Women, criminality and multifocal empowerment responses: some prospects for Botswana

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ABSTRACT

Although the overall agenda of the women's movement is committed to recognizing the needs and aspirations of women and ending gender-based inequality, issues concerning women and crime have always been ignored. This paper documents the situation of women in prison in Botswana. Although the proportion of prisoners who are women is relatively small, women constitute a growing subset of the entire prison population whose needs are different from those of men. Whereas factors that draw women to criminal activities may not differ markedly for men and women, women's crime is a reaction to the special circumstances of their prolonged victimization and dispossession. The paper explores how prisons have historically served to enforce and reinforce women's traditional roles and to foster dependency and passivity. The paper combines empirical evidence collected through qualitative research conducted in six female prisons in Botswana with feminist and empowerment models used to highlight the personal experiences and psychosocial problems of women in prison. We argue for the development of gender-appropriate and gender-sensitive social services in education, economic and personal empowerment, legal aid, medical and counselling, among others, in order to help women prisoners take control of their lives.

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THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE for Women (1975–1985), the Lagos Plan for International Development of Africa (1980–2000) and the United Nations Assembly Resoution 44/211 were major steps toward raising awareness of women's needs and their socioeconomic development. Over the past two decades women have made energetic efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard in their respective countries and in international forums, culminating in the United Nations Beijing Conference for Women in 1995, which emphasized mainstreaming gender in the sociopolitical and economic agenda. Although the overall agenda of the women's movement and social action has expressed a commitment to ending gender-based inequality, recognition of the needs and specific concerns of women in prison have always been ignored.

Prisons serve the same purpose for women as they do for men—as instruments of social control. The imprisonment of women takes place against a backdrop of patriarchal relationships, that is, the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general (Lerner 1986). Men hold power in all important social institutions and women are often deprived of access to such power. The imprisonment of women in Africa as a whole and in Botswana in particular has always been different for women than for men. Women have been sent to prison for different kinds of crime and, once in prison, they endure different conditions of incarceration. In an effort to examine this issue of criminality and imprisonment of women, this paper suggests how empowerment models could be integrated into the services provided for women prisoners.

This is first, to help them gain control over their lives and overcome the factors that account for their oppression or disempowerment. Second, it is to urge that Botswana follows the United Nations Standard Minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners. These state that the period of imprisonment should be used to ensure that, as far as possible, upon her return to society the offender is not only willing, but able to lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life. To this end, the institution should utilize all the remedial, educational, moral, spiritual and other forces and

forms of assistance that are appropriate and available (United Nations 1983).

This paper is based on a study that was done in prisons in Botswana. The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the women prior to incarceration and the conditions they viewed as connected to their participation in specific crimes. The ultimate objective was to offer an impetus to policy changes by providing a foundation for research on women and crime. It also intended to cultivate a theoretical and empirical base for providing nonsexist services and interventions in prison settings. Understanding the realities of women's lives provides a fertile ground for planting new seeds in their lives. Women in prison may share similar experiences with other women. Intervention with women in prison should therefore address the way that marginalization and powerlessness in society is linked to their association with pro-criminal subgroups and ultimately their own involvement in crime.

Methodology

THE STUDY EMPLOYED a combination of both qualitative and quantitative analysis of 80 life-history interviews with incarcerated women and girls in six prisons in Serowe, Lobatse, Tsabong, Maun, Gaborone and Francistown Women's Prison in Botswana. These prisons serve as catchment zones for most of the women sentenced to imprisonment in all the districts in Botswana. The research design is therefore both descriptive and exploratory in nature. A list of women who are currently in prison was obtained from the Department of the Prison and from staff at the women's prisons. This Department keeps standardized data on all women sentenced to a term of imprisonment who are mandated to be under its care for the duration specified by the courts.

A list of all the women in prison was then drawn up and a simple random sampling method used to minimize bias in demographic characteristics and to manage the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from every respondent and all were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Using the above sampling design, a sample of the women was selected for the first part of the study, which consisted mainly of demographic close-ended questions. For the qualitative

component of the study, the same sample of 80 women was used for in-depth interviews. This was mostly a retrospective study, hence the use of intensive interviewing, relying on the individual's memories of events that had occurred previously. An interview guide with probes was used to ensure that key topics were explored with each respondent. The interview guide was structured to probe the information given by the respondents on the questionnaire and to add new areas that the researcher and the women wanted to explore further. A questionnaire consisting of primarily closed-choice questions and open-ended questions was administered to the research participants. The first author and six research assistants, who were all social work students at the University of Botswana, completed the interviews.

