started naming off all the stuff, and she was like, “Girl. I know it’s hard. Here, let me help you make some money. I don’t want you stealing, because you can get caught up.” Well, I got caught up anyway. Now I just got a federal case.

### *Employment*

Another significant challenge facing women returning from prison is finding employment. A couple of the women discussed how much more difficult the employment situation had gotten just within the past few years. They argued that it used to be that a person could leave prison and have no problem securing a job in food service, retail, or some other low-paying position. However, now background checks were the standard, so even employment in those areas not typically desired by most of society was difficult to get. Several women described the problems the women face in finding employment.

Bree: You know. I couldn’t get a job because everyone was like, “Oh. You’re a felon.” You know. Jobs I knew I was qualified for, you know. Really, when you’re in society now and you’re a felon, you can barely get a job at McDonalds. When people used to get out and that was the first job they could get coming out of prison. They could get a job at McDonalds. Well, you can’t now. You know. You have to have been at a halfway house or someplace like that and then go into a job. They bond the people and make them federally bonded, and they make them tax write-offs so they can work there. And you really can’t just go from here to out in the world and try to get a job, because it’s hard, because the first thing they look at is that DOC number. And then people are so nosy. If you say, on that interview paper, it says, “Have you

ever been convicted of a felony?” And if you write “yes,” they’re like, “Oh my God! What is she in for? What did she go for?” They don’t really want to hear it, you know. And a friend of mine, who was a felon, said, “Why don’t you write, ‘will discuss during interview’?” Well, I did that, and I got a second interview. But it was only because people were nosy. They wanted to know why you went to prison, you know. But I just...it was real hard. It wasn’t as simple as it used to be.

B-Dog: Well, I mean, well, it’s really hard. Because it’s hard on us, because we have a record. You’re gonna be told “no” a lot and you’re gonna be looked upon like “you got a lot of nerve to even apply here”, you know, stuff like that, and when I first came in here, it was real easy to get a job and stuff and now they got us, we gotta go through a temp agency just to get hired on. We can’t go, and, that’s what shocked me when I go out, you gotta go through a temp agency, you just can’t just go to the places and fill out the applications anymore. You gotta go find a temp service that is willing to take you and send you on jobs. It’s not even to the point that you gonna get the job that you want, they gonna send you on whatever job they have available. It wasn’t like that when I first got locked up. You just would go to the places and fill out the job and get the interview. You don’t do that no more, you go through the temp services. And they screen for background. Yeah, they’re the only ones who read your papers. They deal with our background, that I’ve been in prison and stuff.

Fifteen of the twenty-one women in this study discussed how difficult it was for them to get a job after their release from prison. (Of the six remaining women, one didn’t have to work; one couldn’t work due to medical issues; two had job offers waiting for them from family or a friend; and two chose to go straight back to crime instead of looking for a job.) All fifteen of the women who had problems finding a job after their release specifically stated that they believed it was directly related to their felon status. Most of these women reported having been trained, through prison programs, to tell the truth about their criminal

backgrounds on employment applications, as employers would be willing to work with them based on their honesty. However, they soon discovered that advice was not accurate.

Young: Scary situation, to them I'm a big red flag, even though I have been incarcerated for so many years and been through programs and successfully completed those programs, I'm still a risk factor to them. I felt like as soon as I said that [I had a felony conviction], you get a feeling like you're never gonna get called. Everything went fine up to that point, but then you get there and don't get the job. That was another thing that added to my letdown.

Sweet: When you get out and you being interviewed, it's kind of like, "Okay. Well, we'll call you" and they don't. You know. It's hard. It's hard.

Vanda: But as soon as they see that prison or ex-felon, you're out. They're not even gonna look at your application. So you don't stand a chance, actually. Especially if you're a woman. I think it's worse against women, because we're women. And, quote, unquote, in society, women are supposed to be home, taking care of the kids, the husband, and the house. So it's just harder on women, all around. Over half of the jobs that I applied to wouldn't even look at it.

Shoshone: I looked for jobs. When I went to lower security, I went to a lot of job searches too. But they want to know if you're a felon. I'm used to getting employment at Hobby Lobby and places like that, but those places aren't available anymore with a felony record. It's frustrating. Especially to a person with a felony record that's worked there before. If you've got that on your record, you're not going to get any jobs...It's just the stigma of the felony, it just stays with you through everything. Even though there's a lot of people incarcerated in Oklahoma, or you know somebody that incarcerated, a family member or something like that, here in Oklahoma, out of 10 people, 8 of them are going to know or be related to somebody that's been in prison. With those kind of statistics or numbers, it seems like they would be making more of an effort opening up the job fields. 'Cause pretty soon, the

way the system is going now, you're going to have to put up a fence around the state of Oklahoma. Even when you're on probation, you have a number, and that DOC number goes with you the rest of your life. I didn't know that until I got in here. I went looking for jobs, but nobody would ever hire me with a felony.

Anne: They [employers] did not have an interest in me because I was a convicted felon. I was open about it, I never lied about it. I wanted to work, I was being honest. But being honest, I got kicked to the side. If I would have lied and said I was never convicted, I would have got a job.

Bad Girl: Well, every time I did that [be honest about felony on application], they'd be asking me, "How many times were you locked up? What was you locked up for?" And you tell them prostituting or selling drugs or stuff like that, they don't want to hire you. You know?...

Interviewer: So you said when you would tell employers about your criminal background...

Bad Girl: They wouldn't give you a chance.

These women reported incident after incident of going somewhere to apply, only to see an immediate shift in the potential employers' demeanor once they found out that she had a criminal background.

Beth: Jobs cannot be found. And I'm a very employable person. I have lots of computer skills. I've never been unemployed. I would go in and be honest on the deal, and tell them that I had a criminal background, and that would cut it off right then. And there was a place, after about three or four months, of constant interviews and being told no, I just said, "Well, okay. I just won't say anything. I just won't answer the question." So it said, "Have you been convicted of a prior felony offense?" I just wouldn't answer it. And a hospital in southern Oklahoma City called me in, hired me. Told me to go buy the scrubs, go get all my stuff, so I did. And when I came in, evidently they had pulled all the paperwork and found out my background and fired me right there

on the spot. And then one time, right after that, I went to a dentist's office and applied for a job as the person that's in the front area, and I was filling out the application and gave them my name and all of the pertinent information. They came back and had someone escort me from the premises, because they were afraid that I was going to bother the patients. I suppose they must have gone right to the back and pulled it right then and there, from the internet. Because at first they were incredibly nice, and then they were incredibly ugly.

Their inability to get a job was not based on lack of effort, as evidenced by the fact that these women would spend all day, every day, trying to find employment. It took a long time for Beth to find work:

And it was six months, of Monday through Friday, focusing, like that was my job, finding a job. And so from 8 in the morning until about 6 in the evening, I was actually beating the pavement. I know a lot of people don't, but I mean, I did the newspaper thing, I got out and walked, I did applications, I went places. And I was beating down doors. And it was rejection straight for six months.

These women were intent on trying to succeed away from crime and stay out of prison. Bree even reported that her parole officer did not believe how hard she was working to get a job.

I had to do an itinerary for my parole officer, because he did not believe that I had went on 39 job hunts, and I was turned down by everyone of them. In like 45 days. So he sent a piece of paper with me, and he asked me to go back to the same places. And I went back, filled out an application again, and I said, "Could you please state on here why I'm not allowed to job? Why you refuse to hire me?" And the majority of them wrote, "Due to being a felon." That was basically their answer. One woman wrote, "She's overqualified for this job. But, because she is a felon, I'm not allowed to hire her. We're not bonded, we're not an equal opportunity employer." Or some of the jobs were not franchised. The burger places, What-A-Burger, there's a What-A-Burger on 36th and MacArthur, right where my father used to live. I walked

over there to get a job. The man said, "I'm sorry. We're not franchised. We're private owned." So they can't hire felons.

Missy looked for a job for two years and was never able to get one, because she refused to lie about her criminal history, as she felt sure that she would be fired if they found out she lied. Beth looked for six months without being able to find a job. Regardless of such efforts, many of these women could not find an employer willing to hire them with a felony conviction. Even those with education and skills could not find work, as Pooty described:

I don't know. I'm thinking, honestly, because of my criminal history, a lot of times, I don't get jobs. Because I don't go looking like me, I go looking like a whole different person. And I have the credentials for it. I have suits, I have education, I have the skills. What else could it be? I'm there. I'll be the first to open and the last to leave, if you want me to. I'm not too proud to do anything. I just want a job. I'm willing to work. And I just couldn't ever get hired.

Tamara had difficulty even getting a job in food service:

It was horrible. I tried to get jobs and I tried to get jobs, and I just ended up working for an employment agency until I actually got on at McDonalds, and that was just somebody putting in a good word for me and I got that job, or I wouldn't have even gotten that job. That's sad.

An interesting pattern that developed among the reports of a few of the women in this study was their experience in losing the opportunity to seek employment or return to work in a field where they held prior experience and/or educational credentials. These women were no longer able to work in their respective fields based specifically on their felony convictions and either laws or



organizational rules denying them employment in that profession. For example, Laci had a chemistry degree, but she grew frustrated when she was unable to gain any professional employment. She thus used her chemistry skills to start producing drugs, arranging to supply people in exchange for money, food, and housing.

In addition to Laci, other women had professional experiences or aspirations, but their felony background disqualified them from those occupations for their futures. For example, those who had work requiring licensure were no longer able to work in their fields. Professional jobs were also often out of the question, as the following women note.

Sweet: I mean, jobs was hard. I was in the nursing field at first, and then, when I got a drug charge, I couldn't go work, doin' the same type of work, so I had to do something different. I mean, it's a headache, getting out there and not having no support, not having nothing.

Anne: I can't be a licensed psychologist with kids, because that's what I was majoring in to be, to help kids that have been abused emotionally and physically. And I could not get licensed because of that child abuse crime. I couldn't work in no daycare centers. I can't be a nurse. Nothing with anything that involves kids.

Missy: I have a lot of computer skills, and I went to school for business management. But I can't go and get a job in the business management field, with my background. I don't see nobody trying to hire me in their company. Maybe a secretary, maybe, but other than that, I just don't see it.

When these women were able to secure employment, it was typically in low-paying positions in food service or through temp employment agencies.

Beverly worked for Taco Bell, Mazzio's, and Del Rancho. Dirty Lucy worked at a restaurant that her friend owned. Tamara worked at McDonalds, extremely grateful to have landed that job through help from her boyfriend's mother:

My boyfriend's mom put in a good word for me. Her old marijuana dealer was the manager at McDonalds, so she got me the job that way.

Interviewer: How long did you work at McDonalds?

About 7 months. I loved it. It was one of the funnest jobs I ever had, except for the people was young there. If I wouldn't have come back, I would have liked to pursue further employment there. I mean, it sounds crazy, but I liked the job a whole lot. It paid like \$6.75. It was okay, for being in Oklahoma.

As mentioned previously, most women followed the programming advice they had received, while incarcerated, to be honest about their criminal backgrounds on job applications. Yet that honesty could often mean extreme disappointment if the women were told they were going to be given a chance, through a position, and then, at the last minute, were not hired. Pooty experienced such a situation, describing it as "heartbreaking."

I had one job, when I was looking, and I went to the whole Monster.com, and I had a nice résumé. I had a job interview with OU Physicians Clinic, right there on 13th. And I filled it out on the internet, and I even put down I was a felon. And they called me. And that made me so excited right there. I was working for the nonprofit organization at this time, which, I said, I was doing 40+ hours for free. So I needed the job. I went to it, did my interview, and the woman called me back for second interview, and she said this was going to be with her supervisor. I was excited! I told my family. I was excited because they paid for half of my tuition to go to OU if I chose to go to OU, which, at this time, I'd just had my son and I was ready to go back and start

school. So this was gonna help me a lot. I just knew I had it. We went through the whole interview, everything was perfect. They even told me, out of their mouth, that, um, I had the job. And she said, "The only last two things I need you do is to go across the street and give me your UA and let me do your criminal background. Is there anything you want to tell me?" I said, "Yes. I'm on probation right now." And she said, "For what?" And I told her, and I explained everything to her, that I committed a crime when I was a kid. That I've been locked up for seven years. "But if you just give me this chance..." And I went through the whole little thing, and she was like, "Okay." I made it home and had an email that I didn't have the job. So that crushed my spirit, seriously. That hurt. It knocked my self-esteem down, when it came to that, because I was excited, seriously.

After experiencing the widespread rejection and negative reactions from employers to their disclosing of this information, many of these women chose to lie when asked on the employment application whether or not they had a felony conviction. Tamara's situation is one example:

Interviewer: Okay. So you said you were lying on your employment applications...

Tamara: Yeah, because people were reacting when they found out. My friend was in jail in California, and I went to visit her and I told her I couldn't get a job, and she said, "Well, you must be doing something wrong," and she asked me about it. And that's what specifically she went to. She went to that and said, "Do you have a record?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "That's what's wrong. You gotta put 'no' on your applications or you won't get a job." So as soon as I did that, I got a job..Usually it only took me about a month to find a job, but that was if I was answering "No" on my felony conviction question on the application too. And if you answer "yes" it's almost like you can forget about ever being called.

Nor is she the only one to resort to lying.

Shoshone: Right now, I lie on my applications. Just because I know the reaction.

These women knew that lying held the potential consequence of being discovered and fired from their jobs, but they held hope that either that would not happen or else they would at least have the opportunity to earn some money before they were fired.

Laci: When you go and apply for jobs, there's that little question on the application, "Have you been convicted of a felony?" If you lie, and they find out about it, you're going to lose your job. And if you say yes, and they ask you about it, you try to explain it to them, but then they hear anything about drugs, they're like, "No way. They're going to steal from me, or they'll do something like that." So you're damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Beth: And for about four of the six months, maybe it was less, two or three months, I was honest every single time and said I was a convicted felon. And then, after that, like I said, I started just not answering the box, because they would not even talk to you. "In the trash, there's your application." So after that, not answering that, when it got to the couple of points where they were actually going to hire me, they found out and let me go. That was a major hurdle.

Six women were fired after it was discovered that they had a felony conviction. They reported having had a great work ethic and reputation at their place of work, but the revelation of their felony conviction was enough to suspend their accomplishments at that position.

Bree: As soon as they say on the job application, have you ever been convicted of a felony, they're right there looking to see what you're gonna write. One time I wrote "no," so I could get a job. I got the job, but by the time they got around to doing the background check, which was like a month later, I had to be let go, because I lied on the application. But then when the lady asked me

why did I lie on the application, I told her. I said, "Because I've been to like seven or eight other places before you, and they wouldn't hire me because they said I was a felon."

Cody: At Olan Mills, I worked there one time. I worked at Olan Mills and they found out I had been in prison and they let me go. And they really, really liked me. They had to let me go...Because I was an ex-felon and they couldn't, you know, they didn't wanna, you know, deal with it, uh, uh. I don't know, I did a good job, so somebody over them, or somebody had something to do with it, that didn't want that.

Tamara was able to find a job she enjoyed. However, eventually her employer learned of her record:

I found a job as a vet technician, because that's what I had been studying in prison. And so that made good money. But I lied on my application, and I think that's what caused me to lose my employment. They figured it out, about my felony.

Interviewer: How long did you get to work before they found out?

Tamara: About 5 months.

Interviewer: How did they tell you?

Tamara: They just said, "We don't need you anymore. We're letting you go." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "There's too many things involved with you."

Beverly was not fired, but she experienced some wrongful suspicion after it was discovered that she had a felony conviction. She shared that she had been a strong employee at Taco Bell, to the point that she was even promoted to a shift manager position within four months of starting to work there. However, one day she was called into the office by her supervisor and asked directly if she had a felony conviction. When she acknowledged that she did, she was allowed to stay

at the position. She stated that within a few days of that conversation with her supervisor, money started to go missing from the cash register, something that had never been an issue before her conversation with the supervisor. She was immediately blamed for it, and she decided to quit before charges were pressed on her for something she did not do.

Once they found out I had been in prison, money started coming up missing, things started happening, and, of course, me being a convict, I'm like, "Man! Let me get up outta here. This is a setup. I'm not going back to prison for these people, 'cause these people are crazy." You know, but things, it started happening like that.

It was consequently the case that, whether women were being honest about their criminal history or lying about it, neither approach proved overwhelmingly productive toward their getting a job.

While the stigma associated with their criminal backgrounds were reported as the critical issue affecting their employability, some of these women mentioned additional factors that further decreased their potential to secure a job. B-Dog brought up the point that incarcerated women were sent out to find jobs while lacking references. Every application that she encountered asked for contact information or reference letters from someone who could attest to her abilities and character, yet she did not have access to anyone that could serve as a reference for her. The people she did have access to, she did not want to use, as she considered them to be bad people. Yet the people she had worked with while incarcerated, to try to improve herself, she could not use as a reference.

B-Dog: And you don't have no references. Who you gonna give them to call once you get out of Mabel Bassett? Ain't got no references. You have to tell them, really, 'cause them three references that they want, you don't have anybody, 'cause you haven't been out, you don't have a job. So I put on there, "In prison."

Interviewer: So you can't put people in here as references?

B-Dog: Uh uh. No.

Interviewer: Why not?

B-Dog: I have no idea. You can't use staff. No. There a rule that you can't. 'Cause you know, they're gonna have to call these people, and they're not gonna do that. No. So you have no references. No.

Another factor that arose for these women and negatively impacted their ability to get a job was their inability to account for the extended gaps they had in their job histories. Some women expressed having to leave that information blank, based on their incarceration, and then having to explain to the employers why they had the long gaps between employments. Yet some women were innovative enough to devise a suitable explanation for this.

Young: And the gap in between the jobs that I've had over the years also drew in a concern to them. They're like, "You haven't had a job in 3 ½ years. Where did you work before here?" At one point in time I lied and said that my husband was possessive and he didn't want me to have a job, so I was a housewife. And that's what got me into that first good job, and I felt bad about lying, because they were really nice people. But I didn't want to lose the chance of having that job. But I would tell the truth when I got to know people.

Bad Girl: Half of the jobs I told them that I was unemployed, that I was just coming from Chicago and I'm trying to get me a house,

moved in. I've got my stuff at the day center at the Salvation Army. I'm staying there at that point in time, because I'm out of work and I need some help. "Could you let me work here for a period of time and see how I work out? If I'm not up to your standards, then fire me." That's it. That's all. They would react better to that than the criminal background, but I still couldn't get a job.

Also interacting with their felony conviction was these women's lack of permanent contact information, in the form of a permanent address or a cell phone number through which they could be contacted for job interviews or for scheduling purposes. As will be discussed later in this research, most of the women in this study were released from prison without any arrangements for stable housing and without any resources to meet their necessities, much less to gain access to phone service. This was a huge factor in Laci's decision to not even pursue employment.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me about your job search experience after your release from prison.

Laci: The first time, I didn't search for a job. I went out, with no place to go, so I stayed at a motel the first night. The next day, I met up with some people I knew from a long time ago, and they were selling dope, so I did that. So I didn't look for a job. I didn't. I didn't have no place to stay anyway. I had no permanent address, I didn't have no phone number or nothing that I could give a job. I had no way to get there, I had no clothes to wear, I didn't have nothing. So I didn't look for a job. I didn't. To survive, I made dope. I had a chemistry degree. I made dope. Because I had no other place to go. They told me I could stay with them, if I had dope. If I didn't, I really couldn't go there.

