

Summary Workshop Women in Prison: Risk Factors and Consequences

On the 17th of June 2013 the Phoolan Devi Institute organized an international conference on the topic of incarcerated women. Several well-known international researchers came together to present their work on one of the following three themes: (1) *gendered/female pathways into prison*, (2) *maternal incarceration and consequences for child wellbeing*, and (3) *reintegration, resettlement and desistance among women*.

Gendered/female pathways into prison

The day kicked off with a marvelous introduction by Candace Kruttschnitt, who discussed the past and current developments within the research field of gendered pathways into prison and age of onset. This presentation was followed by Katharina Joosen who presented the Dutch VIP project on gendered pathways to prison in The Netherlands. After giving an outline of the design of the VIP study, she also presented some initial results from an analyses of a combined sample of individuals who had been institutionalized in childhood and/or adolescence. Comparing males and females showed that the males in this high risk sample were more likely to be incarcerated one year later if they were homeless and/or addicted to soft drugs. For females *hard* drug addiction and homelessness were related to an increased chance for incarceration one year later.

Joanne Belknap followed up with her presentation on the life histories of U.S. female detainees and the impact of trauma and severe mental illness on the lives of these women. She presented findings showing that a large majority of the women in her study had either witnessed violence or had been exposed to multiple types of victimization themselves. Her results also showed that almost half of the women in the sample suffered from a severe mental illness (in a majority of cases PTSD). Last, female detainees who had committed a violent offense more often suffered from a severe mental illness. After Joanne, Jody Miller took the floor and presented some of the findings from a study conducted in Sri Lanka at the Methsevana House of Detention. Women detained in this prison are generally convicted of illegal bootlegging and sex work-related offenses. Furthermore, Jody discussed that the majority of these Sri Lankan women get involved in sex work due to economic motives. Last, An Nuytiens gave a presentation on the qualitative interviews she administered with detained women in Belgium. One of the findings she presented was that when asked about the reasons for their crimes and incarceration, female detainees put most of the emphasis on the men in their lives stating that: 'Men are to blame for it all'.

Maternal incarceration and consequences for child wellbeing

In the afternoon Jane Siegel took the floor and discussed her work on the impact of maternal incarceration on child wellbeing. She stressed that studies show high levels of emotional difficulties in children of incarcerated mothers. However, she emphasized that it remains difficult to unravel the specific effects of detention on the development and wellbeing of children because these children are frequently exposed to risk factors for emotional problems prior to the detention of their mothers

(e.g., family violence, parental addiction). This relationship is further complicated by their mothers incarceration, as many children experience instability in their living/housing situation – a factor underlined by Sanne Hissel's research. According to her study, for children whose mothers are incarcerated a change in caregiver is almost always accompanied by a change in their living situation. However, this finding was qualified by Sara Wakefield who showed that children with an incarcerated mother often experience an improvement in their living situation as compared to the situation prior their mother's detention.

Reintegration, resettlement and desistance among women

During the last part of the day, both Jennifer Cobbina and Gillian McIvor focused on the topics of reintegration and resettlement. According to Jennifer a successful reintegration after incarceration is mainly due to a supportive family, positive contacts with the probation officer, and good access to post-release services. Reintegration was likely to be *unsuccessful* when these factors were missing from the women's lives or when they experienced a sense of competing demands. Gillian complemented these findings with some of her own results, that pointed out women's housing situation is especially crucial for a successful reintegration. Furthermore, desistance was found among women who took care of children, stayed away from drugs, rebuilt their lives and had a strong motivation to avoid future detention. Desistance is also the focus of a new study being set up by Elanie Rodermond. She emphasized that most of our knowledge on desistance is based on male samples and additional studies are needed to determine what exactly contributes to desistance among female (ex)offenders. The day was wrapped up by a presentation of Catrien Bijleveld, who presented findings from the 17UP study on the possible gendered impact of detention on romantic relationships. Preliminary analyses of the 17UP data showed that for both males and females the chances for a steady relationship were diminished when they had been incarcerated in the same year.