The complex nature of life events presented an enormous challenge to the researcher. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to solicit in-depth descriptions, explanations and narrations of what women believed had contributed to their involvement in crime. Information collected from the quantitative data included measurement, prediction and data for drawing correlations and relationships between variables. The qualitative data methods enrich the variables under study by linking them to specific experiences, incidents and observations. A combination of these methods minimizes threats to internal validity. In a mixed-method approach, therefore, the inherent weaknesses of one method are minimized by the other.

The analysis of the data was guided by the research questions. Descriptive univariate analyses involved a general aggregate profile (demographic description) of the characteristics and profile of the overall sample population. Bivariate correlation analyses examined the existence (association) and strength of a relationship between independent variables and the outcome of criminal behavior. Multiple Regression analysis was conducted to identify and determine the relationship between two or more predictor variables and the dependent variable. For the qualitative data analysis phase, a word-processing programme (HYPER RESEARCH) was used to identify the individual participants' files. The computer programme was used to search for key words such as "meaning", "poverty", "violence", "alcohol", "abuse" throughout

the data file, corresponding to the topical areas of analysis. Content analysis of the interviews revealed concepts important to understanding the women's experiences of poverty, violence, intimacy and others, as shall be later seen. Conclusions were then drawn up, based on these findings.

The situation of African women

WOMEN PROVIDE THE BACKBONE of the rural economy in many of the communities in Africa. About 80 per cent of the economically-active female labour force is employed in agriculture and women comprise about 47 per cent of the total agricultural labour force (*Africa Recovery* 1998). In many rural communities in Africa women contribute unpaid labour to the household's agricultural production and spend up to 50 hours a week on domestic labour and subsistence food production. Studies have documented that women work 12–13 hours a week more than men, as the prevalent economic and environmental crises have increased the working hours of the poorest women (*Africa Recovery* 1998).

In some areas, women may have separate access to land and work independently in farming or in some other income-generating activity, but in general they have fewer opportunities than men to earn an income. They combine their unpaid labour with independent production to meet the needs of their families and to attain some measure of autonomy and self-reliance. Their income is indispensable for family survival regardless of the presence of men in their lives and they are expected to generate actively the means to meet the daily expenses for themselves and their children.

With the decline of national and local economies in many African countries, many men have been unable to or have refused to contribute their share of household expenses. This has increased household pressures on women, raising the numbers of women living in poverty and the number of households in the poorest categories headed by women (*Africa Recovery* 1998).

Women in Africa bear a disproportionate burden of the social crisis in the continent. They experience the highest maternal mortality rates in

the world, while the level of illiteracy among them is almost unsurpassed (Economic Commission for Africa 1998). Among the majority of rural and low-income urban dwellers, women perform all domestic tasks, while many also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. They seek to manage the environment, although their struggle for survival often results in environmental damage from activities such as fuel-wood collection (Manu 1998). Lack of access to formal education and training, suppression and domination have been identified as the key barriers to women's development and advancement in Africa. According to the African Platform for Action one way forward for the advancement of women in Africa is to empower them politically and economically, increase their access to education, training, science and technology and support their vital role in society and the family. Their legal and human rights and other social and cultural rights also need to be protected.

Batswana women, like their counterparts in sub Saharan Africa, have a long history of deprivation, powerlessness and deprivation, a result of patriarchal, colonial and ongoing gender struggles. This is shown in their relative over-representation in poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and bad health, the scale of their childcare responsibilities, their lack of safety, and the prevalence of gender-based violence. As a result, when women commit crimes it is most often a result of continued deprivation and helplessness.

Women in prison
WOMEN OFFENDERS POSE multiple challenges to human service organizations at the levels of direct service, policy and administration because of their heterogeneity. They differ in age, birth order, class, educational status, ethnicity and lived experience; all which may have contributed in some way to their involvement in crime. The study confirmed the conclusions of various studies done across the world. First, women's crimes are often a reflection of their social, economic, political and domestic circumstances (Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988,

Gilfus 1987, Mothibi 1994). Second, there are as many explanations of women's criminality as there are pathways to crime itself; hence, a multidimensional portrait seems appropriate. Third, women in prison are products of the class- and gender-based oppression they experience. Gendered power relations which benefit men and perpetuate their needs at the expense of women and children, are push factors in women's criminality (Arlington 1993, Dominelli 1991). Fourth, societal role expectations (latently existing through the legal and normative structures of society) force women to take responsibility for family affairs, often resulting in their adjusting in criminal ways.