A final significant factor that interacted with these women's felony convictions, to make their job searches difficult, was the lack of transportation



available to go search for jobs or to get to work if they found employment. As will also be addressed later in this study, most of these women had to depend on unreliable rides from family or friends; irregularly-scheduled or late-arriving public transportation; or else walking or hitchhiking to get to work, to pick up their children from school, to run errands, or to make it to other necessary appointments. It was thus often the case that these women struggled to find employment based on the limited areas that they could reach by walking or through public transportation, or because of the limited schedule they could work based on their transportation situations. The strongest case for this experience was made by Missy.

A lot of it [being unable to find a job] was because of my criminal history. But there was a lot of jobs that I probably could have gotten, but how was I going to get to and from them? I had to think about that. Because I had to think about how was I going to be home on time, for my kids to come home from school. Because I had little kids, my kids were little. So there was no being home by themselves. So I had to think about that. I had to think about how I was going to get to and from, being as I couldn't just get on the bus, because I don't have money just to get on the bus. It would have to be in walking distance, you know. I'm set on walking a couple of miles or so. I don't have no problem with that. You know, to get there. It was just leaving at a certain time and being able to get back. Well, at the time, the first year, my youngest daughter was in kindergarten, so she only went to school half the day, so that really intervened.

Surprisingly, despite all of these factors, most of them women kept trying to gain legitimate employment, until they were forced by their economic circumstances to turn to crime in order to support themselves and their children.

While most of the women in this study reported putting all possible effort into securing a job after their release from prison, before turning to crime, they simultaneously discussed their realization that surviving economically on the wages possible through such jobs was pretty discouraging. They knew that the limited jobs that would even consider hiring them came with low pay and lack of benefits, making their efforts to stay away from crime that much more difficult.

Beverly: But when you go to get a good job, with 401K and benefits and, you know, a job that you want to stay there for a while, it's like you can't do that, you know what I'm saying, if you a convicted felon. 'Cause they do OSBI checks and of course it's going to come back that you got a felony and "Hey, we just don't hire convicted felons." And then they start looking at you different, you know, it's like, "Oh no. We can't hire you, sorry." You know what I'm saying?

Bad Girl: ...It ain't no jobs out there. If it ain't McDonalds or Burger King or something burger or working in one of them motels, being a maid, it ain't no jobs out here that can sustain a woman to survive... Women's leaving and they're coming back in here for selling drugs, drug abusing, drug using. They try to say "I'm going to try to stay clean out there. I'm going to try to bond with my kids." Hell, three of them have been back since I've been back, and I've been back four calendars.

Many of these incarcerated women subsequently pleaded for training and programs that would help them to gain employment after their release from prison. They still held hope that such training during their incarceration would make them better prepared this time, upon their release, for possible employment, and maybe even a position with good pay and some benefits.

Bree: Give me something in here that I'm gonna be able to use out there. Computers are good. Electrical license. That's good.

Truck driving. They just started a truck driving school. They have done that. But give me something that people use every single day. Teach me something that's in society every single day. Teach me culinary arts. Teach me how to do hair, nails, feet. 'Cause that's where your money lies. If anything, you'll be able to fall back on something. Because if you can't get a job, "Oh, but girl, I know how to do hair. Come on, girl." You know. And start out of your home. It's just life skills, period. Any type of life skills. 'Cause we're women. We do more man labor out here than anything. Just something to help us adapt and survive.

Missy: I'm like, let us work at DHS. Or give us a program or something where we could work for ya, 'cause ya want to put us on everybody else. Let us work for ya. Give us something. Please. Don't just send us out in the cold. You know. So an education program. Or an employment program.

The availability of programming for these women to gain access to fields where they can gain employment with a felony conviction, as well as have the opportunity to earn decent wages and benefits, appears to be critical in reducing the recidivism rates of incarcerated women.

There is thus clear identification of the issues affecting these women's difficulty in securing employment after their release from prison. Overall, in the face of negative, stigmatizing reactions from potential employers to their discovery of the women's felony convictions, these women confronted bleak prospects of employment upon their release from prison. The stigma accompanying their felony convictions was augmented by the additional challenges of finding employment when lacking references; significant job histories, skills, and experiences; transportation; stable contact information; and suitable attire for applying and interviewing. All of these factors worked to

ensure that the vast majority of the women in this study who were interested in working legally were not able to do so. And, even for the lucky few who were able to secure employment after their release, it was either at the risk of being discovered for their felony conviction and let go, or else it was in terms of working for minimal wages and no benefits. It is therefore not a surprise that some women gave up their search for legitimate employment and returned to crime to survive, as there were not many other options available. Beth found out upon her release that she was not eligible for much assistance.

I was amazed. I couldn't get unemployment. I couldn't get food stamps. I could not get anything. I could not get any help at all. They told me that, on my unemployment, for some reason, I was ineligible. Because I went—oh, this was interesting. This was great! (laughs) Because I chose to go to prison. So, since I chose to go to prison, that was equivalent to quitting my job, so I was not eligible for unemployment. So I said, "Okay. That would have been nice. I wish I had a choice to not go to prison and get unemployment." Anyway, that was very funny to me. And on the food stamps and stuff like that, we were like \$10 over the amount, and so we couldn't get them. It was incredibly...that part of reentry was amazing.

### *Housing*

Housing was another serious challenge facing these women upon their release from prison. These women understood the importance of housing as a pillar of stability in their quest to succeed outside of prison. Housing provided necessary shelter for these women and their children, and stable housing offered the first point of establishing a foundation to a transitioning relationship between

the newly released woman and her children. Stable housing was important to note on employment and social service applications. Housing also provided a sanctuary from the judgment they experienced from others. Also important, housing provided the motivation necessary to keep these women working and out of trouble. This sentiment was best expressed by Beverly.

Housing is important, you know what I'm saying. If you out there, you homeless, what can you do when you homeless? What? You know what I'm saying? If you got a roof over your head, you got responsibilities. You know you gotta pay your rent, you know you gotta pay your gas, you know you gotta pay your lights, that's motivation, you know what I'm saying, to go get you a good job, to keep your stuff up. That's motivation to keep a roof over your kids' head, you know what I'm saying, so housing is important.

Despite the acknowledgement of housing as a critical need, the little amount of money that these women were released from prison with did not leave much room for negotiating safe housing options. These women were thus very likely to return to housing within communities that held connections to their prior offending friends, family members, or partners, thereby returning them to their crime-promoting elements. Otherwise, they were left to risk housing situations with unknown people and environments. These women's housing situations were thus likely to be unsafe and often criminal.

Sweet discussed the difficulties of finding a safe, stable place to live for a person just leaving prison. She described the abundant presence of criminal connections and drugs in the housing situations to which she did have access.

However, securing housing in a safer, more legitimately productive area was difficult based on her criminal background.

Uh, getting a place to stay was the hardest thing. I mean, you could get a place to stay like the slums, but then you dealing right back in the environment where there is drugs, prostitution, gangs, stuff like that. Which, if I had to, I probably could go and thrive in that type of environment, but it would be for a limited time, you know. There wouldn't be no time before I was back into drugs because dope is just there, you know...a lot of places, like they got Section 8, they have to screen people to make sure they ain't never had no felonies for Section 8. And that's automatic, you know, like if you go to Quail Springs [an affluent area] or something like that, they're gonna really, really run a check on you to see if you've got the money, to see if you've got the means to pay the rent. So, yeah, they're gonna snoop into everything, you know. I mean, I've had to stay with my sister, I've had to stay with my mom, I've been put back in situations that really didn't help me prosper or anything.

Sweet ended up having to lease an apartment under her sister's name, as they always ran criminal records checks and she could not qualify, based on her felony conviction, for her own apartment. Yet living with her sister brought her back to drugs, as her sister was a drug addict.

Vivian had no place to go after her release from prison, so she resorted to living with people she did not know well. It turned out that she was living in a known "meth house." She said the people there were cooking and using methamphetamines, which she said made them act paranoid and violent. When she figured out that they were making and using these drugs, she left that residence, fearing the trouble she would get into if she was discovered to be living among such criminals. She also feared resuming her prior substance abuse issues

among such exposure and access to drugs. Yet her desperation to find a place to stay after that put her back into trouble, as she moved in with an older man and some of his friends, and her friend eventually started pressuring her for sex, in exchange for providing her with housing.

But the person I went to stay with was an older man, and he was like 50 and I was 40 something. And he never did drugs or anything. So I thought it was okay to go there. But then I got pressure from him, because eventually they start expecting something. 'Cause you're a woman, so he ended up trying to take care of that with me...It was pretty crazy, but, before I went to prison at that time, I met him. I was hitchhiking, and he picked me and we got to talking. And we just kind of got to know each other, and he'd take me out to eat and stuff like that. When I went to jail, I remembered his phone number and I called him. So he kind of helped me all through that whole incarceration. So he was just like a friend. But then, like I told you, he got a little more demanding, and for women, that's hard, because that happens a lot. A lot. That everywhere you go, like if you go stay with a friend that has a husband, next thing you know, he's trying to push you for that. It's just one big mess. And DOC just strings you out there and expects you to swim. And I'm going on like 19 years. I've had some breaks in-between, but it's like 19 years of incarceration. I've lived almost half of my life in prison.

Some might propose homeless shelters as a temporary solution for these women leaving prison. However, many of these women expressed difficulties in finding shelters, even for temporary housing. Many of these women were released after years of incarceration, with little knowledge about the areas to which they were being released. No reentry transitional assistance had been given to these women, so they were not aware of shelters they could turn to for housing. And, even when they did locate a homeless shelter, there were challenges of

finding one that was not full; one that accepted women; or one that that was safe enough for them to stay there.

Another dimension to consider in these women's decisions of whether or not to pursue housing in a homeless shelter was introduced by Bag Girl. Bad Girl gave a valid description of the challenges incarcerated women encounter at these types of facilities, based on their institutionalization after years of incarceration. She stated that the shelter reminded her too much of prison, in terms of not being able to control when you arrive, when you have to leave, and standing in line to eat. She thus made it a priority to get out of the shelter, by selling drugs and prostituting herself enough to save money to get into a hotel room, until she was able to get herself an apartment.

I didn't like being at the Salvation Army. I hated it. That's what brought me back... But at the Salvation Army, you know, it just reminded me of prison. Lining up to eat. You got to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning. And then having kids cuss me out. I said, "I've got to get myself the hell up out of here. I can't do this. I'd like to sleep and get up when I feel like." Smelling feet and ass and people coughing in their sleep. Coughing and farting. I'm like, "No. I've got to go." And I left, you know. Took my little money I had and went and got me a hotel room. I called up my dope partner, one of them big ballers up there in Tulsa, got me some dope, cut it up and got to selling.

Based on these factors, many of the women in this study faced homelessness or unstable living situations upon their release from prison, or once they had exhausted their housing options with friends, families, or others. Many of these women resorted to spending the little money they were released with on a



cheap hotel room for one night, and then sleeping in parks, on the streets, under bridges, etc., while they searched for someone to stay with.

Several of the women in this study shared stories of extreme transitory housing experiences upon their release from prison. Anne went to a shelter for a few days, because she did not know the whereabouts of any of her friends or family. She then got in contact with a friend with whom she had been incarcerated, and that friend let her stay with her. She stayed with her friend for a couple of weeks, until that friend introduced her to the eventual father of her youngest child. She lived with him for about a month, and then they discovered that he knew her sister. She thus left his house to go stay with her sister, until Anne was re-incarcerated.

Bree also faced homelessness and instability in her housing situation immediately upon her release from prison. Bree knew where her father lived and was able to get there. However, she was not greeted in the expected way by her father, which resulted in her having to move often.

I walked. To my dad's house. And it was, "Oh. It's good to see you, but you can't stay here."

Interviewer: So what was the housing situation then?

Staying from pillar to post. From here, maybe one night I could stay over at this person's house, and the next night I could probably stay at this person's house. "Oh, well, I'll let you stay a couple of days."... About seven months that I moved from friend to friend.

Interviewer: Were you ever homeless during that time?

Yes. I remember sleeping in a parking garage. As a matter of fact, downtown, right by the Union Bus station. There's nobody there, so you, um, sleep in the stairwell. 'Cause you know the stairwell doors close, 'cause you can open the stairwell doors to go from the next level. Well, I slept in the stairwells, with no blanket or anything. I just had what I had on my back...housing has been very unstable.

In terms of the housing situation for released prisoners, Lone Wolf provided an interesting new facet that should be considered. Lone Wolf was Native American, and she stated that, normally, had she been impoverished and homeless, she would have had access to tribal assistance with housing, food, clothing, utilities, and education. Yet her felony conviction made her ineligible for such assistance from her tribe. She stated that such ineligibility for services, based on a felony conviction, varied from tribe to tribe, so it was her bad luck that her tribe had such a rule. Left without such assistance options, she stayed with her friend immediately after her release from prison, for about a week. She then went to stay at her mother's home for about two or three days. She stayed in her next residence while she worked for a few months, but then she quit and ran around with no set housing.

I just stayed here and there. I lived out of my tote bag...It was a lot of moving around. I'd just go from here to there to here and there. Because I didn't have my baby then, and my other kids was already with my mom and dad, so I had responsibilities, but they wasn't with me. So I just hopped around everywhere. I even slept under bridges and things like that. Walked miles in the dark, drunk, with a bottle in my hand, because I didn't care. I hid the feelings, and nothing mattered.

These women were thus typically released from prison without any guidance or assistance for securing housing. The housing they did have access to was either among people and environments that had been conducive to their original offending, or else it was among strangers and situations that were unstable and, oftentimes, dangerous. Also, the women faced difficulty in securing housing based on their criminal backgrounds. In the face of such options, these women were also likely to be homeless at some point following their release from prison. Confronting such issues with housing, several women returned to crime to generate money to use for housing.

Bad Girl, who had stayed in the Salvation Army shelter for a couple of days, got back in touch with her former drug supplier and went back to dealing drugs in order to save enough money for an apartment. She stayed in a motel room for four months, selling drugs to pay for the weekly stay rate, until she was able to afford an apartment with no move-in fee or first-month's rent. She sold enough drugs to pay her rent three months in advance. Similar to other women's experiences in attempting to secure housing, prior to being approved for her apartment, the staff asked her if she had a job and if she had a criminal background. Yet she had an experience different from most released offenders looking for housing.

Yeah, I told them I was a prostitute. They gave me an apartment. They asked if I had a criminal background, and I told them, "Yeah, for selling drugs." They told me if I got caught in their apartment selling drugs, I would have to move. But that was the only

warning they gave me. They didn't care otherwise. They was alright with me. Some apartment places won't let you move in with that stuff, but me and the man that rented me the place, we ended up being real cool. My rent was always paid on time.

Pooty also returned to selling drugs in order to earn enough money for housing.

She had tried to find a job after her release from prison, but she grew frustrated

after she was repeatedly turned down based on her felony conviction.

I was selling drugs while looking for a job at first. I didn't have anything. I was homeless. I lived out of my backpack... I was homeless when I got out...I stayed at motels, probably for about a month and a half, not too long. I was paying for them with the drug money. And then I got me an apartment, 'cause hotels are expensive...I had the money for a down payment while living in the motels, but I just had to find somebody to rent me the apartment. That's another thing. I could not rent an apartment nowhere, because of my felony. Nobody would take me because of that...So I found someone to get me an apartment in their name. A friend.

Securing government assistance with housing issues, through programs like Section 8, would seem like a viable option for women who are reentering society with no financial resources and no other possible legitimate housing options. Yet there were contradictory reports about these women's access to public housing. Some women in this study reported that they were told by individuals at public housing agencies that they were ineligible for housing assistance based on their criminal backgrounds. Vanda was one of the women in this study who reported being turned away from Section 8 housing based on her felony convictions and overall criminal history.

You cannot get a low-income house if you're a convicted felon. You cannot get low-income housing if you're a convicted felon. They don't allow it. They will not even look at your application. I would have been screwed if it had not been for my family. A lot of people will not rent to you if you're a convicted felon. Low-income projects or however you want to call them, they're supposed to be for low-income families. You don't get much lower than being a felon and just coming out of prison. You don't get much lower than that. That's why I tried them, because you don't get much lower than that. But nobody wants to give you a chance. So you're just there. A product of society, that's what you are. No help. None at all. There were three different housing that I went to. Low-income housing, HUD, and Section 8 housing. You can't get housing with neither three of them, they said no. Turned down flat because I'm a convicted felon. That's the reason they said.

However, some women were able to secure Section 8 housing. In fact, Pooty was able to move out of the apartment she got under her friend's name because she was awarded Section 8 housing, and Anne and Missy were able to get Section 8 housing assistance as well. It therefore seems that there is some discretion available among housing authorities as to whether or not they will assist ex-felons. (For this research, an effort was made to determine whether or not a felony conviction disqualified someone from residing in public housing or receiving government-subsidized housing assistance. While information was found that stated that a family would be evicted or lose their benefits if someone in the household committed an offense during their tenancy, no information was ever located on the influence of a current criminal history on someone's eligibility for housing assistance.)

Yet even having access to Section 8 housing assistance did not solve the immediate need for housing among these women, as there were long waiting lists to survive in order to finally get such assistance. Cody stated that by the time someone's turn comes up through that waiting list, that person was likely to be back in jail or prison. If a woman stayed out of prison long enough to receive public housing assistance, her tenancy there was continuously threatened based on her ability to pay the utilities necessary to live in such a residence. Missy encountered this situation, as she was able to get a Section 8 apartment, but she was unable to keep it because she could not pay the bills for that apartment.

It is thus not a guarantee that women released from prison will find hope for housing through public housing options, and even if they do, there is no guarantee that they will ever get such assistance or that they will be able to keep it if they are lucky enough to get it. These women were also told that they would cause a family to get evicted from public housing if it was discovered that they, as an ex-felon, were residing there. This essentially eliminated that avenue of possible housing for them as well.

Finally, women reported experiencing discrimination even in their search for housing outside of government-subsidized programs. Despite the advertising of available housing, these women were seen as undesirable tenants based on their criminal backgrounds, regardless of their ability to pay. Missy had initially been upfront about her criminal history with potential landlords. She soon began to

notice landlords' reactions to that information and the following denial of residence that would occur soon after. To deal with rejection for any housing based on criminal history, Missy started lying about her criminal past.

And just the look on their faces or just to see them writing something down, something was telling me just me to not do it no more. So after that, yeah, I started lying. So I was upfront at first, but then I saw people reacting and started lying.

As was previously mentioned, women tended to get innovative in order to find shelter and to meet their other basic necessities. This innovation tended to come in the form of returning to crime, in order to gain enough money to meet these needs. However, one woman in this study, Laci, actually devised another way to deal with her need for housing upon reentry. While this method of securing housing may seem unethical to some, it should be considered in the context of her physical disability, as she was seriously and terminally ill and in a wheelchair upon her release from prison.

Desperate for housing and medical assistance, Laci lied to administrators at a battered women's shelter, telling them that she had just left a physically abusive relationship and was in need of emergency shelter. This lie allowed her to escape explaining her criminal past and her incarceration, as she explained the past years of her life as isolated at home, away from any possible support or employment, by an abusive partner. This lie allowed her to get stable housing and medical assistance for an extended period of time. By the time she did disclose the truth to the shelter's administrators, they were understanding and still willing

to help her. She considered the shelter a “Godsend,” as she stated that they were better than her parole officer in providing her with transitional assistance.

I was so sick and they helped me. This battered women’s shelter helped me ten times more than my parole officer did...They helped me with bus tickets, with everything. They were great. What they did was give the women in there help with the same basic needs that they would need every day to live. And that’s what they did. They helped them do that. But they [the residents] had to do things too. They had to get jobs. They had to attend meetings. So they had to do things too, because a lot of women have been so locked in, to a certain mindset while they were being abused. The percentage of women in this prison here that have been molested or abused is horrific. You hear some stories that wouldn’t let you sleep at night, and they’re true. It’s awful. So DOC should go to that women’s shelter so they can tell them how they did it for us. You wouldn’t have anybody coming back to prison.