The other major conclusion of the study was that women are heavily burdened with a number of responsibilities, especially within the reproductive and care-giving arena. This leaves them with few options for making a livelihood, despite their resilience. As role demands on these women multiply, they find it increasingly difficult to cope with their poverty and inequality in employment opportunities. The prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional victimization by family members and intimates and the high proportion of drug and alcohol use by the women, their parents or their male partners also signify a high level of distress present in women when they enter custody. Women in the study reported experiencing ongoing physical and sexual abuse throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood and co-occurring economic deprivation. Throughout their lives they experienced continuous victimization (especially those from low socioeconomic classes) which they resisted or responded to by becoming involved in criminal activities. This leads to their entrapment within the walls of the criminal justice system.

Finally, their narratives pointed to stress as a major factor in women's lives. Conditions associated with a low-income status such as unemployment, poor housing, low literacy rates, violence and crime are chronic stressors. Such psychosocial distress may even be a factor in the development of criminality, as people seek to escape their situation through non-legitimate ways. Freedman (1981) suggests that the growing rate of women in prison could be linked to social change and changing gender roles, especially increasing urbanization and the development

of new agents of social control. Property- and drug-related crimes were often the most readily available ways for women to support themselves and their children.

The neglect of social services for women in prison has often been justified by referring to the smaller proportion of women as compared to men in the entire prison system. Furthermore, most women offenders are sentenced to short terms of imprisonment due to the nature of their offences. Hence their needs and the provision of gender-specific services are often neglected or ignored. (Carlen 1983, Chesney-Lind 1989, Gilfus 1987, Sarri 1983, Simpson 1989). In Botswana, however, men and women also differ in degree to which they participate in certain crimes (Government of Bostawana 1998(a) and (b), Gilfus 1987, Moleboge 1998, Mothibi 1994). Female criminality is on the increase in Botswana, accounting for 15 per cent of all those arrested/accused and 10 per cent of all incarcerated prisoners (Moleboge 1998). Only 20 per cent or less of convicted women end up in prison: the remainder are diverted away from custody through fines, community service or given a warning.

While offences against property and persons rank as the first and second major offences for all, the third most frequent offence for women relates to public order, usually due to fights in public places such as bars and drinking spots (Moleboge 1998). For all convictions, about 60 to 70 per cent of men are likely to be fined, compared to 75 to 85 per cent of women. Factors in the development of "deviant behaviour" do not differ markedly for men and women, but the latter are especially vulnerability to physical and sexual violence, poverty and single parenthood, low esteem and identity problems. Women's crime is a reaction to this dispossession.

This paper recommends a wide range of comprehensive, integrated and responsive programmes and social services designed to steer women out of crime. Such strategies are meant to assist women in the development of their overall well-being. Programmes that address the central issues of women's empowerment in economic, political and social spheres, equal opportunities in social services and mother-child relations are needed the most. Professionals from many fields, such as criminal justice, social work, education and health, should be aware of this need

and should thus exercise sensitivity in sentencing women and developing programmes targeting them. First we will discuss the service interventions in the current prison system and their limitations, in order to build an argument for a different approach to working with women in prison. Then we will consider the experiences of women as our data and analysis has revealed.

A critique of existing programmes offered to women in prison

PROGRAMMES DEVELOPED IN prison have often focused on rehabilitating inmates, without acknowledging the structural impediments outside prison that could be responsible for driving people to a life of crime and keeping them captive in a criminal subculture. The Prison Department in Botswana offers rehabilitative programmes such as carpentry, tailoring, building; upholstery, mat-making, fencing, knitting, leatherwork, crocheting, farming, cookery, social welfare counselling and religious activities. The emphasis has been training prisoners in vocational skills and the criteria for eligibility is the length of sentence. According to the *Prison Rehabilitation Handbook*, (1996:1), the aim is to "train prisoners in such trades that may enable them to be self employed after they are released from prison. Prison industries also generate income to government since goods produced whilst training inmates are sold to offset government expenditure in procuring raw materials."

But central questions remain unanswered in these documents; namely:

- What are the objectives of imprisonment generally and specifically of women prisoners?
- What broad macrosocial problems are reflected in the crimes that women commit and to what extent do social definitions of crime reflect current values and assumptions about the status of women?
- What ideological standpoint underlies the choice of service programmes: what are its implications for social service provision and do all prisoners need such services?
- Are prisons are the ideal place for social services?

- What social services and programmes would be responsive to the needs of women who enter prisons? The answer will help understand what social services and programmes to provide so that women prisoners can make meaningful choices.
- Do the services aim to facilitate changes in the behaviour of the prisoners and help women to deal with personal and macrosocial changes, including the cultural and structural forces that contribute to women's criminality?
- Do social services in prison increase the inmate's self-empowerment in order to prepare her for a life outside the prison and what could be some of the (positive and negative) effects of empowering women in prison?
- The final question is whether the prison staff is trained to provide gender-specific and culturally-sensitive appropriate services to female prisoners.

Prior to developing any programme, the above questions must be answered and used to provide a conceptual framework to guide interventions. However, as the situation stands now, in the prison system, where a majority of service providers and recipients are male, provision of services for women are clearly inadequate. Service programmes for men are more capacity-building than those for women. There is gross discrimination in terms of availability, sustainability and suitability between programmes for women and those for men. Women in Botswana are offered a smaller range of programmes. For them skill development is concentrated in the areas of making mats, sewing and knitting, cleaning, scrubbing floors, vegetable gardening and, to some extent, literacy education and religious activities. While some of these skills may be relevant for some women, their benefit to most is minimal. Homebound skills cannot empower women who will have to perform multiple roles, including breadwinning, upon release and it is likely that such programmes, far from "rehabilitating", could actually reduce the women's aspirations and self-esteem and ability to achieve economic and emotional sustainability.

Official records show that while in prison, the women's programmes are not only less than empowering; they are often offered at an elementary level and participants are not eligible for any kind of trade testing. The failure to view women as breadwinners could be a leading factor in the provision of these minimal opportunities for women. In the prison system, equality means allowing women access to some of the programmes traditionally reserved for men, but not designing special programmes to meet their own special needs. Despite the fact that most of the women in prison are single parents or grandparents and are thus breadwinners with the sole responsibility of maintaining their children and grandchildren, none of the services in prison will help them turn to productive activities. Instead, women in prison are offered menial and undervalued work activities; the very activities which failed to keep them from coming to prison in the first place. Furthermore, once in prison, women continue to provide cheap unpaid labour to the prison itself, all in the name of rehabilitation. The lack of proper, gender-sensitive programmes for women in prison stems from a lack of knowledge and understanding of why women become involved in criminal activities.

Opportunities for women's self-enhancement and self-determination therefore remain unaltered, and so unimproved. In planning and resource allocation, women's projects are confined to domestication, dependency and socialization into roles in the kitchen. This serves to affirm the traditional dependency role of women. Instead of improving their well-being, they serve to train women to be better domestic workers and housewives or dressmakers. These jobs pay very little, if anything. The practical side of social service provision contradicts the theoretical, because women walk out of prison with hardly any of the skills they need to earn a living.

The length of the sentence determines the choice of social services provided. Since most women's sentences rarely exceed three years, this has skewed all capacity-building programmes towards men. If women in Botswana are generally under-educated and have few opportunities for paid employment, it is logical that their need to earn an income may turn them to illegal activities such as theft, stealing, possession of

dagga—the southern African name for cannibis— and illegal border jumping in order to trade (the latter as it relates to Zimbabwean women). Women who have been structurally dislocated from a rural-based economy find it difficult to survive. There are no opportunities alternative methods of food production and they have few employment opportunities. When they can earn, their wages are too low to support themselves and their families. A shift from "home economics" oriented strategies to income-generating activities, life skills training and job apprenticeship is an urgent need. Janitorial level jobs only reduce these women to the level of domestic workers, taking then back into this private sphere, no matter how far away they had ventured prior to incarceration. If women are taught survival skills, they could access legal income opportunities more and use these to stay in the community in their own right and not in an emotionally or financially dependent relationship "with the father of my child".