Laci pursued this avenue of housing based on her desperation, but it was interesting to see that the services offered to battered women, to help them reconstruct their lives separate from their abuser, were the same services that Laci needed to successfully reenter society after her incarceration.

Despite the shelter, programs, and assistance provided to Laci by the battered women’s shelter, she still encountered problems from her parole officer with this residence. He wanted to make her leave the shelter simply because it did not grant entry to males based on the residents’ experiences with domestic violence at the hands of males. He was annoyed with the special arrangements he would have to make in order to supervise her regarding her parole requirements.

And my parole officer was trying to make me move out of there, because he couldn’t come visit, because it was a battered women’s shelter, and no men are allowed there, period...And he got mad,



because he had to send a female parole officer just to come and see me and make sure I was there. Because he was not allowed to come and visit. So he was threatening to make me leave there. But I had no place to go to, and I was like, “Where am I going to go?” He said, “You have to leave.” I was like, “Sir. I’m in a wheelchair. What am I going to do? Where am I going to go?” I told him that pretty much my whole family was all drug addicts. I was like, “Do you want me to go there?” He was like, “Well, no.” I said, “Well, where am I supposed to go, then? I have no place to go then. There’s no other place to go but here. These people are going to let me stay there.”

While Laci was able to persuade her parole officer that this was the best placement possible for her, her time eventually ran out at the shelter. She was then forced to navigate her housing situation, as well as her other many needs, on her own, with her challenges compounded by her fight with cancer and being in a wheelchair.

It is consequently evident that housing that is conducive to leading a non-criminal lifestyle is not amply available to women returning from prison. These women face lack of access to housing from family members based on estrangement from their length of incarceration; not wanting to risk their family members’ eviction from public housing; or not wanting to return to the people and places that had enabled their criminality in the first place. These women further lack access to housing based on contradictory rules regarding public housing assistance options and whether or not they will accept someone with a criminal background. If these women qualify for such housing assistance, that assistance is either extremely delayed or else put at risk by their ability to pay utilities. They

are also unable to find housing based on housing discrimination from landlords focusing on their criminal history. Women released from prison are thus left with few options for housing except for homelessness or shelter secured through lying, victimization, or crime.

### *Transportation*

Another issue significantly related to these women's lack of success upon release from prison was transportation. Newly released women report multiple responsibilities connected to access to transportation, and these responsibilities need to be met in order to stay out of prison. Some of these responsibilities include meeting with parole officers; finding and maintaining employment; and meeting with social service providers for assistance with food, shelter, clothing, and even custody issues for their children. Women in this research reported that there was not typically any empathy expressed by people in these institutions when the situation was explained by way of irregular bus schedules, late taxi cabs, or failure of a promised ride to show up for a woman. However, when survival necessities and services are routinely denied to newly released women, transportation is certainly not one of the needs likely to receive any focus for reentry. Yet it is a significant factor influencing success outside of prison.

The first challenge connected to transportation for reentering women involved simply learning about the available transportation options. As

mentioned previously, women were typically released from prison to the last place where they offended, and they are likely to have lost their connections to friends or family members who they might have been able to count on for rides before their incarceration. Also, these women were not likely to have depended on public transportation prior to their imprisonment, so they were not familiar with the public transportation system to begin with. Augmenting these transportation challenges is the length of time women have been incarcerated, as anything they might have been familiar with has very likely changed during their absence. These women thus expressed coming out of prison with no idea about how to reach desired locations or where to find information about public transportation options. Relying on word-of-mouth to gain directions, these women reported riding around aimlessly for hours, trying then to just return back home, much less to the places they needed to be.

One of the first areas of concern connected to transportation for newly released women was getting to locations necessary to keep them out of prison. This meant getting to their parole officer's office to check in on time or getting to work on time, in order to avoid trouble with parole stipulations for work involvement and performance. Just as many of these women had expressed immense fear of reentering society based on failing with children, debts, or finding food and shelter, they also expressed fear of failing to meet these

appointments and schedules and returning to prison for those reasons. Bree and

Vivan explain such worries here.

Bree: I mean, it's kind of hard, trying to make sure you get to the parole office or to other places you need to be. Like, when I first got out, my mind was set on the right thing, it really was. I got out, and 72 hours later, I was supposed to report to my new parole office, so I could get my new picture taken and get processed through. Well, I had to catch like three different buses, because I lived on North MacArthur, and it was way downtown on Harvey. And then I ended up walking from the bus depot, too, because I was so nervous about getting there. And at that time, I didn't care how I got there, I just wanted to get there. And that's why I said, I started out on the right track, but I just veered off. But transportation is hard if you really don't have anyone.

Vivian: But the job search experience was very stressful for me. When I'd go to the bus station, I would sit right where my bus was going to pull up at. I was scared to leave it. I was scared I might miss my bus. I was scared I was going to be late, or I'd be late and miss the bus, or I'd be late getting back and I'd get in trouble. So it was kind of paralyzing, for me. Maybe people that haven't done that much time are okay, but I wasn't. And then there was a men's facility down the street, and there were these guys coming up, and people we knew from the drug world, we were all at the bus stop. That wasn't very good.

Both of these women were intent on staying out of prison, by staying on the right track. They initially worked hard to get to where they needed to be, even to the point of letting the thought of not making it paralyze them. Also, another interesting point they both brought up generally in their accounts is that issues with transportation led them to bus stops and overall situations that exposed them to problematic individuals, in terms of exposing them again to illegitimate behaviors and opportunities.

Another concern related to transportation was the impact it had on finding and keeping a job. Multiple women stated that they returned to a major city in the state, yet that city lacked a dependable, far-reaching transportation system. This situation meant that these women were limited in the geographical consideration of where they could seek employment, if they were going to rely on public transportation to get there. Vanda was lucky enough to have eventually worked as a dispatcher for a taxi cab company. Her luck came in terms of being able to arrange for the cab drivers from that company to pick her up for work and take her home afterwards. However, up until she received that position, she had been limited in her job search because of her lack of transportation.

Without transportation, you're limited to where you can get a job. Because it's gonna have to be to where you're able to walk, within a certain distance. So I was lucky to live by work or to work for a company that could take me to work. There is no public transportation in the town that I was in, besides the cab company.

Pooty shared how she lived in a major city, but the only employment she had found was in a suburb of that city. However, the bus system did not travel that far, so she was unable to take that job. A lot of the women in this research, like Bad Girl, thus reported limiting their job search to somewhere close to where they lived, or else walking miles and hours to find a job and keep it.

Interviewer: Okay. Please tell me about any transportation issues that you had after you were released from prison.

Bad Girl: My feet. Walking. I had to walk everywhere, just about, because I didn't know to catch the busses there. By the time

I learned to catch the bus I had bought me a little hooptie. I just saved up and bought me a car.

Interviewer: So how long did you have to walk for?

Bad Girl: About two or three weeks. Getting to the health department, getting to the Salvation Army, picking up tokens to get to different programs, you know. Something to do, because I was trying not to get caught up no more...

Interviewer: Okay. So you said that before you bought your car, you were walking everywhere...

Bad Girl: Yeah. I was walking all day, every day, looking for jobs and stuff. Some of these places were like 10 to 15 blocks away. I was walking forever.

Another issue related to the public transportation system was having the money to use it. Putting all available money into simply trying to keep afloat with fines and survival needs, transportation costs were essentially nonexistent for most of these women. A couple of women had parole officers who would give them enough bus passes to get them to work and back, as well as to required appointments, through their next parole visit. Most of these women, however, were on their own to fund their public transportation needs. Whether these women were using bus passes or depending on others for transportation, some would enter a cycle of debt, based on their borrowing money for their transportation, only to pay it back with their next paycheck and then have to borrow again.

B-Dog: City bus. That's what I had available. But first you have to get bus passes, and those was like \$40 for like one whole month. You got to get that, and, like I said, you only got \$50 in your

pocket when you get out. You know what I'm saying. So it's either that or you walking. I did a lot of walking myself. 'Cause you gotta have money for the city bus, you know. 'Cause it's gonna be an everyday thing. You gonna have to go out and find you a job and try to find you a place to stay and stuff. And then transportation to that job if you get it, you know. 'Cause the bus routes only go so far, you know what I'm saying. So that's a bad thing too. So I did a lot of walking because of the cost of the bus, because I had to eat too... But I would have to borrow money to get my bus pass, and then the money I made working I would use to pay them back. But then I would need to borrow again to get the bus pass.

Cody relied on her grandmother to give her money for bus passes and bus rides, but she said it would get her around for about two or three days. She thus resorted to asking coworkers or neighborhood people for rides to and from work. Yet she eventually found that the people giving her rides exposed her to delinquent behavior, through such actions as stopping by the liquor store or drug dealers' residences on the way to her job or on the way to her residence. These people would also put conditions on their rides for her, stating that she had to go out with them to party or purchase them alcohol or drugs. She thus eventually succumbed to the opportunities to get back into drugs, alcohol, and offending, instead of constantly struggling to find transportation to her job.

And it was always my transportation, that was the number one thing about having the job and having to leave was the transportation... And I was so proud that I had a job. Because it would take up my time from me being at home and bored and let me go out and me have some good, clean fun, you know? I can be around this person that don't get high and won't get high, or I can be around this person that gets high and get high, you know?

Bus schedules also proved to be a huge problem for these women's use of public transportation. Many of the women in this research reported that bus scheduling was not flexible enough to accommodate their work schedules.

Laci: How are you going to get to work? A lot of times, if you work at night, the buses don't run. A lot of towns don't have buses in Oklahoma. So how are you going to get there? There might be work, but employers don't like it if you don't come to work, if you can't get there...If you stop to think about it, you need transportation to your job...

Several of the women in this study also expressed that marginalized employees, such as themselves, had the greatest likelihood of finding employment during off-peak hours. These hours tended to be working overnight. However, busses typically stopped running during the early morning, meaning these women could get to work using public transportation, but they were not able to get back home using public transportation.

Cody had a job where she worked at eleven in the evening, five to six days a week. She did not have regular transportation, so she would rely on public transportation or hitchhiking to get to work. She did not like to hitchhike, feeling uncomfortable with people she did not know, so she would ride the public bus whenever she had money available. However, the bus service stopped each evening at six o'clock. That meant a five-hour gap between when her bus could arrive at her place of employment and when she actually needed to be at work. Yet she was serious about keeping her job, so she would travel hours in advance



to make sure she arrived to work each day. She would then hitchhike back home or ask coworkers for ride homes.

I took the bus. And it stops running at 6 o'clock pm. So if you're stuck somewhere, you're stuck somewhere. You have to hitchhike back. That's an easy way to get caught up at the liquor store, to drive through the neighborhoods where your homies are at...I would always get there [to work] very early but it was impossible to get home.

Considering that these women were tired from working, and taking into account the late night or early morning hours they were likely to be heading to work and back, there were significant safety issues involved for some of these women. As mentioned above, Cody was working overnight hours and arriving to work hours in advance of her shift to ensure she was at work on time. She thus reported that she was always very tired getting back home after work, because of the hours spent getting to work, the eight to nine hour shift she worked, and then the drive home, whether it was through coworkers or hitchhiking. That tiredness eventually got to her, as she shared the following dangerous situation in which she found herself.

I almost burned my grandma's house down, hitchhiking home. God, girl, I went to sleep cooking. I worked from eleven to seven in the morning in Yukon and here I was having to get home. But I needed that job. I knew that I was going to change, even after everything with the drugs, I was willing to change. I wanted to change. Well, I hitchhiked there and hitchhiked back and it wasn't good and I got too sleepy and almost burnt the whole house down. And I'll never forget that.

Another situation resulting from transportation challenges for these women involved Tamara. Tamara got pregnant soon after her release from prison, and she and her boyfriend took to living with his mother. Yet his mother was not financially stable, so it was still up to her and her boyfriend to get enough money each month to pay the bills and to pay for other necessities. The only job she was able to find was at a fast-food place that was over five miles away from her house. Lacking transportation and money to access public transportation, she walked to her place of employment every day that she was scheduled, up to the time of her pregnancy.

When I worked at McDonalds, I was walking almost five miles to work. My dad says it was 5 miles. He said it was 5.2 miles or something. And I was in the later stages of pregnancy. It was August, and it was really hot, walking 5 miles to work and back. Or I would get a ride back. So I was walking like 10 miles a day. I went to work a couple of times, not just once, where I would be so exhausted by the time I got there. I passed out twice, yes, and they took me to the doctor over it, but I was just exhausted, that's what it was from. Just from trying to get to work.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to get to work?

Tamara: I would usually leave two hours before my shift. And then do my shift and walk back home. Yeah, that was horrible. I was in a small town. Yeah, my doctor said, because I had a Caesarian, she said, "You almost had nothing to sew you back up." She said, "You are so skinny." It was so bad, when I was pregnant, we had no food. There were some times when I would go days without eating. After the fourth or fifth day, I'd call my dad and he would bring me food. I mean, I went out to a bad situation. I won't make that mistake again...

Interviewer: So you were walking to work and back. Where else were you having to walk to?

Tamara: Anywhere that I needed to go...I used to carry groceries home, when we [boyfriend and her] would have groceries.

While Cody and Tamara definitely faced scary situations based, respectively, on their tiredness and pregnant condition, perhaps the most chilling accounts of dangers encountered due to transportation shortcomings came from Lone Wolf. Lone Wolf stated that she had no car and no money to pay for gas money for anyone to drive her around. She lived in an isolated, rural area, so there were no public transportation options. Not only did Lone Wolf face transportation issues, she also had significant substance abuse addiction problems. Based on her inability to stay sober, she eventually quit her job. At that point, she fully succumbed to the substance abuse issues and placed herself in extremely dangerous situations, hitchhiking for alcohol, drugs, and food.

When I quit my job, I just walked to the next place where I'm going to go get drunk and probably lay my head down. Trying to find a place to stay and drink. If I couldn't find me a place to stay, I just had me a little blanket in my bag and stuff. I'd just go underneath the bridge and just pass out and just go to sleep.

Interviewer: Did anyone ever try to hurt you while you were out there hitchhiking or sleeping?

Lone Wolf: There's a few times that I got by them. I was riding in this car with these two guys, and I never knew these people. I'd just get in the car. I'm drunk and I'm a brave person when I'm drunk. So I get in the car with these two guys and we go riding around. And we start getting real messed up and drunk. And pretty soon, I noticed they start whispering to each other when I wasn't looking, and my senses told me, "Next stop. Run. Get out of the car." And so we stopped at the store, to get some more beer. Okay. They get out to go get the beer. They get back and they set

the 12-pack down. And the woman, she let them use the phone. So what I did is that they had I don't know how much money that had in their seat, in the console, so I grabbed all the beer and stuck it in my bag and all the money and took off. But I felt that they was wanting to go away, out in the field somewhere and party and do whatever they wanted with me, and I was just supposed to get some beer and stuff, but I just took off on them before anything happened. This other time, I got a ride from this guy, and he said, "I've got to use the restroom." And I'm already drunk, like a said, I always have a bottle with me, drinking. And he went down into this field, way down in there, and I was like, "Man, we're going too far out here. I want out." And I was going to jump out, and he grabbed me by my hair. And I had my bottle in my bag, and I turned around and I hit him in the face with it. He let go, I jump out, and I start running. And it was dark. That's probably why I got away, because it was dark. I could hear him looking for me in the woods, and I lay underneath in the bush, still. And I could hear him walking around and stuff, looking for me. And I've almost gotten run over, walking in the night, drunk. It's like one night, I was walking through, and a little voice tells me, "Be on the other side now." So I just stagger myself on over to the other side. About that time, a car comes by without no headlights on. Just, vroom, right where we were standing. And I've been through some crazy stuff. It's a wonder I survived. Yep.

Finally, even if these women were able to gain their own transportation eventually, there were issues with that transportation as well. Specifically for this research, such issues consisted of the condition of the vehicles or else the legality of the woman driving in the first place. Missy was finally able to save up enough money to purchase a car, but it broke down after two weeks. She could not afford the repairs, so she drove her car until the motor literally fell out of it on the interstate. She had just started a new job when she got her car, as it allowed her to get from the city to a suburb that was not an option to get to through public transportation, as the bus system did not go out that far. She was stuck depending

on a friend. She and her friend worked out a situation where they would trade use of her friend's vehicle, as long as Missy made sure to get all of the children to and from school on time, as well as making sure that her friend was picked up from work on time, while also getting herself to work on time. Missy stated that it grew increasingly complicated to get everyone picked up and to places on time, to the point that her friendship grew strained and she came to lose that friend and her transportation agreement with her. She subsequently lost her job as well, as she had no way to get to work. While looking for a new job, Missy explained the other challenges she faced in considering employment options, centering on her childcare responsibilities and her lack of transportation.

Because I had to think about how was I going to be home on time, for my kids to come home from school. Because I had little kids, my kids were little. So there was no being home by themselves. So I had to think about that. I had to think about how I was going to get to and from, being as I couldn't just get on the bus, because I don't have money just to get on the bus. It would have to be in walking distance, you know. I'm set on walking a couple of miles or so. I don't have no problem with that. You know, to get there. It was just leaving at a certain time and being able to get back. Well, at the time, the first year, my youngest daughter was in kindergarten, so she only went to school half the day, so that really intervened.

Missy shared that she had to walk her children to school and back, and she would have to have her children with her when she went to look for employment. She had no family or friends to help her with childcare or transportation, so she came to realize that there was no way she could work and take care of her children. She thus remained unemployed until she was re-incarcerated.

Angel went without transportation until she gained a boyfriend who had a van. This van counted not only as their main form of transportation, but also as their residence. Angel was driving without a license, as she had been unable to pay all of the fees and fines necessary to reinstate her license and to gain insurance for the vehicle. While she had been incarcerated for possession of stolen property, she had numerous tickets that she had accumulated prior to her incarceration that she had to pay off. She estimated her fines to be around \$550, and they had to be paid all at once if she wanted to get her license and insurance. She ultimately received a ticket for driving without a driver's license, and she was not able to pay it. Upon her incarceration for her current offense, she was able to use the time she served in jail, while awaiting sentencing, to "sit it out," or pay off the ticket through time served incarcerated.

Lack of access to reliable, affordable transportation, whether through friends, family, or a public transportation system, consequently proved to be detrimental to many of these women's success upon release from prison. Factors such as non-existent public transportation or public transportation schedules that were not conducive to scheduling were significant barriers in these women's search for employment, as well as in maintaining any employment they might have found. These factors also affected their ability to make it on time to appointments required for parole qualifications, such as parole supervision appointments or other program requirements. Even if public transportation was

available, many of these women had no idea how to use the transportation system, or else they faced financial difficulties getting the money necessary to pay the bus fares.

The consequences of these transportation uncertainties were significant. Many of these women were unable to find or keep a job. They were also stressed in meeting their parole requirements. Some of these women placed themselves in dangerous situations centered around transportation and keeping a job, taking care of their children, and meeting their overall needs.

Yet possibly the great consequence for criminal justice consideration is the part that these issues played in discouraging these women away from structured, legitimate activities, back into lifestyles lacking productivity or else involving illegitimate, illegal activities. Many of these women expressed reentering society full of strong intentions to succeed and to pursue positive opportunities, away from the behaviors that had previously put them into prison. However, these women lost that drive after facing transportation challenges, in addition to the other obstacles mentioned in this research, subsequently surrendering to the negative, criminogenic pressures surrounding them. Such pressures were further emphasized when these women were dependent on such individuals for transportation.