Both the criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs of the women should be addressed by using objective, empirically-based assessment instruments on contemporary research on women and crime. These would target those at risk of reoffending, those with antisocial attitudes, those with problems with peer group membership, self-control and poor problem-solving skills, with a history of alcohol and drug involvement both of themselves and their partners and with other familial pressures. Women in prison are confined in a system designed, built and run by men for men and they therefore suffer accordingly. There are no "economic of scale" to be made in meeting their needs.

Towards gender-sensitive service programmes: the empowerment model

IT IS A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY that sends women in Botswana to prison, makes the rules and defines the crimes. In a patriarchy is acceptable for a husband to beat up his wife, but that very same wife cannot defend herself against his violence. Once in prison, patriarchal assumptions and male dominance continue to play an essential role in the treatment of women, even when women prison officials run the prisons, for they merely perform the work of the patriarchal prison system and society.

Although imprisonment rates for women are low, they are rising rapidly. It is possible that deteriorating economic conditions are now pushing women to the brink faster than men. As the primary caregivers of children, women are driven by poverty and other social circumstances to engage in more crimes of survival. In addition, changes in sentencing laws and practices, such as mandatory minimum sentencing, are commonly considered a main factor in the rising imprisonment rates for women, especially for possession of *dagga*.

A profile of the woman prisoner

THE PROFILE OF THE women that emerged from the study is of young, single or married mothers or women with few marketable job skills; school drop-outs who live below the poverty level and are mothers of dependent children and who are unemployed most of the time. Incarceration has severe ramifications for women. A large number who enter prisons are mothers and have to undergo the intense pain of forced separation from their children. In most cases they are often the sole caretakers of their children and the primary source of financial and emotional support. When a man goes to prison, his wife or sister often assumes, or continues to assume, responsibility for the children but the reverse is not true in the case of the woman. For most imprisoned mothers the separation from their children is one of the greatest punishments of incarceration, and this engenders despondency and feelings of guilt and anxiety about their children's welfare.

Visiting their children is another problem for women. Women prisoners are often denied contact visits and visitors are required to go through long and cumbersome procedures. When women leave prison, there are no reunification services to bring mothers and their children together. Pregnant prisoners also suffer from inadequate reproductive rights and social services while in prison. The essentials for a healthy pregnancy such as nutritious food, fresh air, exercise and reasonably sanitary conditions are usually inadequate. The powerlessness, helplessness and dependency they experience is systematically heightened by the rules and the regulations of the prison system. It is

therefore difficult for these women to feel their own power and to take control of their lives.

Towards empowerment

EMPOWERMENT HAS BEEN defined by the Cornell Empowerment Group (1990) as an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which deprived people gain greater access to and control over valued resources. Empowerment therefore refers to gaining control over one's life or over the factors that account for one's oppression or disempowerment. Empowerment is also an appropriate goal for any community, group or individual experiencing systematic and institutionalized discrimination (Solomon 1976). The term describes the transformation from individual and collective powerlessness to personal, political and cultural power. Women individually and collectively live under conditions of discrimination and powerlessness; hence the empowerment of women is an appropriate and necessary goal toward a just society.

Economic empowerment

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR female prisoners contribute to economic empowerment. Economic empowerment refers to the promotion of women's economic rights and independence, including their access to employment and appropriate working conditions and their control over economic resources. Women so empowered may obtain equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade, and families of these women should experience the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for both parents. The goal also includes the provision of social services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income and rural women and the strengthening of women's capacity and commercial networks (Katepa-Kalala 1999).

The economic empowerment for women is central to crime diversion. Strategies that could be considered are access to lending and other credit facilities for small businesses and human resource development

through training and job placement. Research, advocacy, planning and community advisory services are needed to decide on what would be the best model at the community level. The economic capacity of women should be strengthened and they should be directly involved in accessing income opportunities, thus shaping the direction of market forces that often ignore gender considerations altogether.

Programmes, services and facilities should be designed to meet specific requirements such as helping women to make meaningful choices and to earn respect and display dignity in supportive environments, with restored possibilities for positive socialization and life experience. College education is also a possibility for a number of women who dropped out of school due to pregnancy or other reasons. The only time when these women can have an educational opportunity is when they are in prison. Business education, clerical skills and computer skills are also possibilities. Apprenticeship programmes may be developed to include electrical training, mechanics, soft furnishings, pottery and beadwork, basketry, cosmetology, fabric-cutting, welding, painting, plumbing and mechanics, among others.