### *Education*

The women in this research also revealed severe deficiencies in the education and programming provided to them while incarcerated. Previous research has established the likelihood of incarcerated women being undereducated, as well as their need for significant programming in parenting, finances, and employment skills (Belknap, 2007; Belknap, 2003; Richie, 2001; Leverentz, 2006b). Yet this same research finds that programming in women's prisons is lacking in access and diversity, especially as compared to male prisons. These findings were supported in this study, as all of the women discussed the dire need for programming and educational opportunities in prison. While it would be impossible to expect any institution to meet every individual's needs, it was alarming that all of the women mentioned the same needs and experiences in accessing the few educational and programming opportunities that were available in prison.

This lack of access to education and relevant programming is not due to a lack of want from female prisoners, as they are aware of the value of furthering their education and skills. In fact, all of the women in this study expressed wanting more education, skill development, and program opportunities. They realized this knowledge and information could improve their chances of succeeding outside of prison, as potential employees, parents, and citizens in general. Beverly made the argument that holding a degree from one of the local



colleges and universities would go a long way in helping her to overcome the stigma of her criminal conviction in society.

And I think education, to me, is the most important, because no matter what you are, if I was a graduate of OU, and I put that on an application, I promise you, they gonna look over the box that says “convicted felon.” And see OU and be like, “Wow.” You know what I’m saying? Or, if I was a graduate of OSU, or Rose State, or UCO, you know what I’m saying, that’s gonna stand out, you know what I mean? And that “convicted felon” is going to become small, it’s gonna be like fine line, so I strongly promote education, ‘cause education is important. And the more that you know, the better off you’ll be in life, because you can’t learn enough. And especially if you get a good job, you gotta know things, you know what I’m saying? You can’t just get by with a GED or a high school diploma, you know, that’ll be exactly what it is, getting by.

It is therefore the case that these women recognize the importance of furthering their knowledge and skills. In fact, they are begging for opportunities to do so.

One of the most troubling discoveries made in this research was the existence of significant waitlists for all available educational and programming opportunities, with the exception of religious services. Not one woman in this research was able to take all of the classes she deemed necessary for herself, and the major factor for this was the waitlists. As explained by these women, there were two problems with getting off of the waitlist and into the classes. One problem was that many women were not in prison long enough to outlast the waitlist, so they were released from prison before their name came up for a class. The second problem was that some women were in prison for so long, that they were not deemed a priority for taking these classes. Instead, even though they had

been on a waitlist for years, women who were leaving in a shorter amount of time would be given precedence for enrollment in a program. It was therefore almost down to luck if a woman was able to take a course while incarcerated. This held for programs as basic and essential as GED and Adult Basic Education training.

Cody encountered this situation. She had been on a waitlist for her GED preparation for two years, yet she had seen numerous other women come in after her and participate in the program before her. She knew that it was because they had less days than her before their release, even though she was never given preferential enrollment in the GED program when she was last released.

Similarly, Young had never been able to get into the vocational technology program, and she attributed it to her having too many days left to serve to be considered for the program. She also stated that by the time she was close enough to release to possibly take part in the program, she would likely be transferred at that point to a lower-security prison without such programs.

Numerous other women also shared that they had not partaken in programs they thought they would benefit from, solely because of the waitlists for those programs. They are thus left with little options for activities or things to do to pass their time in prison.

Shoshone: So there's nothing for me to do except lay in my cell and watch TV. That's what I do every day. Some days you don't even want to get up and make your bed, because you know you're just going to get right back in it. Just stay on your bunk all day long and just watch TV. This is the most exercise I've had today,

walking up here. Because I just live in that little corner room right there. (laughs)

Young: So there's a lot of depressed people here, with no jobs or programs, just sitting on their bed or sitting around with nothing to do.

There were consequently many women in this study who had no idea about what programs they would ever be able to take and when they might be able to take those programs.

While all of the women in this research begged for more education and program opportunities, it was disturbing that the programs they had been able to participate in were described as being irrelevant and ineffective. These women reported the programs as run by untrained volunteers and even current female inmates who lacked any formal educational or professional experiences. Because these programs were run by volunteers, the courses met irregularly, often going months without meeting or even terminating the program before the completion of all of the goals set forth for the participants. The participants of these programs were never kept informed as to when the program would resume or why it was terminated. Volunteer program staff also experienced significant turnover rates, further adding to the delays in program delivery. Beth's sentiments here were consistently expressed by the other women in this study.

Interviewer: What type of programs did you participate in your last time in prison?

Beth: Um, I did parenting, both parenting classes, and I did that because that's the way that you can earn your kids to visit you at

Eddie Warriors. There I was not there for very long. I did Thinking for a Change while I was there. And those were really the only two things that I did, the two parenting classes and Thinking for a Change. And in my opinion the parenting classes were completely terrible. Actually, to be honest, I think all the programs I've taken are really not very good. I hope this doesn't sound very critical. I'm not trying to sound ungrateful. But this is why I think women come back...Um, so I think that these programs are so school-book thought out and really have no basis in anything that they'll do for us. They haven't for me, and I was looking for things to use...They are just not relevant. It's so inappropriate. I know these girls are going, "Whatever!" And I've seen, I don't know how many of them, that I went through the class with, saying, in front of the person who taught it, "Yeah. I've learned a lot. I've really changed." And then they'll go out and get thrown in lock. Just like that. They didn't learn anything because it was so irrelevant.

Beth went on to describe how the programs typically consisted of role-playing with unrealistic, irrelevant scenarios. These scenarios taught women what to do to keep their husbands happy, like agreeing with the men to avoid arguments. Beth made the great point that these women were not married, so these lessons were not applicable to them. Also, the curriculum for these programs were extremely outdated, based on 1950s ideals of women belonging only in the home, with no voice or options for their lives.

Pooty also elaborated on the ineffectiveness of the programs offered to her during her prior incarceration. While she was able to participate in numerous programs, she expressed that she gained nothing from that participation.

I took every available program there was. Anger management, Thinking for a Change, New Behavior, Life Skills. Um, I took a vo-tech business class. I took numerous classes at college. These programs sound good, but they're nothing. They just would ask

you questions, give you a piece of paper, and there'd probably be about six subjects on the paper. It would tell you like, maybe, how to write a check, and what you're supposed to say at a job interview. Um, something that took three sessions to complete. Nothing. I mean, seven years...I took advantage of everything they had to offer...I think that, just like they say that they put you in prison for rehabilitation, this is no rehabilitation. They don't rehabilitate nobody. They don't even offer you things to rehabilitate you. We got churches coming in from outside that offer AA and NA. And that's it.

Vanda similarly expressed that she had received over 500 hours of substance abuse rehabilitation programming during her last incarceration period. She called it "a joke." She said it did not help anyone overcome substance abuse addictions, as the program consisted of outdated workbooks, a journal, an occasional video, and untrained prisoners and volunteers running the program. Vanda stated that the female inmates in this program routinely faced meetings where they were unsupervised and left to figure things out for themselves.

Finally, Bree admitted that her program participation during her previous incarceration had not rehabilitated her in any way. In fact, it had only served to make her a better criminal.

Interviewer: So what kind of lessons have you learned through the programs that you have taken part in?

Bree: Really...to tell you the truth, nothing. 'Cause I continue to do the same thing. I continue to do the same thing. I didn't learn anything. I didn't learn anything. I'm still angry inside, you know? And then, Thinking for a Change, I did think for a change, but, hell, I got out there and did the same thing. I changed up just a little bit. I started writing checks instead of stealing. But, you know, like I said, I became a better criminal in here.

A program that was regularly mentioned as one participated in widely by the participants of this research was titled “Thinking for a Change.” This program was described by Missy as “a class that helps us to get our minds together, to think about things before we act. To help us decipher things, or try to just sit back and think about things before we act.” This program was actually run by professional staff in the prison, but it received mixed reviews. Some women felt it had improved their ability to consider the consequences of their actions, thereby improving their choices and behaviors. Yet other women kept in line with the arguments of ineffective programs, arguing it was irrelevant and outdated in its curriculum.

Yet another issue that arose during this research that deserves serious consideration is the over-representation of faith-based organizations among programming efforts in prisons. Of course, with low-funding situations arising from current-day economic crises in our society, it is understandable that volunteer groups would be utilized and welcomed into the correctional environment. Also, the women who described these groups’ programs did not disparage them based on unkind or disrespectful volunteers. These women tended to see these groups as benevolent and earnest in their attempts to help these women. However, the incarcerated women saw these individuals as lacking in experiences and knowledge about what they needed to succeed outside of prison. They described these groups’ focus on the use of prayer and paternal morality as a

way to succeed in life. Again, the morality lessons consisting of submitting to one's husband and the father of your children were not seen as very applicable or positive among the incarcerated audience to which they were delivering this message. Nevertheless, these were the types of programs that were consistently available to women, without a waitlist. Some of the programs these groups offered were similar to Thinking for a Change, in terms of asking participants to consider God's views and the consequences of their actions prior to doing or saying anything. Other programs provided by these groups were substance-abuse education, Bible studies, parenting classes, marriage classes, and religious worship services.

Related to these groups, Beth brought up some interesting information about the complex set of issues introduced by granting religious-based groups such a presence in the prison. Beth was serving her first incarceration sentence, for bogus check writing, and she was extremely well-educated and from an atypical affluent background. She gained information about these religious groups by encountering some women in the prison yard who were talking about how they had been promised an early appearance before the parole board based on their involvement with a federally-funded religious group program. She asked the woman in charge of the program, and she was told that was correct—that because this organization wanted to create a large group of participants for their program, to maintain their lucrative federal funding, they were guaranteeing

special early consideration through the parole board for the participants. Yet she was suspicious that such a group could promise this, so she asked for the guarantee in writing. She was subsequently denied participation in the program, and she never heard back on her efforts to follow-up with the group.

Similarly troubling were Beth's accounts of prison administrators forcing inmates' participation at religious speakers' presentations. Beth questioned the administrators and guards when they tried to tell her these were mandatory-attendance events, and her citing of her religious freedom kept them from forcing her to go. Yet she said that she was not aware of any other woman who had not bought into these tactics to force them to attend these presentations. She stated that the prison officials would encourage high attendance at these events, so they would be able to attract speakers regularly to their institution. Such concerns of inmate turnout, as well as forced attendance of inmates through "mandatory attendance" tactics, were especially high during a few of the presentations that were being videotaped for distribution nationally.

They let in these religious speakers, Mike Barber and Kenneth Copelin, with some others. (laughs) Actually, girls didn't go, and the officers acted like it was mandatory, and they said, "Everybody out. Everybody out and dressed. Okay, everybody line up, you're going to the program in the gym." And I said, "I'm not going. I am not going. I don't want any part of that." And they said, "No. You need to go." And I said, "Is it mandatory? Is it my Level?" They said, "No." So I said, "Then I'm in my room reading. I don't want to go see Mike Barber. Thank you." It was, to me, very creepy. Making people show up for a religious speaker. They really didn't have a choice about it, being told it was mandatory to get a good presence out there for him.



Beth stated that she wanted to contact the state legislature about the problems involved with having so much power granted within the prison to religious groups. She believed that they enjoyed advantages to entering the prison than other groups. In fact, she expressed surprise that the researcher was allowed entry for this research project. One of the biggest points of contention she had with these groups in the prison was the fact that they did not attempt to separate their faith's lessons from the lessons they were supposed to be objectively providing to the female inmates. She argued that there were some women in prison who could not find a program to participate in, as they were not Christian and they refused to be subjected to a continuous stream of Christian ideas. Beth believed that incarcerated women should be able to access programs similar to the ones taught by the Christian groups, but independent of the religiously-directed curriculum. She was also angered by the promise of the religious program director to give women participating in her program an advantage in appearing before the parole board earlier than they were entitled to be considered.

Now, I'm a Christian, but I believe that churches should be separate from state, and I don't believe that just because I'm a Christian, that means that I should get in front of the parole board, and others who are not should not. I believe it should be based on if you're doing the right thing and changing your life. And, um, there is nothing in here for anybody...I'm a Level 4, which is the highest level you can be—there's nothing in here for me that's not church-based that's going to help me get out of prison. And I'm very troubled by that. What about people that aren't religious? There are some women that need the church aspect of it, and I'm not mocking that. I am not mocking that. I have a problem with it.

To me, that's not why the United States was created. So I shouldn't have to go and be a part of your faith program to get somewhere...It's very much that way here. It's very much that way with church. I'm very surprised that they let you in here. Churches get to come in here, but they're very selective about that too. But there's not a lot of other programs let in here. If someone came in here and said, "I want to teach these women home ec, and it has nothing to do with church, but it has everything to do with how to be clean, how to cook, how to take care of a baby," I don't know if they'd let them come in. But it's easy for these religious groups to get in.

Beth was so frustrated with these circumstances, that she regularly discussed with her husband how she voiced her disapproval of the situation to prison officials, inmates, and visitors. Her husband asked her to stop and to do as she was told, without causing conflict, so as not to cause any problems or delays in her release from prison. He worried that she would jeopardize her well-being in the prison by being so vocal on this issue.

Also related to religious programming, several women expressed having found God for the first time during their current incarceration. Yet some women viewed it as something that these women were doing socially, or else to help them cope with their daily experiences in prison. Such women, like Sweet, refused to turn to God and religion just because of their current incarceration.

If you don't have no programs in prison, and you don't have nothing but a whole bunch of other women like you around you, there ain't nothing good in here goin' on. I mean, there ain't nothing goin on, except everyone comes to prison to get religious, you know. That's why I kind of leaned away from religion, because I'm not going to go to church just because I got locked up. If I'm going to take the Lord in here, I'm going to take the Lord out there too. I just haven't been able to grasp that. That's another

chapter in my life that is not written, because I have never known God.

Finally, similar to the view of the ineffective nature of overall programming efforts, the various vocational training programs that were eventually made available to these incarcerated women, after a long waitlist, were not seen as beneficial either. Pooty stated that the prison administrators were quick to put people to work in the kitchen or cleaning around the facility. Yet she argued that such experience would not help these women to obtain employment in the future. In line with these views, these women asked for more opportunities with diversified vocational education, as they knew they had a small chance of being able to participate in the vocational education system that currently existed there. They wanted programs involving computer training, and, in terms of education beyond the GED or high school diploma, access to college courses as well.

Some of the good job training programs that were available were the truck driving program, the telemarketing program, and the clothing industry. These programs were seen as lucrative in pay, compared to the other prison positions. They were also seen as providing skills that would be beneficial in the workforce upon reentry. However, gaining a position in one of these programs was essentially reserved for the long-term inmates, as the waitlist for these positions was years long. There was also a program dealing with basic money management skills that Amos found very helpful toward her reentry needs.

I never was taught how to balance a checkbook. I never was taught how to pay. Never. This is the most punishment I've ever done, because I've had to humble myself. I had somebody sending me money. I preyed on people. I'm not doing that. I'm humbling myself. And I'm making ends meet. So I know it can be done. But I'm having to learn at this age, in here. I'd like to see the young ones have to pay in here. "This is how it's going to be, because you can't go out and spend all your money." You know. Women even at my age really don't know this. I didn't. None of your classes teach you really about managing money. You spend your money on the drugs, and you end up here. I even brought this up. In one of our workbooks, they gave us like \$2,000 budget. This is play-like. We had to write our bills out, and I enjoyed it, because nobody had worked with me like that. I had change left, but that little change had to last me until the next month, when the next \$2,000 came in. So I kind of enjoyed that. And after we had to do that, we have never learned money skills. I was interested in that. When I went and got my GED, I was so impressed with numbers. But we didn't learn as a kid. But now I'm like, "This will save me \$2. That's enough to buy me a pair of shoes." And I'd never done that before, thinking ahead of what I had to pay and what I had to buy. Because I always lived on those drugs. But when I get out there this time, I'm going to make it. I'm not going to depend on nobody.

There were therefore a few programs which the inmates did see as beneficial toward their improvement and overall goals. Yet entry into the vocational programs was extremely limited, due to significant waitlists, and the money management program was only for a short period of time and did not cover anything beyond the basics described by Amos.

Overall, then, these women's experiences with educational and programming opportunities are very restricted, mostly due to the lack of space in these programs. These women consequently face tremendously long waiting lists for much-needed programs, to the point that they express not being likely to

participate in most programs prior to their release. Unfortunately, the programs that these incarcerated women do have access to are described as ineffective and irrelevant for the women's needs and experiences.

Also troubling are the practices disclosed by Beth, of prisons allowing religious groups to offer the majority of the prison programs that most women can access, despite the fact that their programming curriculum is heavily inundated with Christian doctrines. This thereby restricts access to programs for women who do not hold such religious views and/or who do not want such doctrines permeating their rehabilitation needs. These trends are disturbing, as they translate into the fact that most of the women leaving prison are doing so without any critical progress made on much-needed education, vocational, and personal development needs. Lacking such knowledge and skills, it is disturbingly easy to understand why many women resume their problematic behaviors soon after they are released from prison.

### *Health and Medical Needs*

The final major obstacle that the women in this study reported encountering upon their release from prison involved issues with their health and medical needs. In discussing health concerns, existing research documents the higher rates of chronic illness, mental health issues, and substance abuse issues among incarcerated women, as compared to women in the general population. Despite

awareness of these conditions, these women are not receiving adequate treatment while incarcerated or upon release from prison (Anderson, Rosay, & Saum, 2002; Baldwin & Jones, 2000; Moe & Ferraro, 2003; Anderson, 2003; Ammar & Weaver, 2005). Unfortunately, this contributes to negative, and often dangerous, experiences for these women reentering society.

Of course, the overall health situation while incarcerated is oftentimes much better than anything these women had access to prior to their incarceration. Before their incarceration, most of these women lived in poor socioeconomic situations, which translated into conditions involving poor nutrition, high stress, substance abuse, and lack of medical attention for injuries and illnesses, much less preventative health care (Richie, 2001). It is therefore beneficial that these women have stable access, during their incarceration, to food, shelter, and some medical attention.

However, due to either budget limits and/or punitive practices, most of the health care incarcerated women receive in prison is reactive, not preventative. Also, even if the women arrived into the prison with known physical ailments, chronic illnesses, or documented mental health issues, many of them described serious difficulties in receiving medical attention during their incarceration, with the situation only worsening with their reentry into society. Finally, if women prisoners did receive necessary medical attention during their incarceration, it was definitely not the case that they received assistance to ensure the transitioning of

such services for them when they left prison (Moe & Ferraro, 2003; National Commission on Health Care, 2002; Vigilante et al., 1999).

As mentioned previously, female inmates' negative experiences with medical attention often begins immediately upon their reception into the prison. One of the women in this study, Cody, was actually injured in her efforts to evade the arrest that brought her back to prison this current time. In trying to escape from the police, she had a serious car wreck, which left her in a coma for two weeks. The wreck also severed her ear off of her head, and she essentially had her entire scalp sewn back together and re-attached to her skull after the wreck. In terms of injuries, she suffered a dangling left arm; a broken back; and severe physical trauma to her chest and breasts.

Once she awoke from her coma, she came to find out that she was only kept in a hospital for the first two days of her recovery. After those two days, the Department of Corrections, who she believed was worried about the expenses associated with her hospital stay, had her transferred to the local jail's infirmary. She stayed there for two weeks, until she came out of her coma, and she said she gained consciousness not realizing where she was or what had happened to her. Upon regaining consciousness, she was immediately transferred into a room at the prison, despite the fact that she was in a full body cast for the next four months.

There, her challenges toward recovery continued. Cody reported being left on her own to regain her mobility and to navigate prison life while severely

disabled, without much-needed physical therapy. She stated, “I had to teach myself to use the bathroom again, I had to do a lot of things, if it wasn’t for someone else being in the room with me, it wouldn’t have happened.” Cody’s experiences are thus very telling of the level of medical attention offered to inmates in a severe medical situation, and the other women in this study offered similarly grim accounts. Unfortunately, most of these women’s struggles for medical attention only continued upon their release into society.

Laci was diagnosed with cancer during her prior prison incarceration. She said the treatment she received for her cancer was so delayed that she almost died. Based on the poor treatment she received, she suffered a coma for almost a year, as well as numerous health complications revolving around her cancer. After about two years of dealing with her cancer, the Department of Corrections chose to release her under a medical parole, rather than continuing to deal with her condition. Despite the fact that they knew the severity of her cancer, and even though Laci was so frail that she was released in a wheelchair because she could not walk, the Department of Corrections did not help her to secure any housing or medical attention upon her release from prison. She went to her father’s home, but he only let her stay one night. She was thus homeless and severely ill for weeks.

At this point, Laci was still able to get limited medical assistance from the doctors in Oklahoma City that had overseen her cancer treatment during her



incarceration, as they took sympathy on her and had known she was getting released from prison. However, she eventually lost even that assistance, as she was surviving homeless in Norman and was too sick to travel to Oklahoma City. In a desperate situation, Laci had an epiphany to lie to a battered women's shelter, telling the administrators there that she had been hit and kicked out of her home by an abusive male partner. She was thus allowed to stay there, and it was only through the shelter's services that she was able to locate medical attention and assistance for her cancer.

During the three months that she stayed at the shelter, she was able to receive chemotherapy, radiation, physical therapy, and other much-needed medical services. The shelter administrators had put Laci in touch with a local nonprofit healthcare agency, which she considered a tremendous blessing for her health. She shared that she could otherwise not get any medical attention because she was uninsured, and she was ineligible for Medicaid because she was not a mother of dependent children.

During the few weeks between her release from prison and her finding the battered women's shelter, as well as her time between her release from the shelter and her re-incarceration, Laci accumulated approximately \$100,000 in medical bills in the span of two years. This was despite the fact that she was receiving some assistance from local nonprofit health agencies. Even with that debt, she shared that she was often not able to get her much-needed prescriptions filled

because she did not have the money for them, and she had exceeded her prescription refill privileges at local nonprofit health agencies.

Laci was reincarcerated this current time only because she failed to check in with her parole officer, who ordered her to take a drug test in which she tested positive for drugs. She stated she had started doing drugs after she had exceeded the maximum stay time at the shelter and was forced to move out. While the shelter's administrators had helped her find housing, she said she started using drugs to help her deal with being lonely, depressed, angry, anxious, and in pain. Laci was in such poor health that she was transported immediately and directly from the jail's infirmary to the prison infirmary upon her reception into the prison system.

Dirty Lucy also had a serious illness that she contracted during her previous incarceration, yet her illness went undiagnosed for years. She complained of severe stomach pain, and due to her inability to eat or digest anything, she went from 187 pounds to 103 pounds in three-and-a-half months. Despite her begging for medical attention, the prison health officials would not test her for anything. She said they had promised to take her to receive outside professional medical attention and an ultrasound one time, but when she arrived for her appointment, she was told that it needed to be rescheduled. That rescheduling took so long that her condition deteriorated rapidly. Dirty Lucy

eventually gave up on trying to seek medical attention outside of the prison, due to the humiliation it caused her each time.

It finally got to where I said no to going, because what it did, I had diarrhea for four years. And so I told them, “I tell you what, I’ll sign a waiver, because I’m not going to outside medical, shackled in cuffs and have me soiling myself for ya or no one else.”

When she got out of prison, Dirty Lucy had a friend who was a nurse, and she recommended to her that she get tested for H. pylori, as her friend’s father-in-law had experienced similar symptoms and was discovered to have this condition. According to Dirty Lucy, H. pylori involves live bacteria eating the lining of the stomach and causing ulcers, hernias, polyps in the stomach, and internal hemorrhoids. Dirty Lucy also shared that some people have died from this condition, as “it eats your insides up.” Her friend’s suspicions were confirmed when she tested positive for this condition, which she had suffered through for four years of her incarceration. Her doctor gave her the following information:

When I got out and my doctor found out I had it, she said, “The normal level is 1.1. Yours is 4.4. Yours is the highest I have ever seen in my medical profession. When you take this medicine, you are going to feel like you are dying, because it is so far advanced in your system.”

According to Dirty Lucy, her doctor told her that this condition typically begins with bacteria contracted from contaminated food and water. According to information on the Mayo Clinic’s website (“H. pylori infection,” 2009),

H. pylori infection is caused by the H. pylori bacterium. H. pylori is primarily passed from person to person through direct contact

with saliva or fecal matter. *H. pylori* can also be spread through untreated water.

Dirty Lucy stated that she later found out that the prison she had been at had passed out pamphlets, after her release, warning people there not to drink the water, as it was contaminated. Her issues with *H. pylori* were compounded by the fact that she had arrived to prison already having hepatitis B and C and a history of seizures.

Dirty Lucy thus encountered great difficulties in society in getting the medicine she needed to treat her conditions. She stated she did not have insurance, because it was hard for her to get coverage based on her history of seizures. She never got state medical coverage because she could never satisfy all of the demands the state health department made of her to secure such coverage. Consequently, when she would go to a doctor, she said it was an extremely expensive office visit. Once she would secure prescriptions for her multiple health conditions, she could occasionally get them filled at a local free clinic. Yet most of the time, she had to go without the medicines, as her hepatitis medicine cost her \$1,200 a month.

However, the most expensive and impossible medicine to get was for the *H. pylori*. That medicine had to be taken for fourteen days, with eight pills needed a day, and each pill was \$247. She would often be advised by doctors to double that dosage, since her condition was so severe. It was consequently

impossible for her to get rid of or even to maintain a tolerable level of comfort with this condition.

Dirty Lucy initially tried to work to earn money for this medicine, but she deteriorated so rapidly that she was not able to work. She thus resorted to selling drugs to try to earn enough money to pay for her medicine, while also using the drugs to self-medicate.

When I first got out and was working and stuff, I paid for my own [medicine]. But whenever I got so sick, I couldn't work. Like for a year, I couldn't eat anything but I made vanilla bean milkshakes everyday. All I could eat was a vanilla bean chocolate milkshake, and some of my mom's homemade jelly. The best around. Or a little jar of her apple butter jelly. That's all I could keep down. For a year. So I wasn't working for that year. I worked when I first got out and stuff, but then, when I had to start taking that medicine, it hit me. I got out in October 2001. I worked until August of 2002. And then I got really sick, and I couldn't work anymore. And that's when they finally had found out what was wrong with me. And by then I'd had it five years, and they never gave me SSI or medical. I was in the process of getting SSI when I got locked up this time. Yeah. So I had major medical issues...And I was so sick, so I was like, "Well, I'll do a little bit of morphine here, and it'll make me feel better." And one thing led to another and I was right back in the place I was before. So while I was sick, I was selling drugs, to help pay for my medicine and stuff and to continue my drug habit. They made me feel better when I was sick.

Her mother, despite her limited financial circumstances, would also give her as much as she could afford to try to help her buy her medicines. Dirty Lucy stated that she has been told that her stomach suffered irreparable damage as a result of the neglect suffered from failure to diagnose the H. pylori sooner. She said she had asked prison officials for medicine to help her control her diarrhea,

and she has been repeatedly denied it. While she was troubled with this effect of her H. pylori for reasons of personal hygiene and physical discomfort, her biggest issue with it was the blow it took to her self-esteem and self-image to not be able to control her bodily functions around others without medicine.

Vivian was another woman in this study who reported developing a condition during her past incarceration. Vivian stated that, during her previous incarceration at another facility, she noticed that she would have extreme difficulty breathing while trying to exercise. Eventually, she noticed she had difficulty breathing even when just walking a short distance. However, she faced a long road ahead of her before she got any answers about her condition.

I went to the doctor about it, and they showed me the X-ray, and I seen something on there, but they said it was normal. But I was trying to jog, out on the track, and I couldn't do it. I was trying, but I couldn't figure out why I couldn't breathe very well. They kept telling me it was normal. Even before I went to Turley, I went to the doctor, and they said, "Something's wrong." One of the prison doctors. But they're not really doctors. They're physician's assistants. So I never got treated in prison before I left for this.

Interviewer: When did you figure out what the problem was?

When I came here, and I just kept complaining about it, they finally took an x-ray, and they still didn't want to tell me the truth. They wanted to minimize it, downplay it, because they don't want to spend money on it. But the nurse told me, by accident. Not really by accident, but when I went for blood tests, I saw a memo laying on my file, and I said, "What's that say?" And the nurse told me what it said. And that's how I really found out. So I wrote to see the doctors about the results, but I couldn't tell them that she told me. They were trying to say I had asthma. I never had asthma before. And the lady told me that the memo said COPD. So I

have gradually got them to actually say it. I went about two years before I got any help.

Yet the prison health officials' acknowledgement of Vivian's condition, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), did not necessarily translate into effective management of her condition. Furthermore, Vivian was confident that she would face additional difficulties accessing treatment for her condition upon her release from prison, based on the lack of medical transitional assistance from the prison health officials.

Now, they just have me on inhalers, but I still can't breathe very well. I don't know if there is anything else they can do, because I'm not out there to talk to a real doctor, and they're not giving me any options. I think there's some medication for it available, but not here. Some medicine where I could actually breathe, but not here. And when I get out there, they're not going to help me get my inhaler or the medicine or anything. When I leave, the only thing I know to do is, when I was out there before, I'm not sure if they still have it, but when I was out there before, they had a van that would go to different low-income apartments, and so I'll go there. It's like a doctor in a van, like a medical clinic. I don't know if they still have it, but they'll give you your medicine right there. I don't know if they still have it. But I think I might be able to get on disability. I don't know. But I'll probably have to get a lawyer for it or something. You know, so it's just all this stuff. And you can't take care of hardly none of it when you're here. I'm still scared about getting out this time...Here I am, now I'll be going out there. I'll be 50, and I've been diagnosed with COPD. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. So I have to use an inhaler. I can't walk very far, very fast. It's hard for me to go up stairs, up a ramp. I mean, I can get up them, and I don't look crippled or nothing, but I'm breathing real hard. So all the walking and bus stops I was doing and stuff before are not possible this time.

Tamara expressed similar difficulty getting the inhaler she needed for her chronic asthma after her release from prison. She said she was able to gain a prescription for it at a free local medical clinic, but when she got to the pharmacy, she was told it was going to cost \$275. Since she could not afford it, she experienced serious issues with her asthma. This was even more problematic than normal, because she got pregnant soon after her release from prison and was having to walk two hours, about five miles each way, back and forth to work while pregnant.

While such a situation seems bad enough, unfortunately it was compounded by the fact that she would regularly go four to five days without eating, as she had no money for food. When asked by the researcher why she did not get food stamps during her pregnancy, she said that she had believed, at the time, that she was ineligible for food stamps based on her felony conviction. The combination of her chronic asthma, walking about ten miles a day, and lack of food all contributed to her extreme thinness during her pregnancy and delivery.

Yeah, my doctor said, because I had a Caesarian, she said, “You almost had nothing to sew you back up.” She said, “You are so skinny.”

Vanda also had chronic asthma and lacked health insurance coverage, so she went to either the health department or the hospital emergency room to try to get an inhaler, as she did not have the money to see a doctor. She stated that she would simply not pay the emergency room bills, because she did not have the



money to do so. Yet for most of her time outside of prison, she had to go without treatment or medicine, to the point that her asthma would get so bad that she would then go to the hospital emergency room to get a breathing treatment.

Her health struggles were entirely preventable, as she would only need an inhaler to deal with her asthma. Also, it would have been much more cost-efficient to give Vanda regular access to her inhaler, which she stated cost only from twenty-five to twenty-eight dollars. However, she was unable to regularly purchase an inhaler to replace ones that ran out, so she had to resort to emergency room visits to attempt to manage her chronic asthma.

So I went without. I was getting it in here [in prison] but I couldn't out there [in society]. I'd go to the ER, and they'd give me breathing treatments in there. It'd be on my hospital bill. When my asthma started bothering me, I'd have to go to the ER to get a breathing treatment. I could have had an inhaler and not had to go to the hospital. But I could make an inhaler last, because I would take it unless I absolutely was in dire need of them, so it would last. It had to. But to go to the ER, it's a sad thing. I had a serious problem, and I didn't get to go to the doctor.

The final woman in this survey who reported serious issues getting medical attention after her release from prison was Shoshone. Shoshone was a Native American, so she had access to routine medical and prescription-filling services. Yet she was not able to get medical attention for the one health issue she did have—torn ligaments. As was described earlier in this research, Shoshone had experienced shoulder and elbow injuries at the time of her arrest, and she had never received treatment while incarcerated for these injuries. Unfortunately, she

was also not able to get treatment after her release from prison, as the Indian hospitals reserved treatment of such injuries for only young, active student athletes.

Well, see, here, the Indian hospital, they only do ligament tears and things like that for active students in sports and everything. So they don't do it if you're my age and they don't see that you're a very active person. I've got ligament tears in my arm now, from that police incident, and they said if I had insurance, I could go to a private doctor. It would be followed through and everything. And I don't have the money right now, to pay the full price for a doctor, you know what I mean?...I still have pain in my elbow that I can't get treated. I can't lift anything over like five pounds, because it pulls and it tends to dislocate again. I've got torn ligaments in there that they've got to go in there and fix. The Indian hospital, they can't do it, because they have to save their funds because of all of the cutbacks. They have to save their funds for the students that are in sports that have the injuries and stuff like that.

Shoshone therefore continued to endure the pain from her former injuries. She said that she wished she had qualified for some kind of public health insurance, like Medicaid, as she believed she would have been able to take care of rehabilitating her injuries and ending her pain with the medical attention possible through such coverage. Interestingly, Amos was also Native American, but she had medical issues that were covered by Indian hospitals. However, her problem in accessing medical services through the Indian hospitals was based on transportation issues, as she had to travel seventy-one miles to get to the nearest Indian hospital.

There is thus ample support for prior research findings detailing troubling experiences with prison healthcare systems during a woman's incarceration.

Unfortunately, there is also plenty of support for prior research arguments that reentering women will encounter significant obstacles to accessing much-needed medical attention and medicine after their release from prison. Such experiences regrettably translate into decreasing the quality of life for these women during their incarceration and after prison, as their conditions can be so debilitating as to cost them physical mobility and even possibly their lives. These women consequently face the options of either living in physical misery; relying on others to try to provide the economic means to help them access medical attention and medicine; or else re-engaging in crime to try to raise enough money to address their medical needs.

Another health-related area of concern for incarcerated women has to do with their mental health and their accompanying need for services and medication not only while incarcerated, but also when they leave prison. The higher rates of mental health illnesses among incarcerated women, as compared to women in the general population, have been well-established in the literature (Swaminath et al., 2002; Teplin et al., 1997; Anderson, 2003; Belknap, 2003). Such studies have documented the influence of traumatic events in childhood and adulthood in the emergence of these women's mental health issues. Those traumas can involve physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and domestic violence. Bree explains here what she believes to be the origins of her mental health issues.

Me and my adopted mother kind of fell out, because when I was a child, I had so many mental health issues, that she gave me back to

the state, and I held that against her for so long. You know. I felt thrown away again. I felt like trash. I felt like my mom gave me away. My mom got up one day and said, "I'll be back. Don't you open this door. If you open this door, I'll beat your ass." My mom never came back. I remember the police kicking the door in, because my aunt came over there and we were there by ourselves. So my aunt had called the police. The fire department took the whole door off, just to get into us, me and my brother. We ended up separated. We ended up being adopted by two different families. We ended up growing up without each other. That's where a lot of my issues came from. My brother mentally blocked everything out. I remember every single thing. I remember every punch, every scream, every holler. I remember. And it trips me out, because things happened like when I was little, little, and I thought I dreamt it, and my aunt was like, "No. That really happened." You know. So that's where a lot of mental issues come in. Like abuse. Mental abuse. Physical abuse. Sexual abuse.

While many of the women in this study discussed experiences similar to the abuse and trauma shared by Bree, most of them did not specifically discuss mental health issues. It is not clear if the absence of such mentions of mental illness among the women in this sample is because this sample was somehow not representative, in this area, of the typical female offender. The author's own suspicion is that part of the reason behind the lack of these women's discussion of mental health issues is due to their failure to identify their emotional struggles as mental illness. Of course, not all emotional difficulties are mental illness, but the way these women spoke nonchalantly about experiences that most people would see as extremely traumatic and violent led the author to suspect that these women had either repressed their true emotional struggles, or else they simply denied the intense mental distress that they had suffered from such events.

In addition to Bree, the only two other women in this sample who talked about mental health issues were Young and Bad Girl. Young reported an extremely negative response to her encounter with mental health services in prison. Essentially, it involved the supposed mental health expert dismissing the severity of her experiences and issues. This resulted in not only her needs continuing to go unmet, but also in further traumatizing an already fragile individual.

I had talked to mental health once before, and the woman just patted me on the leg, the first time I'd ever opened up to anybody, and this was before I got out last time, and she just patted me on the leg and told me I was just being self-pitying and all this and that. I just kind of looked at her and was like, "I'm not telling you this so you can feel sorry for me. I'm telling you this because these are things I just have replaying in my mind, and it's keeping me from moving on." She just more or less acted like she didn't know how to help me, so there it was again, "I don't know how to help you." ...And I'm like, "You're mental health. What do you mean you don't know how to help me?" I was so upset. I was just shaking, because I was so upset. When I was telling her this, she was just asking all the questions, and I just let it all out, and she's like, "You're okay. You're just having self-pity." I was so mad.

Bad Girl had been diagnosed during her last time in prison with mental health issues, and she had been prescribed psychotropic drugs to help her function on a daily basis. Upon her release from prison, she went to the health department for what she thought was a minor medical issue and was found to have tuberculosis. During the recording of her medical history for documentation of her diagnoses, she shared that she had been taking psychotropic drugs in prison for mental health issues, and the health department issued her a Medicaid card and

sent her to a mental health facility. She was admitted for three weeks, to sort out and appropriately identify the mental health issues she had, and they then started her on medication, which they supplied to her for free.

After her initial three-week stay, she was required to come in to the facility once a month to check in with the mental health professionals. Unfortunately, even with her medication, Bad Girl was still unstable. At one point in time, during a doctor's effort to revalidate her mental health issues, she was extremely hostile towards him.

And my psych doctor, he was alright. He was a little bit too old, you know. I had to cuss him out one time. I told him, "It ain't your job when and why and what the fuck I do. You just need to give me my medication, motherfucker, so I can be okay. That's it and that's all. You just too goddamn nosy for me. I don't owe you nothing about what the fuck I'm thinking. You can call up to the penitentiary about my history. I don't need to tell you nothing else." After I cussed him out, he gave me the medication. He called up to DOC, and they told him.

So, aside from this momentary lapse in control, Bad Girl considered herself pretty lucky to have encountered the health department toward the beginning of her release from prison, as they were the ones who referred her to the mental health facility to ensure continued access to the mental health services and medication she needed.