These programmes are recommended against the possibility that there exist tensions between political, administrative and institutional agendas which may result in the inconsistent application of other plans decided upon according to national development priorities. It is critical that a well-intended strategy is agreed at departmental and ministerial levels, especially if it comes after the plans have been submitted and approved at departmental levels. As a broad recommendation, policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty should be vigorously sought after. The recent National Platform for Action to revise laws and administrative practices to guarantee women's equal rights and access to economic resources is a welcome venture. Such macroeconomic policies and development strategies should be prioritized and women should have access to savings and credit mechanisms in their own right.

Ample evidence exists that imprisonment is simply not serving the purpose for which it was originally intended and recidivism rates are escalating each day, especially among men. This speaks to need for

targeted services. The following principles should be operational if women in prison are to be economically empowered:

- Increase women's self-sufficiency by instilling in them a sense of power and autonomy and mastery over certain skills, tasks and initiatives;
- Develop group consciousness by showing how the political, social and economic conditions that women live in outside prison are connected to their criminality;
- Reduce women's self-blame but emphasis their need to take responsibility for the methods they have used to acquire resources;
- Work towards income-generating methods that are not criminal in nature;
- Educate the women on the economically-empowering programmes that exist in the community and the criteria for qualifying for such programmes.

Motherhood and child welfare

ALTHOUGH MANY OF THE young mothers in the study experienced problems during childhood and early adolescence, they did not abuse alcohol. A common theme in their personal narratives was their concern for their children and their resolve to be good mothers after release. However, their poverty was compounded by teenage pregnancies, a lack of education and an association with men who *were* caught up in drugs, especially alcohol and marijuana, and criminal activities. It is improbable that such men could or would take responsibility for the welfare of their children. In these situations, child-support enforcement programmes may fail (if the ideology of law enforcement is that an unemployed man cannot be expected to maintain a child). However, some of these women prefer not to have any further contact with the fathers of their children—having been "dumped" after a pregnancy.

No programmes exist currently to connect these young mothers to work opportunities in the community. However, to be able to support their families, these women will need to reconnect with the school system and start where they left off so they are equipped with equivalency tests and can receive training for jobs that pay enough to maintain a family. On the way to self-sufficiency, these young mothers will require

childcare subsidies and programmes that also focus on their self-development, such as dealing with anger and assertiveness. They are prime candidates for educational support and childcare so they can eventually become heads of independent households. Policymakers should, therefore, consider the situation of young mothers; specifically their need for programmes that involve positive mentoring and support.

Restorative justice

THE PRACTICE OF RESTORATIVE justice is rooted in Tswana customs and traditions. This requires that, before an issue can be discussed in public, the "victim family" and the "offending family" should meet to prevent further acrimony. The wronged party must meet the person who has done the wrong within a closed family setting where reconciliation, restoration, healing and payment for the wrong take place. The modern criminal justice system operates on principles of vengeance, deterrence and punishment through an adversarial and antagonistic approach, where the victim never even confronts the offender. This usually only makes it easier for offenders not to take responsibilities for their actions, especially if they are unable to see the impact of their behaviour on other people.

In this study it was quite clear that some of the women (especially those whose crimes are property related) were not prepared to take responsibility for their behaviour and they saw nothing wrong with what they had done. This is clear from their statements such as "I am here for no reason at all"; "The police hate me", "I was reported by jealous people; they choose who to report to the police. How come so-and-so was not arrested as well?" It is possible that the world-view of these women is based on avoiding taking responsibility for their actions. Socialization patterns that emphasize physical abuse even after a child has "told the truth" could result in avoiding truth-telling. Through their lives these women have learnt that people, (who are mostly trusted elders), rarely take responsibility for their behaviour and various systems have assisted them to do so themselves.

It is therefore critical to develop a justice system that will take note of how fractured relationships can be mended, especially when the woman is both the victim and perpetrator. At the centre of most cases of

criminality was evidence of a splintered relationship in the women's life. One example is of a married woman sent to prison for grievous harm, after having assaulted another woman who was in love with her husband. All attempts to restore her relationship through the customary court system and the police had failed and her husband responded to her with yet more violence. Ultimately, the police had intervened, but in vain: she assaulted her husband's lover and was sentenced to seven years in prison. In the meantime, when she was in prison, the husband moved in with his lover and abandoned his children.