This study thus did not contain many women who specifically admitted to having mental health issues and who discussed needs related to mental health during prison and after their reentry into society. However, it is not clear whether

these women truly did not possess mental health issues, or if they were not willing to talk about them. Another possibility, discussed previously, is that these women did not even know about their mental health issues. Such a possibility is not far-fetched, in light of the experience that Young shared about having her plea for mental health assistance met with dismissal of her experiences and her needs.

Yet the experiences shared by Bree help to illustrate the urgent need of mental health assessment and treatment as soon as possible following reception of these women into the criminal justice system, as such issues contribute to women's overall challenges while incarcerated and, especially, upon their reentry into society. While Bad Girl was very lucky to have had her mental health needs met almost immediately upon her release from prison, the literature cited previously shows that most women with documented mental health issues struggle to gain access to professionals and services upon their release into society. With Bad Girl momentarily exploding on the mental health professional in the manner in which she shared, while receiving medication and mental health services, it is very evident why women struggling with mental health issues urgently need access to such services and medication to succeed in prison and outside of prison.

The final health-related issue that the incarcerated women in this study faced involved their substance abuse, addictions, and lack of access to adequate and effective treatment for these issues. Many of these women came into prison

with substance abuse issues, consisting of drug and alcohol abuse. Some of these women had lifetimes of abusing drugs and alcohol.

Vanda started drinking when she was nine- or ten-years-old, and she said she steadily consumed alcohol from that age. She also started using methamphetamines in her late teens. Laci stated that she “first shot dope” when she was eight years old, “for my birthday. I’ve been shooting dope ever since. I did speed, but I never did heroin. I was scared of it. Speed, cocaine, marijuana.” Dirty Lucy started doing drugs and selling drugs when she was fourteen years old, in order to deal with her parents’ divorce and her move from her home state, and to help her mother pay the bills, since her mother was now on her own to support Dirty Lucy and her sister. Angel started smoking marijuana when she was eleven years old. She then began using powdered cocaine when she was twelve years old and crack cocaine when she was seventeen years old. Tamara started doing methamphetamines when she was sixteen, and eventually started using marijuana as well.

Yet the woman in this study who appeared to have the most serious substance abuse issues, specifically involving alcohol abuse, was Lone Wolf. As described previously in this research, Lone Wolf was so dependent on alcohol that she would resort to hitchhiking, prostitution, and stealing to get it. Her alcohol dependency put her in extremely dangerous situations.

So I just hopped around everywhere. I even slept under bridges and things like that. Walked miles in the dark, drunk, with a bottle



in my hand, because I didn't care. I hid the feelings, and nothing mattered.

Interviewer: What would you do after you woke up under a bridge? How did you decide what to do after that?

First thing I'd be thinking is that I've got to get me another bottle. Because I always made sure, if I'm going to pass out, I've got to have me a bottle when I wake up, because I'd be sick. I'd be real sick. And I always had another extra bottle in my backpack. And I would sit there and drink that and then catch a bus and I would think that it helps me think more and what I'm going to do next. I might go to the creek and wash off, wash my hair, change my clothes, and take off walking down the road. And usually when I'd take off walking down the road, somebody would pick me up and usually, 45% of the time, it's a single man, and they're just looking to have a good time and drink and stuff. And they'd buy me beer or whiskey, whatever. And I'd talk with them. And some would just buy it for me and just send me on my way. Some just wanted something else. And if I wanted to eat, if I wanted to drink, then I had to do what I had to do.

These women thus had serious, established histories with drugs and alcohol. But, the initial problem in dealing with these issues arose from the way that the prison handled substance abuse treatment. The women in this study described programs that were irrelevant, ineffective, and poorly staffed and organized. Oftentimes, these were the programs that were left to volunteers to run, and these volunteers were not screened for their credentials to be running such programs.

Amos: I think I remember one drug program there [in her former prison]. I think it was called Chemical Abuse or something like that. It was just like a SAT program. But we were just there. It was just like a warehouse. I think they had GED program, but it didn't have enough volunteers. That's probably one of the worst times.

Dirty Lucy described what was officially labeled as a substance abuse program, even though it did not appear to be relevant toward treating her substance abuse issues. Also, Dirty Lucy points out a major downfall of this program, resulting from the prison's failure to screen for the effectiveness of such programs and the professionalism and qualifications of the people running these programs. This means that the first few groups of women going through these "experimental" treatment programs are not going to benefit as much from it as people who participate later, once the issues and failed practices have been ironed out for these programs.

Dirty Lucy: I'm in that character-based substance abuse program right now. It's not what they said it was going to be. It's all about relationships. I haven't had a relationship in 12 years. I have a drug problem. I need help with my drugs. I don't need help with my relationships... Well, there's nothing been mentioned, we've been in there for nine months, and we only have three months left to go, and there's been nothing mentioned about drugs. Relationships led you to do drugs. No, I did drugs because I liked them. That's why I did drugs... Well, we just finally had class last week. It was the first time we'd had class in six or seven weeks. So, not getting a whole lot out of the program, because it's not happening. And so it's really a big letdown. I need something that's going to help me, because I know I have a problem. I know I need help... There's just nothing happening. I really wanted something to happen. We all did. But we're all getting really discouraged because there's nothing happening. It's not working for anybody, and there's a 100 and something women over there. Yeah. And we only have three months left... It's just not what it's supposed to be. It's the program, it's not the people. Hopefully they'll have it together by the time the fourth or fifth group comes through. We're the first group coming through it, so they're trying to work the program... On Saturdays down there, they have this substance abuse program where some church people came and

they'd tell you about a different drug every week and stuff...There's just no intense help.

Also, whatever programs were available were very difficult to get into, based on the significant number of women who needed substance abuse treatment. All of the women in the study who shared substance abuse histories expressed wanting treatment. Yet they all communicated the difficulty of getting into such treatment, based on significant waiting lists. Sweet elaborated on the challenges of getting into much-needed substance abuse treatment in prison.

I mean I never really...ever, since I've been incarcerated, there's never been a program to really help you deal with your drug addiction. I mean, like I said we got AA and they got SAT, which is like substance abuse treatment, where it takes forever to get into that, you know, and, uh... But, I mean, it's just like, uh, a recommended...uh, community, you know, where you work the book or something... I can't really say because I've never been in it. I mean I always get recommended to get into it, but when I get to the place, you know, like this place, I was recommended to, uh, that SAT program, but they're not able to get me in. I've been trying for, like, a year and a half, to get in that program.

Interviewer: So there's a waiting list?

Sweet: Right.

Interviewer: And during your intake, they recommend that you get in?

Sweet: Right.

Interviewer: So what does it take to get into those programs?

Sweet: A drug addiction. Substance abuse...

Interviewer: You have one, right, you said...? And, so...

Sweet: Oh, yeah, I do! But so do 6,000 other women. I mean, you know, it's just waiting until you can get into it and they prioritize those people that are in delayed sentencing, uh, there's kind of like a probationary period, that, you know, they let some people come in and do six months and then go before the judge again, for those ladies they prioritize. So, I mean, for anybody that's just waiting on the yard, you just be waitin' up to a year, two years to get out to those programs.

Interviewer: So have you ever done any substance abuse programs?

Sweet: Um, not during an incarceration. I haven't.

It is subsequently understandable, then, that these women will leave prison and return to abusing drugs and alcohol, as they have not been given alternatives to help them deal with the stressors, circumstances, and environments that promoted their use of drugs and alcohol in the first place. The women in this study expressed strong intentions to get out of prison and never touch drugs or alcohol again. Even if they had not had access to substance abuse treatment, they considered themselves strong enough to withstand the pressures and the former addictions pulling them back toward drug and alcohol abuse. However, it did not take long for some of these women to fall back into their old patterns with drugs and alcohol, as illustrated by Tamara's experience.

Well, the same day I got released, I used, but that was because of my boyfriend. He was using, and he had been visiting me at the prison and everything, saying, "I'm clean. I ain't doing this. I'm being good." And I was like, "Good. I can come out to a clean environment, start good." And it wasn't even like that. It was totally opposite. So the same day I was released, I started with methamphetamine again. I left it alone after that day for a while.

And when I got pregnant, I left it alone then, until after I had the baby. And then my baby passed on and I just went downhill fast.

Interviewer: ...Ok. So, you used meth the day you got out of prison. What other drugs did you use?

Tamara: Marijuana. Other than that, no other drugs.

Interviewer: Were you using those drugs regularly?

Tamara: Marijuana I used regularly. But meth no. That was just occasionally.

Bree also resumed her drug and alcohol use immediately after her release from prison, for a similar reason—it was right in front of her, and she had not had enough counseling and support inside of prison to help her learn to resist the lure of these substances.

Interviewer: What drug issues did you have after you were released from prison?

Bree: Alcohol and crack cocaine. It was right there in my face when I got out. It was right there. And that has always been an issue for me. So, when I got out it was right there in my face. There was a guy staying with my dad, and he was a drug addict. And I had my little money, my little check, from where I had been in prison so long. And my dad was like, "Buy me a drink." So I go buy my dad a drink, and the guy goes with me. He was like, "Oh, I'm your dad's friend. I look out for your dad." So we're in the liquor store, and he's like, "You get high?" I'm like, "I used to." He's looking at all my money. He's like, "Hey. Let's go get a package. Don't you want to celebrate you being out?" I fell right back into it. But, yeah, alcohol and crack cocaine consistently, everyday.

Young also turned back to drugs soon after her release from prison. She shared that she resorted back to drugs to help her cope with the rejection of her

family and the denial of employment and other opportunities. She also declared that she felt pressured to use drugs, as they were rampant in her community.

Young poignantly summarized her retreat back to drugs with her following statement.

To me, I mean, that's all I knew, and that's what I turned back to. I guess like a therapy. I just did it to numb the pain and to make me forget what was going on around me. 'Cause it was just hurtful.

Overall, most of the women in this study had significant histories of drug and alcohol abuse. They used drugs and alcohol leisurely in relationships and social interactions; as self-medication; or as a means to meeting basic survival needs. Ideally, substance abuse programs would be offered in prison to target a captive audience of women who largely admit that they need such treatment. Yet, such treatment is not universally available to women entering prison, due to scarce resources to devote to the staffing and curriculum creation necessary to operate effective programs. There are consequently many women leaving prison without having had any substance abuse treatment.

Also, whatever programs are available, at least as described by the women in this research, tend to be irrelevant and ineffective in addressing the true causes of their drug and alcohol abuse. An additional problem with the substance abuse treatment programs described by the women in this study is that they were likely to be overseen by volunteers who were not screened for credentials to provide such a program, and the programs they were offering were not screened for tested

effectiveness at addressing substance abuse issues. Finally, whether it was volunteers or prison staff running such programs, the women in this study reported encountering numerous delays in the program's operation, without any explanation offered to them for such occurrences.

It is therefore painfully apparent, at least according to these women, that incarcerated women experience serious issues in meeting their health and medical needs, not only while incarcerated, but especially upon their release from prison. Whether these issues involve chronic illness, severe injuries, mental health, or drug and alcohol abuse, women leaving prison encounter significant obstacles to realizing a healthy and fulfilling life. The pain and consequences associated with these health and medical concerns leave these women with few positive options for recourse. Their options consequently consist of enduring the pain and the negative effects; relying on others to attempt to help them recover; or else getting involved in crime again to open up options available only through additional financial resources or through the escape that drugs and alcohol provide them.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

This research has examined the factors influencing female recidivism among incarcerated women in Oklahoma. Female offender reentry and recidivism are important issues, as most of the women incarcerated today are expected to leave prison. In order to understand the scope of these issues, the levels of female incarceration, release, and recidivism must be reiterated. Approximately 114,852 women remain incarcerated nationally (Sabol et al., 2009), and 2,744 women remain incarcerated in Oklahoma (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2010). The national female incarceration has grown since the 2000 incarceration rate of 59 per 100,000 population, with the latest figures available showing an incarceration rate of 68 per 100,000. Oklahoma has the highest female incarceration rate in the United States, incarcerating 134 women per 100,000 population (Sabol et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, there are no current data available on the number of women released nationally, but the latest available data on this issue show that 57,345 women were released nationally from prison in 1998, at a time when the national female incarceration rate was 57 per 100,000 population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). The higher national female incarceration rate today would subsequently lead us to expect a higher number of released female prisoners today across the United States. In Oklahoma, 1,316 female offenders were released



from prison during the 2009 fiscal year. Of the 1,284 women who came into the Oklahoma prison system during the 2009 fiscal year, 184 had violated probation, and 22 had violated parole. There is no information available on how many of the remaining 1,068 women were previously incarcerated, but there is no doubt that this group contains recidivists as well (Oklahoma Department of Corrections Female Offender Operations, 2009).

While data exist on the numbers of female offenders incarcerated and released from prison, only limited data exist on recidivism levels of female offenders. Huebner et al. (2010) found that 47 percent of the women in their study were reconvicted or reincarcerated during their eight-year study, with most women reconvicted or reincarcerated within the first two years following their release from prison. Deschenes et al.'s (2006) research found that close to 60 percent of women are rearrested, almost 40 percent are reconvicted, and 30 percent are returned to prison within three years of their release from prison.

For Oklahoma, the most recent data show a female offender recidivism rate, over the three years following their release from prison, of 14.7 percent. Over a 53-month release period, the recidivism rate for female offenders was shown to be 22.5 percent, as compared to 33.6 percent for male offenders over the same time period (Oklahoma Female Offender Management Group, 2008). Finally, Spivak and Damphousse (2006) found that women in Oklahoma were 31.2 percent less likely to recidivate than male offenders in Oklahoma. Part of the

reason for the low recidivism rate is that Oklahoma incarcerates women who would not be sent to prison in other states and thus are less likely to be re-offenders.

Female offender reentry and recidivism issues consequently affect a large segment of the national population, as well as individual states', such as Oklahoma's, populations. It is thus important to understand what is causing women to return to prison, in order to avoid their recidivism and reincarceration and the many costs to society associated with these issues. Since this study focused on Oklahoma female offenders and their reentry and recidivism experiences, these women will be the focus of the following discussion. However, such consideration will be grounded against the findings in existing literature related to these issues. Also, while the findings from this sample concur with the limited existing literature on the issues influencing female reentry experiences and recidivism, there is no attempt made here to argue that these findings are entirely generalizable across the nation's population of female offenders. The issues that the women in this study reported encountering were related to families, abuse, adapting to changes in society upon their return, meeting their basic needs, paying debts, employment, housing, transportation, education, substance abuse, and health and medical needs.

The most expressed concern among the women in this study was reunification with their family and loved ones, especially children. These women

understood that their incarceration had devastating effects on their children, parents, siblings, and remaining significant others. These women's absence from their children was not typically described as something they desired; instead, it was often explained as based on the caretakers' inability to bring the children to visit the women in prison. Such caretakers' inability to bring the children to visit the women in prison was overwhelmingly reported as due to financial difficulties associated with traveling, especially for the women whose children lived far away. Yet other women described situations where caretakers did not want to bring the children to see them, because they were angry with the women and either did not want the children to see them, or did not want to invest the time and resources necessary to bring the children to visit them. These same reasons served to explain most of the women's lack of communication with their children through telephone calls, which they either reported as very expensive, or else very difficult to arrange in the face of family or caretaker hostility toward them.

Whether or not they were the children's primary caretakers before their incarceration, these women expressed serious challenges with gaining their children's trust upon their release from prison. Some of these trust issues among the children were related to these women's physical absence from their lives. However, other trust issues among these children had to do with the abuse and separation from siblings that these children suffered as a result of their mother's incarceration. Several of the women in this study explained that their children

had missed them during their absence; however, upon the women's return, these children were overwhelmed with happiness at seeing their mother again and with anger and hurt over what they perceived as their mother's abandonment of them. These women also reported seeing extreme anxiety among their children, to the point that the children would panic if their mothers left their sight. Such a perplexity of feelings among children resulted in these women's difficulties with interacting with their children and disciplining them.

Another issue that women had to deal with upon their release from prison revolved around the placement of their children during their incarceration. Most of these women reported their children being with one of their relatives, and some had the children lived with the children's father. These placement arrangements were not particularly problematic for women looking to regain custody after their release from prison. Yet some women had lost custody of their children, and they fretted about the possibility of finding their children and regaining custody of them upon their release from prison. Many of these women had already experienced difficulty in regaining custody of their children after their prior release from prison, so these situations involving custody of their children were all too familiar.

Compounding all of these issues between these women and their children was the typical female offender's inability to provide for her children upon her release from prison. Women knew the hurt and horrors they had inflicted upon

their children during their previous incarcerations, so when they came out of prison, the combination of their maternal instincts and their desperation to make up to their children the difficulties they had brought about for them led some of these women to turn back to crime. These women reported a willingness to go to any extent necessary, including crime, to ensure that their children had everything they needed and wanted. Such actions typically included drug sales and stealing.

Another issue women faced upon their release from prison was relationships with romantic partners, typically men. Whether or not these women were returning to the same men they had been involved with prior to their incarceration, most of the men in these women's lives, whether in the past or present, influenced the actions that brought these women back to prison. Almost all of the women in this study reported experiencing tremendous abuse from men throughout their lives, whether these men were caretakers when they were children or romantic partners as adults. Such abusive experiences lay the basis for what women tolerated as appropriate from men in their lives. Some women were reincarcerated based on the crimes they had committed with their boyfriends or husbands. Other women were incarcerated because their boyfriends or husbands let them take the blame for crimes which they actually had no part in. Some of these women were in prison due to crimes they had committed against the men in their lives because of abuse they had experienced at their hands.

All of these reports from women in this study are consistent with existing research findings. Female offenders report greater histories of abuse; feelings of abandonment by a parent; and lifetimes of violence, as compared to male offenders (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Comack & Brickey, 2007; Acoca, 1998). Research also documents the effects of female offenders' incarceration on their children, through these children's experiences with emotional volatility; abuse at the hands of caretakers; and problems in social settings from school to relationships with friends and future romantic partners (Hirsch, 2002; Mumola, 2000; Kampfner, 1995; Sharp, 2003). Bloom (1995), Mumola (2000), Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza (2001), Sharp (2008), Forsyth (2003), and Arditti and Few (2006) substantiate the numerous challenges incarcerated women face when seeking to reunite with their children. Bauer et al. (2006), Naser and Visser (2006), and Golden (2005) confirm the devastating effects of a woman's incarceration on her relationships with her family and significant others. Additionally, Austin et al. (2002) and Mumola (2000) corroborate the reasons behind the lack of physical contact and communication between female offenders and their children and families. Leverentz (2006a) documents the influence of a romantic relationship with a male on a woman's likelihood of committing a crime or recidivating.

Women released from prison also face several general reentry needs. The women in this study reported difficulties in adjusting to life outside of prison, as

they had moved from total control of their behavior by the prison to a forgotten level of freedom upon their release from prison. While many of the women were happy to leave prison, they felt they had been institutionalized, to the point that they could hardly function outside of prison. These women were not able to complete tasks that most people take for granted, like pumping gas, using a cell phone, or filling out job applications online or with a computer, because they had lost contact with changing technology while incarcerated. These women expressed having felt vulnerable, ridiculed, and overwhelmed with their inability to complete such tasks, as well as with their inability to function in the face of things like silence, space, and lack of structure to one's day, since those were all facets of life they had lacked exposure to while incarcerated. Also, despite the numerous restrictions the women in this study faced while incarcerated, they did acknowledge that, at least in prison, they had stable access to shelter, clothing, and food. Yet these women experienced significant stress upon their release from prison because they lacked these necessities, and they were unable to access them regularly based on financial limitations they faced upon reentering society.

These experiences also align with the findings in existing research about prisoner reentry and, when available, female offender reentry. Travis (2005), Travis and Visher (2005), Travis and Petersilia (2001), and Travis et al. (2001) document the typical reentry experiences of prisoners, complete with discussions of the multiple obstacles that they face to adapting back to society. Such

obstacles include readjusting to societal dynamics and lack of access to food, shelter, and clothing. Yet these researchers overwhelmingly focused on male reentry experiences. Severance (2004), Richie (2001), and Leverentz (2006b) specifically documented reentering female offenders' reports of facing overwhelming tasks and harsh environments immediately upon their release from prison. These researchers find that women reported greater levels of anxiety and lower levels of social support than incarcerated men upon their release from prison.

Many women in this study also reported numerous issues connected to their economic marginalization following their release from prison. These financial difficulties were related to their having to pay debts that they had accumulated prior to their incarceration or else based on the crime for which they were currently incarcerated. Financial stress also arose from their inability to find employment upon their release from prison. Here, women reported fines and fees related to traffic citations, medical bills, living expenses, or fines and fees assessed based on their criminal offending (i.e., court costs, restitution, supervision, etc.). Only one existing research study (Arditti & Few, 2006) could be found to corroborate these reports from the women in this study, signifying a potential new area of research for understanding female offenders and their reentry and recidivism issues.



The financially related issue that does have a lot of support in the literature is the difficulty that incarcerated women face with securing employment. Most of the women in this study reported this difficulty, citing the increased use of background checks over time as a huge obstacle to their employability. The women who reported such difficulty in securing employment after their release from prison believed that it was overwhelmingly due to their felony conviction and the resulting ex-felon status with which they were branded. These women shared how they were quick to be dismissed from employment consideration if they were honest about their criminal background. They were also quick to be fired if their felony status was discovered.

Also hampering these women's employment opportunities were the multiple time demands from the criminal justice system and their children. Some of these women reported having to report to various agencies to satisfy requirements from the criminal justice system. Such requirements involved substance abuse treatment, parenting classes, and parole supervision. Also, some of these women had to consider child obligations, like picking their children up from school and finding childcare for their children, while they searched for jobs or while they were working. The women reporting such difficulties eventually tended to either start lying about their felony background or else to retreat back to crime to survive economically.

Such reports are supported in the literature related to the impact of a felony conviction on employability. In terms of debts, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (2007) found that the average offender leaving prison had an average debt of \$3,500. Holtfreter et al. (2004) found that economic marginalization significantly increases a woman's likelihood of re-arrest. Travis (2005), Travis and Visser (2005), Travis and Petersilia (2001), Travis et al. (2001), Dietrich (2002), and Mukumal (2001) discuss the difficulties that returning offenders have in locating a job and overcoming employers' negative perceptions of ex-felons. These researchers found that former offenders' employability is impeded not only based on the stigma and employer bias they encounter, but also based on their lack of job history, employable skills, and low education levels, as compared to the general non-offender population (see also Hahn, 1991; Henry & Jacobs, 2007; and Piehl, 2003 for further discussion of the impact of a criminal background on offenders' employability). Pager (2003) found that a criminal record significantly impacts the applicant's likelihood of receiving an interview for an available position, with former criminals much less likely to receive an interview than individuals without a criminal background. Severance (2004) and Richie (2001) found that women with a criminal background do report difficulties in finding employment upon their release from prison as a major impediment to their success. Rose et al. (2008) verified the additional effect that time constraints had on returning female offenders' ability to

find and maintain employment, as the usual time constraints experienced by any individual were supplemented by criminal justice system requirements that absorbed a lot of these women's time.

Housing was another issue mentioned by most of the women in this study as a major obstacle to their success away from prison. These women understood the importance of housing for providing stability for them and their children, as well as for serving as a contact point for potential employment and social services. Yet many women in this study reported not having the financial resources to secure stable and safe housing upon their release from prison. Several women in this study reported being ineligible for housing assistance from state and federal housing agencies, and some women at least thought they were ineligible for such assistance, even if that was not the case. For the few women who were able to get housing assistance, they often stated that they had to get on waiting lists that were months-long or even a year-long. Furthermore, even if women had the resources to gain their own housing, several women shared discriminatory experiences from landlords not wishing to rent to ex-felons. Many women in this research reported that they received no assistance in securing housing prior to their release from prison.

These women were thus left homeless or else dependent on potentially dangerous or criminal people for housing. Some of the housing situations these women were forced to rely upon left them vulnerable to drugs, crime, and abusive

relationships. Some women were quite nomadic in their housing situations, moving from place to place with no idea of where they were going to be next. Other women resorted to sex to stay at a place for one night or for an extended period of time. Still other women endured abuse and known criminal activities because they felt they had no other options. One woman, Laci, was innovative and desperate enough, based on her medical conditions, that she lied about her situation to get into a battered women's shelter. While most of the women in this study tried to obtain housing through employment or relationships, several women eventually resumed their former criminal activities in order to generate enough money to put down deposits, pay rent, and pay their utilities.

These experiences with housing are substantiated by existing literature. Travis et al.'s (2001) research finds that the lack of financial resources; federal blocks on criminals receiving housing assistance; estrangement from family during incarceration; and landlords' reactions to a criminal conviction all serve to severely limit housing opportunities for returning former offenders. Such situations almost guarantee that returning prisoners will face homelessness sometime soon after their release from prison. O'Brien (2001) argues that the lack of affordable housing for reentering offenders is a major obstacle to these individuals' success away from prison. Leverentz (2006b) finds that returning female offenders, lacking financial and social resources, are typically forced to return to the very neighborhoods and living conditions that led them to crime in

the first place. The stress related to housing is further augmented by parole and child custody requirements that women maintain stable housing away from criminal activities or convicted felons (Leverentz, 2006b; Richie, 2001; O'Brien, 2001). In the face of such difficulties, combined with the difficulty of securing employment to pursue housing legitimately, it is not a surprise that women report turning back to crime to provide for this necessity.

Many of the women in this study also discussed the lack of transportation and its impact on their ability to succeed outside of prison. The women in this study reported anxiety related to transportation, because transportation was necessary to meet the parole requirements for staying out of prison, as well as to support themselves and their children. For these women, transportation was necessary to meet with parole officers; to find and maintain employment; to travel to social service agencies for assistance with basic needs; and to transport their children to school, medical appointments, and other necessary places. However, dependable transportation was difficult to access, as several of the women reported that the family and friends they had thought they could rely on for transportation assistance either grew tired of helping them, or else offered assistance only on the condition that these women pay them or engage in delinquent behavior with them. These women were thus left to rely on irregular or outright unavailable public transportation options, as they could not typically afford cab rides or their own transportation. Also, when a few of the women in

this study were able to purchase their own transportation, it tended to be older and in poor working condition, which eventually translated into it breaking down and these women being unable to afford the repairs.

Similar to the housing problems, these transportation crises left women vulnerable and dependent on potentially dangerous individuals and situations. Some women opted to hitchhike to get where they needed to go. Other women walked miles each way to reach their destinations. Yet both of these options, outside of public transportation, put these women in danger in several ways. When hitchhiking, some of the women in this study left themselves vulnerable to attack from their drivers and the drivers' passengers, especially in the cases where these women were leaving work extremely tired. Also, walking miles to a destination left these women open to similar risks from passersby. Walking long distances significantly endangered one woman's pregnancy in this study, as she was left extremely underweight during her entire pregnancy, and she lost consciousness a few times based on the extreme exertion she experienced from walking and lack of food. Overall, most of the women in this study expressed difficulties related to transportation upon their release from prison.

While transportation issues for released offenders are not well-documented in the literature, it is generally described as a concern impeding success for returning offenders. Travis (2005) and Baer et al. (2006) document that transportation issues are a major barrier to reentering prisoners' success.

Holtfreter et al. (2004) found that transportation issues, as connected to poverty status, are part of the explanation behind women's recidivism. Chesney-Lind (1997) also found that transportation difficulties can contribute to women's stress after leaving prison.

Education and programming were other factors mentioned by women in this study as contributing to their failure upon their release from prison. All of the women in this study reported wanting access to education and relevant programming, to improve their chances of success in employment and in personal and social endeavors. Yet most of the women expressed their view that there were not enough programs available for them to participate in while incarcerated. Their lack of involvement in programs, whether for education, vocational training, substance abuse treatment, or personal enrichment (i.e., parenting, finances, anger management), was further compromised by the existence of significant waitlists accompanying the programs that were available. Inmates felt that most waitlists were so long that they would get out of prison or be transferred before they got to participate in most programs.

Among the programs in which some of these women did get to participate, many were described as irrelevant and ineffective, based either on their outdated values and references; lack of qualified personnel and tested curricula; and irregularly-held meetings because of volunteer staffing. Another issue related to programming that a few women mentioned as problematic for them was their

perception that many of the programs offered to them were run primarily by faith-based organizations. One of the women, in particular, expressed her belief that this was in violation of the Constitution's First Amendment guarantee of separation of church and state, and she shared her feelings that the prison officials essentially forced women to participate in such faith-based activities.

Regardless of who was running the programs for these women, most of these women's views that they came out of such programming opportunities having gained no skills or rehabilitation translated into their feeling that they were sent out of prison, before, unprepared and unqualified to succeed educationally, vocationally, personally, and socially. Such perceptions about their current programming also bode ill for their potential to succeed after their current incarceration.

Incarcerated individuals' needs for education and programming are well-documented in the literature. Petersilia (2003) shows that two-thirds of prisoners released have not received any vocational or educational services while incarcerated. Travis and Visser (2005) further discuss how lack of education and programming is related to individuals' recidivism. Wilson et al. (2000) found that participation in prison programs reduced recidivism rates, with the greatest recidivism decrease related to educational program involvement. Gaes (2008) and Steurer and Smith (2003) also found that educational programming in prison is related to lower recidivism rates.



Specifically related to this research, incarcerated women tend to be undereducated and lacking in vocational skills, as compared to male offenders (Brown, 2006; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Richie, 2001). Bloom and McDiarmid (2000) state that two of the greatest needs among female offenders are education and training in job and parenting skills. Bloom (1995) and Bloom et al. (2003) argue that female offenders benefit from programming related to substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, pregnancy, parenting, relationships, and overall training to empower women and promote coping and decision-making skills away from dependency on men and crime. Related to female recidivism, women's educational and vocational limitations put women more at risk of offending for economic reasons than men (Heilbrun et al., 2008; Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008; Rose et al., 2008). Finally, Torre and Fine (2005) found that educational participation in prison reduced recidivism among female inmates.

Women in this study also reported substance abuse histories and the failure of the criminal justice system to provide them with adequate treatment, or even, sometimes, any treatment. Similar to the discussion above on prison programming, all of the women in this study who had substance abuse histories expressed wanting treatment. However, the women in this study described substance abuse treatment programs as irrelevant, ineffective, and poorly staffed and organized. Many of the women in this study shared that these programs were often left to unqualified volunteers or fellow inmates to run.

Regardless of who was running the program, all of the women in this study who reported needing such treatment communicated the difficulty of getting any treatment, based on significant waiting lists. Several of these women, then, left prison with no substance abuse treatment, or poor treatment if they did receive any. The women in this study who had substance abuse issues stated that they soon returned to drugs and alcohol after their release from prison, because they lacked the coping skills and self-control to resist almost daily exposure to drugs and alcohol.

The substance abuse histories among incarcerated women are well-documented in the literature. Fazel et al. (2006), Baer et al. (2006), and Conly (1998) found that incarcerated women have more serious and persistent issues with substance abuse than incarcerated men. Belknap (2003, 2007) and Pollock (2002) found that women are more likely than men to report using drugs to “self-medicate” against abusive and economically desperate situations. Yet treatment in women’s prisons is severely deficient (Kelley, 2003; Mauer & King, 2007; Young & Reviere, 2006). Laux et al. (2008) support the argument that women find substance abuse treatment during incarceration nearly impossible to access. Conly (1998) further states that women tend to turn to crime to support their substance abuse. Lattimore et al. (2005) and Richie (2001) argue that substance abuse treatment in prison is related to lower recidivism rates.

The final issues the women in this study reported struggling with in prison and after their release from prison involved health and medical needs. Women reported coming into prison with injuries, chronic physical illnesses, and mental health issues and not receiving adequate treatment, thereby leaving them to suffer from their conditions during their incarceration. Women who reported contracting an illness during their incarceration also reported not receiving adequate diagnoses or treatment for their conditions, leading to the worsening of their health and irreparable physical damage. Furthermore, women reported leaving prison with no transitional medical assistance, so that they were left to fend for themselves to secure medication and necessary medical attention. Also, a few of the women got pregnant during their time away from prison, and they were left without access to prenatal care and even food sometimes, because they lacked insurance and financial resources to access these necessities. Some of the women dealing with these physical and mental health issues reported that they returned to crime to be able to afford the medical attention and medicines that they needed to manage their conditions.

These accounts are also substantiated by existing literature. Belknap (2007) finds that incarcerated women possess significant physical and mental health issues based on their higher likelihoods of substance abuse and living in poverty, the latter of which translates into their lacking medical care and adequate nutrition and health information. Messina and Grella (2006) find that

incarcerated women's health is also negatively affected by childhood traumas connected to abuse and household dysfunction. Incarcerated women have higher rates of chronic illness, breast cancer, and mental health issues, and they also have unique health concerns of pregnancy, cervical cancer, and menopause, as compared to men (NCCHC, 2002; Maruschak, 2008). Yet Anderson (2003), Belknap (2007), Moe (2006), Harlow (1998), and Teplin et al. (1997) find that women are not getting adequate physical and mental health medical attention while incarcerated. Ammar and Weaver (2005) interviewed incarcerated women who expressed that they did not get the medical attention that they needed, and they reported that the limited medical attention they did receive lacked dignity and compassion in the health professionals' interactions with them. Vigilante et al. (1999) found that transitional health services for incarcerated women were associated with lower recidivism rates.

### *Theoretical Concurrence*

Overall, then, the findings of this research are supported by existing literature related to prisoner reentry, in general, and female offenders' issues toward reentry and recidivism, specifically. This research is also in line with existing theoretical explanations for female offending and the need to consider female offenders' issues separately from male offenders' issues. These women's reports of experiencing strains conducive to crime as related to lifetimes of abuse

and neglect; racism; sexism; poverty; and troubled relationships with their children, family, and romantic partners falls under the gendered consideration of General Strain Theory, as studied by Broidy and Agnew (1997), Sharp et al. (2005), Belknap (2007), Acoca (1998), and Miller (2001). The current research also supports these researchers' findings that women are more likely to express their strain through self-destructive behavior like substance abuse. Also in line with Chesney-Lind's (2006) and Sharp and Hefley's (2007) theoretical argument that women have been marginalized in the study of crime, women in this study expressed feeling left out of research and program creation efforts, which they felt communicated the low priority that female offenders received in the criminal justice system. In fact, most of the women expressed surprise that this researcher was allowed into the prison to conduct this research, with several of these women sharing that they had never heard of a researcher, aside from the chair connected to this research, who had ever been into the facility to inquire about women's experiences with crime or incarceration.

Many women in this study felt that incarcerated men received the preponderance of research efforts, with the result being programs tailored to their needs and not female offenders' needs. One of the most reported causes of crime in this research sample, economically supporting themselves and children, also appears to be a unique motivation for female offenders, as compared to male offenders. Additionally, the standpoint method used in this research (as explained

by Flavin, 2001 and Daley, 1997) allowed for the discovery of previously unelaborated experiences among the female offenders in this study. Specifically, these two areas that have been left largely unexplored among female offenders' experiences involve: (1) the role that institutionalization, frustration, and discouragement play in female offender reentry and recidivism; and (2) the impact of debts on female offenders' chances of succeeding after their release from prison.

Finally, in terms of theoretical arguments calling for consideration of intersectionality (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Brown, 2006; Belknap, 2007), women in this study reported experiencing multiple marginalizations in prison and upon their release from prison, based on their potential and intersecting statuses of woman, lesbian, poor, undereducated, unemployed, unmarried, minority, criminal, drug addict, alcoholic, and non-Christian. The findings of this research and their theoretical implications thus go far to explain why women are involved in crime and what they are facing while incarcerated and when they leave prison.

### *Recommendations for Change*

This research subscribes to the reintegrative shaming arguments proposed by Braithwaite (1989), in his restorative justice model. Currently, the shame and ostracism that the women in this study report, caused by their criminal backgrounds, their incarceration history, and their felony convictions, fall under

Braithwaite's discussion of disintegrative shaming. The women in this study also provided evidence of Braithwaite's next assertion, that exclusion from legitimate and conventional activities, such as education and employment, left these women with few options outside of criminal recidivism to survive economically and socially. These women's experiences are further supported by research by Chiricos et al. (2007) and Dodge and Pogrebin (2001). Since the existing tactics of disintegrative shaming have done nothing to alleviate the reentry experiences and recidivism levels of reentering female offenders, this research supports the use of Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming as the basis for modeling solutions for these women.

Braithwaite (1989) argues that reintegrative shaming succeeds in decreasing crime by convincing individuals that their delinquency will hurt others and will therefore lead to social disapproval, thereby playing upon individuals' needs for acceptance and companionship. This approach should bode especially well for female offenders, based on existing feminist researchers' assertions that women place greater emphasis on successful relationships with others (Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Sharp et al., 2005; Belknap, 2007). Through this reintegrative shaming approach, individuals are held accountable for their actions, but they are forgiven and reaccepted into society after they have met constructive conditions for their rehabilitation and for righting their wrong to society. This research will now provide policy recommendations based on this reintegrative shaming

approach, with the ultimate effort of eliminating negative reentry experiences and thereby reducing their recidivism.

The overwhelming issue responsible for these women's difficulties in succeeding after their release from prison is connected to their having been labeled as an ex-felon. To eliminate the consequences stemming from this negative label, more deferred sentencing should be implemented to deal with first-time offenders. Upon these offenders' successful completion of community service, treatment, restitution, and other rehabilitative measures as dictated by the court, those offenders' criminal records should be sealed and eligible for free expungement after two years. If a person offends more than once, or if the first offense is violent and/or severe enough to merit incarceration, the issues encountered by the women in this study should be addressed accordingly.

The women in this study reported experiencing tremendous difficulties related to maintaining contact and relationships with their children and family while incarcerated. Such difficulties resulted in negative effects not only for the incarcerated women, but also for their children and family members. To eliminate these negative consequences, several changes could take place. First, incarcerated women's phone calls should be made much more affordable for them and their families, by the state Department of Corrections negotiating a lower, more reasonable rate to encourage such communication. If women or their families are indigent enough to not be able to afford phone communication



despite lowered call rates, funds should be allocated at the state level to allow these women and their families to continue to interact, up until the point in time where the inmate can afford to pay for a portion or all of these phone calls.

Another action that can be taken to improve contact between women, their children, and their family members during these women's incarceration is to implement secured video conferencing capabilities between prisons and communities across the United States. With cheap and rapidly developing webcam and Internet technologies (like Skype) widely available today, there is no reason why these advancements cannot be implemented to alleviate the stresses of communication between inmates and their children and families. It is understandable that inmates and their family members should not be left unmonitored during such interactions. For this reason, monitored and secured video conferencing stations should be set up in commonly accessible public locations, like public libraries, courthouses, and schools and universities across the United States, to make the distance necessary to interact with an incarcerated loved one feasible, economically and geographically. This practice is already in existence at the Decatur Correctional Center for women in Decatur, Illinois, through the Parent & Child Together Video Conferencing program, and it has allowed women and their families to interact despite the offender's incarceration (Decatur Correctional Center, 2010). Prior to the implementation of this technology, such interaction was virtually impossible, based on the requirement

that children and family members travel hundreds of miles and spend money and time that they did not typically have.

Other actions, conducive to preserving maternal bonds with children and maintaining family connections, have already been implemented around the United States, albeit sparingly. This involves creating programs allowing children and family to visit the incarcerated women for entire days, or even weekends or a week, for specialty camps consisting of fun activities and rehabilitative therapeutic programs for the women, children, and their families to participate in together. While such programs do exist, they should be expanded across female prison facilities, to spread the benefits of such interactions and activities across larger numbers of female offenders, their children, and their family members.

A final step that should be taken to improve relationships between incarcerated women, children, and their family members, as well as help all of these individuals to deal with histories of abuse and other difficulties, involves individual and family counseling being offered to the women in prison, as well as to their children and family members. Individual counseling could take place at the prison for the female offender, and it could take place in the home community for the children and family members directly affected by the woman's incarceration. Family counseling could then be offered at the prison for the women and their children; for the women and their family members; and for the women, children, and family members together. Family counseling could also be

offered for the children and family members together within their home community. Money should be allocated in a special budget to fund the children's and family's transportation to the prison for such counseling if they cannot afford it, as well as for visitation in general. Such transportation expenses could be decreased through the use of busses, regularly scheduled to travel along certain paths to pick up interested family members. Also, since these children and family members might be staying for multiple days, near-prison living suites should be constructed to house them during their stay.

To deal with the institutionalization and accompanying fear, frustration, and anger that the women in this study reported experiencing upon their release from prison, transitional programs should be created and implemented to help to ease these women's entry back into society. Recently released women should be interviewed at specific intervals following their release from prison, not only to follow-up on their experiences and needs, but also to learn about the things that women who are about to leave prison will face and will need addressed prior to their release. Such transitional programs should offer one-on-one counseling between these women and qualified, professional reentry counselors, to deal with their feelings of fear and panic, as well as to offer guidance about and contacts for resources available at the specific locations to which they plan to be released.

This transitional assistance should also include the introduction of the soon-to-be-released inmate to a mentor that she can contact within the community

to which she plans to be released. Such a pairing of inmate and mentor could be made based on an inventory administered ahead of time, attempting to pair individuals of similar interests, family backgrounds, etc. Contact should be maintained with both the inmate and the mentor to ensure that they are both upholding their end of the relationship, after their initial encounter in prison and following the inmate's release from prison. This recommendation is made based on the women in this study stating that such a mentor would have been greatly beneficial in their navigating society after their release from prison and avoiding problematic behaviors adopted to cope with the stress and anxiety they were facing alone when newly entering society.

To deal with the basic needs that the women in this study expressed being released without, every prison should make it a common practice to release women with enough clothes and shoes to accommodate them for a week. Such clothing and shoe ensembles should consist of clothing for casual occasions, business interactions, and semi-formal social occasions like church or family functions. These women should also be released with luggage to transport their clothing, as well as enough personal hygiene products to carry them through one month. Released women should also have access arranged to a laundromat in their community, to allow these women to have their clothes washed for a few weeks. These women should also be released with food and housing assistance arrangements in place within their community when they arrive after prison.

Finally, released women should have access to a local community salon to receive personal grooming services for a few weeks, to allow them to preserve their pride and self-esteem as they attempt to secure employment and other available social assistance for themselves and their children, where applicable.

In terms of paying debts, prison officials should work with incarcerated women, immediately upon their reception, to calculate their outstanding debts at that time. This will give the women and the prison officials the ability to understand the scope of these women's debts and to best work at reducing or even eliminating such debts. To help toward this end, incarcerated women should be paid for their work in prison at rates comparable to what they would be paid outside of prison. This increase in income for these women could be used, partly, toward the repayment of these debts while these women are incarcerated. The remaining income could be split into savings to access upon release; money to be sent to children; and necessities in prison. If women have been working hard while incarcerated to pay their debts, yet they still face significant debt upon release from prison, they should be provided with legal assistance and amended bankruptcy laws to allow them to seek the waiver of some of these debts. A calculation should be made at that time of what each woman can reasonably expect to pay when leaving prison, and that calculated figure should be revisited within a month and periodically throughout the first year of the woman's release from prison, to ensure that the woman is paying her remaining debts while not

experiencing extreme financial duress from an unexpected difficulty in gaining or maintaining employment or dealing with an unexpected crises.

To deal with released female offenders' challenges in gaining employment, increased public awareness campaigns should take place to inform employers of the many economic benefits associated with hiring an ex-felon. Such benefits should simultaneously be expanded, to encourage employers to give these individuals, as well as other marginalized individuals, a chance to prove themselves. To improve their employability, as well as to address their educational and vocational needs, incarcerated women should be tested for educational and vocational capabilities immediately upon their reception into the criminal justice system, to help prison education officials create a customized education plan for each offender. These offenders should have access to effective educational and vocational training opportunities, including a college education. The state Department of Corrections should then work to arrange offenders' transitions from prison into a place of employment in the community to which they will be released. Department of Corrections officials should then maintain contact with the released offender and the employer to which she was released, to ensure that they are both benefitting from the arrangement. If either party is not satisfied with the pairing, an alternative arrangement can be made for the offender. If it is discovered that the female offender is at fault for the employers' dissatisfaction with the arrangement, that offender can receive additional

education and training, until either that person finds employment, or until that person has proven problematic enough to consider incarceration as a punishment for her inability to meet multiple employers' needs.

To deal with released women's housing issues, as mentioned previously, arrangements for stable, safe, and affordable housing should be arranged for these women within the community to which they wish to be released. These arrangements should include coverage of a few months of rent and utilities, to allow the woman sufficient time to secure employment. If the woman can prove that she has worked hard to find employment but has been unable to do so, she can apply for an extension of her housing and utilities benefits until she can find a job, and, even then, until she can afford to pay all of those expenses. If the woman chooses to return, after prison, to a housing situation with a family member or a friend, that housing situation should be thoroughly investigated prior to the woman's release to that location. If it is found to be suitable, that arrangement should still be followed-up on every month, to ensure the safety of the former offender and her fellow occupants in that dwelling. A woman living with someone else should also receive assistance to cover her part of the rent and utilities, until she is able to do so on her own.

To deal with the transportation issues reported by the women in this study, women should be helped to fully understand any public transportation systems present in the communities to which they are relocating after their release from

prison. Such an understanding can involve providing the offender with maps during her incarceration, as well as providing her with the assistance of her mentor during her first few rides through the system. If a comprehensive public transportation system is not available in the community to which this inmate is relocating after her release, arrangements should be made with transportation options available to the disabled or elderly in the community, to allow these former offenders to partake of these options until they are able to get back on their feet enough to find their own transportation.

To address the absence of relevant programs and the existence of long waiting lists for much-needed programs for incarcerated women, more professionals should be hired to offer such programs within the prisons. Also, local and state colleges and universities should be approached about conducting program evaluations to assess the effectiveness of existing and proposed new programs for female offenders. Asking local colleges and universities to conduct such program evaluations provides two benefits: (1) It opens up research and service opportunities for faculty and students; (2) It eliminates the costs associated with program evaluations. At least two colleges should conduct a separate evaluation for each program, and the colleges and universities conducting these program evaluations would be held publicly accountable for their results, to discourage biased or uninformed findings from being released and potentially influencing the programs offered in prison to these women.



Ineffective programs should be immediately eliminated, and programs should be implemented only after thorough evaluations are conducted to find them beneficial for incarcerated women.

Substance abuse among incarcerated women should also be addressed through the implementation of significant changes. First, most of the women who initially encounter the criminal justice system based on substance abuse issues should be considered through a drug court, instead of facing incarceration. Every sentence from the drug court should include thorough counseling to identify the causes of the substance abuse, as well as the best ways to address those causes. If treatment and rehabilitation through the drug court are not achieved after this first encounter, then such a female offender can face incarceration. Yet personalized substance abuse treatment, at the hands of professionals, should continue within the prison for each woman. Furthermore, whether following the drug court sentencing or incarceration, every woman should receive transitional assistance with her substance abuse issues. That transitional assistance can include continuing substance abuse counseling and treatment, as well as guidance to local support groups addressing the causes behind each woman's substance abuse problems.

Finally, to deal with the health and medical issues that women reported in this study, health and medical services should be overhauled within the prison system across states and the federal government. This overhaul should include

the drafting of a national prisoners' health bill of rights by a board of diverse medical, health policy, and criminal justice professionals and academics. This health bill of rights should include implementable consequences for prison and Department of Corrections officials' failure to recognize these rights among prisoners. This overhaul should also include a mandatory screening of every female offender, upon reception into the prison system, for injuries, chronic illnesses, mental health issues, STDs, as well as gynecological, breast, vision, and dental health. Any issues discovered at this initial screening should be promptly and thoroughly addressed, with the best treatment available, during the woman's incarceration period. Every inmate should be allowed a timely visit to an outside medical professional if she would like a second opinion on a potentially significant health issue. Preventative screenings for incarcerated women should be scheduled in accordance to nationally accepted standards. Incarcerated women should be required to pay for a portion of their medical services and medications, based on the amount of income they are making and the various legitimate ways in which that income is being spent. Any money able to be devoted to frivolous items, such as commissary items, must be largely used to pay for medical services.

In preparing for these women's release from prison, arrangements should be made for physically and mentally chronically ill inmates to continue their treatment and medication up until the time when they are seen as capable of

paying for a portion or all of these medical expenses. Additionally, all inmates should be released from prison with health insurance coverage that will continue until they are able to afford a portion or all of the coverage on their own. Related to these inmates' medical needs, programs should be offered in prison to inform the women about healthy practices related to nutrition, cooking, health screenings, dental health, parenting, relationships, dealing with stress, and other beneficial and preventative health lessons, to best prepare them to handle these issues on their own when they leave prison.

This researcher recognizes the immense costs associated with implementing these changes in prison practices and policy across the United States. However, one of the mantras in dealing with social problems consists of paying now (through preventative efforts) or paying later (with reactionary measures), with even greater costs associated with paying later. Such costs are not only economic in nature, but also social in terms of the negative effects brought about through the continuation of such problematic practices toward incarcerated women; their children and family members; and their communities at large. With the women in this research devoting their time to sharing the obstacles they encountered to succeeding upon their release from prison, the least that can be done is to consider the implications of overhauling our existing and largely punitive societal reactions, practices, and policies toward incarcerated

women, versus maintaining and possibly worsening this situation for incarcerated women and the people and communities connected to them.

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## Appendix A

### Federal Certificate of Confidentiality

#### CONFIDENTIALITY CERTIFICATE

MH-07-098

issued to

University of Oklahoma

conducting research known as

**“A Needs Analysis of Recidivating Female Offenders in Oklahoma”**

In accordance with the provisions of section 301(d) of the Public Health Service Act 42 U.S.C. 241(d), this Certificate is issued in response to the request of the Principal Investigator, Susan Sharp, Ph.D., and her doctoral candidate, Ms. Juanita Ortiz, to protect the privacy of research subjects by withholding their identities from all persons not connected with this research. Dr. Sharp and Ms. Ortiz are primarily responsible for the conduct of this research.

Under the authority vested in the Secretary of Health and Human Services by section 301(d), all persons who:

1. are enrolled in, employed by, or associated with the University of Oklahoma and its contractors or cooperating agencies, and
2. have in the course of their employment or association access to information that would identify individuals who are the subjects of the research pertaining to the project known as “A Needs Analysis of Recidivating Female Offenders in Oklahoma”,

are hereby authorized to protect the privacy of the individuals who are the subjects of that research by withholding their names and other identifying characteristics from all persons not connected with the conduct of that research.

This behavioral research study examines factors associated with female offenders’ return to prison. The study investigates experiences, conditions, and needs surrounding prisoner’s recidivism. Approximately 50 incarcerated women will be recruited from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

A Certificate of Confidentiality is needed because sensitive information about mental health, substance use, illegal activity and psychological well-being will be collected during the course of the study. The certificate will help researchers avoid involuntary disclosure that could expose subjects or their families to adverse economic, legal, psychological and social consequences.

Page 2 – Confidentiality Certificate

All subjects will be assigned a coded number and identifying information and records will be kept in locked files.

This research is underway, and is expected to end on August 31, 2008.

As provided in section 301 (d) of the Public Health Service Act 42 U.S.C. 241(d):

"Persons so authorized to protect the privacy of such individuals may not be compelled in any Federal, State, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings to identify such individuals."

This Certificate does not protect you from being compelled to make disclosures that: (1) have been consented to in writing by the research subject or the subject's legally authorized representative; (2) are required by the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (21 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) or regulations issued under that Act; or (3) have been requested from a research project funded by NIH or DHHS by authorized representatives of those agencies for the purpose of audit or program review.

This Certificate does not represent an endorsement of the research project by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Certificate is now in effect and will expire on August 31, 2008. The protection afforded by this Confidentiality Certificate is permanent with respect to any individual who participates as a research subject (i.e., about whom the investigator maintains identifying information) during any time the Certificate is in effect.

Date of Issuance: August 6, 2007



Patrick Shirdon  
Acting Executive Officer



## **Appendix B**

### **Subject Recruitment Letter**

November 11, 2007

Dear Potential Research Participant:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma Sociology Department. I am conducting research under the supervision of Professor Susan Sharp on what causes women prisoners to return to prison. Returning to prison and problems with returning to society are big problems in our society today, and this study focuses on finding out what might help women like you to avoid future returns to prison. You were selected for this study based on the criteria of being a woman who has returned to prison within 3 years after your last incarceration. Your experiences would be helpful in understanding what causes women to return to prison. I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences.

If you choose to participate, I will interview you at your facility, as a face-to-face interview with you. This interview will take place sometime between November 19-December 21, 2007. Your involvement will be entirely voluntary, with few risks involved with your participation in this study. If you agree to participate, the interview should not take more than two hours. The questions are quite general about your experiences before, during, and after your incarcerations. However, you may refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. All information you provide will be considered confidential. Your name will never be used in any publications or presentations. Additionally, you will be protected by a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality. This will prevent anyone from forcing me to tell them what you said.

When I arrive at your facility, I will ask you if you are willing to participate in this study. At that time, you can ask me any questions that you have about this study before agreeing to participate.

Thank you for considering participating in this subject. I look forward to meeting you soon.

Sincerely,

Juanita Ortiz

University of Oklahoma  
Sociology Department  
780 Van Vleet Oval  
Kaufman Hall, Rm. 331  
Norman, OK 73019  
(405) 325-1751

## **Appendix C**

### **Informed Consent Form**

**University of Oklahoma  
Institutional Review Board  
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Project Title:** A Needs Analysis of Recidivating Female Offenders in Oklahoma

**Principal Investigator:** Juanita Ortiz

**Department:** Sociology

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been identified as a female offender in the state of Oklahoma who has returned to prison within the past three years.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

#### **Purpose of the Research Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors associated with female offenders' returning to prison. Your responses will help identify the causes behind women's returning to prison in Oklahoma. This study focuses on discovering what services female offenders who are re-entering society need in order to avoid returning to prison.

#### **Number of Participants**

Approximately 25 women will take part in this study.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions that focus on your experiences while formerly incarcerated and also while you were released from prison. Examples of the types of questions you will be asked is What types of needs did you have when you re-entered society?, Why did you come back to prison this time? Were you convicted of a new offense? If so, what? Or, did you commit a new crime but were returned due to a parole violation? Or, did you come back to prison based on a parole violation only? Tell me about this., and What drug issues did you have after you were released from prison?

**Length of Participation**

Your participation in this study will take no longer than two hours.

**This study has the following risks:**

To minimize any risk to you, a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality has been obtained. All of your identifying information will be kept confidential, and it will be stored in a separately locked location. All of your identifying information will be destroyed immediately following the transcription of this interview. This study will involve probing for personal or sensitive information through an interview, which may make you sad or uncomfortable. I will also be asking about your behavior while out of prison that may not be known to the criminal justice system. To address these risks, you are free to refuse to answer any questions during the interview. You are also free to terminate the interview at any time. If you experience any stress from this interview, you should seek counseling through the regular prison channels. Finally, to minimize the risks of providing information that may be unknown to the criminal justice system, I have gained a Certificate of Confidentiality to prevent my forced disclosure about any of the information that you offer in this interview.

**Benefits of this study:**

There is no direct benefit to participating in this study, although you may help the legislature, re-entry counselors and the Department of Corrections improve their understanding of the factors contributing to female offenders returning to prison. There is a long-term benefit to society and offenders through identifying causes of why people return to prison that may be used to help develop more effective reentry programs. Participation in this research will have no effect on your parole status.

**Confidentiality**

In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include the OU Institutional Review Board.

To help us protect your privacy, we have obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. With this Certificate, the researchers cannot be forced to disclose information that may identify you, even by a court subpoena, in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. The researchers will use the Certificate to resist any

demands for information that would identify you, except as explained below. The Certificate cannot be used to resist a demand for information from personnel of the United States Government that is used for auditing or evaluation of Federally funded projects.

You should understand that a Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about yourself or your involvement in this research. If an insurer, employer, or other person obtains your written consent to receive research information, then the researchers may not use the Certificate to withhold that information.

The Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent the researchers from disclosing voluntarily, without your consent, information that would identify you as a participant in the research project under the following circumstances: If you report previously unreported abuse of a child, this will be reported to the appropriate authorities; or, if you give us information that indicates a serious threat of harm to yourself or someone else, it will be reported to authorities.

In other words, a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality protects you from anyone finding out what you tell me during the interview with those two exceptions. You can tell people that you participated and what you said, but I cannot unless you give me written permission. Additionally, nobody, including a court or the Department of Corrections, can force me to tell them what you said. The only exception is that if you report current child abuse to me or information that indicates a serious threat of harm to yourself or someone else, I will report that.

The Certificate of Confidentiality is not an endorsement of the project by the Department of Health and Human Services, US Government.

### **Costs**

There is no cost for your participation in this study.

### **Rights**

Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decline to participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

### **Waivers of Elements of Confidentiality**

Your name will not be linked with your responses. Please select one of the following options.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being quoted directly.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being quoted directly.

### **Audio Recording of Study Activities**

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

I consent to audio recording.     \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

### **Contacts and Questions**

If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at (405) 325-1751 or pig@ou.edu. You can also contact Dr. Susan Sharp, my advisor, at (405) 325-2829 or ssharp@ou.edu.

Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions or if you have experienced a research-related injury.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.***

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

---

Signature

Date

## **Appendix D**

### **List of Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about your prior incarceration(s).
2. How many times have you come back to prison since your original incarceration?
3. Why did you come back to prison this time? Were you convicted of a new offense? If so, what? Or, did you commit a new crime but were returned due to a parole violation? Or, did you come back to prison based on a parole violation only? Tell me about this.
4. What types of programs did you participate in your last time in prison?
5. What types of programs did you participate in while you were out of prison?
6. Describe for me your experience of going back into society.
7. How did your prison experience affect any relationships that you had prior to your incarceration?
8. What types of needs did you have when you re-entered society?
9. Tell me about any types of programs that you think would have helped you stay out of prison this last time that you came back.
10. Tell me about your job search experience after your release from prison.
  - a. If out of work for any period of time, why do you think you were not able to find work?
11. How did you handle your criminal background situation when looking for employment, housing, or in any other situation?
12. Tell me about your housing situation when you got out of prison.
13. What types of problems did you have getting medical services or medicine after your release from prison?
14. What transportation issues did you have when you got out of prison?



15. What drug issues did you have after you were released from prison?

16. Tell me about any social or community groups that you were involved with after your release from prison.

17. Tell me about your relationship with your children before, during, and after your incarceration.