It may look as if justice was served, since the lover lost her lip in the fight and the wife went to prison. However, reconciliation and restoration had not taken place. The wife was still angry about the events that landed her in prison and was fully occupied in planning her revenge. If all parties had been able to meet so that she fully understood her new position vis-à-vis her husband and children, she would be better able to plan to move on with her life after prison. As matters stood, she saw prison as the final destructive blow that would completely destroy her family. Unless the legal system explores the possibilities of victim mediation and opportunities for the parties to meet, it will remain disempowering.

Health and mental health services

AS PREVIOUSLY STATED, the study found that poor physical and mental health was highly correlated with women's criminality. The chronic health problems of women include hypertension, unintended, interrupted or lost pregnancy, dysmenorrhoea, chlamydeous infection, chronic pelvic inflammatory disease, anxiety and depression. The latter are the most significant health problems cited by women inmates. Bivariate correlation showed a close to marginal relationship between a history of physical violence and health problems of the respondents ($r= .32$; $p= .04$). The poor financial situation of the family was also correlated with health problems ($r= .46$; $p= .004$). Post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from long-term victimization, if investigated separately, was found to be highly prevalent.

Body-image problems were also prevalent, as well as other mental-health problems such as depression, sleep disorders and anxiety, in

part a consequence of being in prison. Women inmates told stories of histories of multiple episodes of violence at the hands of fathers, husbands, boyfriends and strangers, and this abuse was often directly related to the offenses for which they were in prison. A barrage of problems such as poor physical health, sexually transmitted diseases, psychological problems, family responsibilities and a lack of marketable employment skills greatly complicate women's status.

Health-related programmes for women inmates should be expanded and made to be intensive, comprehensive and women-specific. Especially when combined with aftercare, these could enhance the women's reality testing and compromised judgment, thus ultimately reducing recidivism and assisting the women to navigate the community without committing crimes. Studies have shown that women who have a low-income status, low educational prospects and history of family violence, with multiple dependent children, were found to be at a higher risk for chronic conditions like hypertension, substance abuse and gynaecological complaints (Adelmann 1994, Avotri and Walters 1999, Brown and Harris 1978, Noor 1995). But women in prison seemed less likely to get early diagnostic and preventive services such as screening for breast, ovarian or cervical cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease or any other life-threatening diseases. The health status of these women could decrease their longevity and general quality of life and negatively affect their future aspirations and those of their children.

Adequate data is needed to assess accurately the interrelationship between the health problems of women, their children and criminality. Prison policies and strategies should devise an information base and a plan to address these health issues. A central need is to evaluate how the health risks of women are changing in reaction to the growing demands on them and how this may impact on their criminality as in issues of compromised mental health. Comprehensive services are needed to encompass a wide range of prevention, promotion and treatment services such as poverty alleviation, protection from violence and prevention of general physical ill health and alcohol abuse.

There is also evidence that, due to relational inequality in intimate relations, women are exposed to unprotected sex on a regular basis,

even if they are aware that their partners have other partners whose might be HIV carriers. Unprotected sex has obvious implications for the spread of the HIV virus and other sexually-transmitted diseases. Contrary to male offenders who may "have no time to exercise self heath care outside as they are presumed to be always on the run" (Government of Botswana 1996:24); women (except probably illegal immigrants) are less mobile. However, their powerlessness in sexual relationships, which may be manifested through the sexual abuse of young girls, rape, incest and other forms of violence, means they are still at high risk of infection and worse. Services should therefore be directed at educating women about the nature of their bodies and its functioning and the health risks associated with various behaviour such as alcohol and unprotected sex. Other integrated services should be developed to assist women with self-assertiveness and empowerment in decision-making and their rights over the use of their own bodies. Such services could incorporate self-defence training for women, especially taking into account the high risk of violence against women and subsequent unwanted pregnancies, infanticide and criminal abortion.

Mental health aspects of pregnancy and childbirth

COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR PREGNANT women should be integrated so as to educate them about their reproductive rights and post-partum depression. This condition, which some women are confronted with after childbirth, is implicated in baby-dumping, infanticide and child abandonment. These reproductive services should be integrated with other supportive structures in the community such as the family, school, customary courts and the police. Comprehensive services for women and girls' health in the community would be useful as they would make it possible for people to be aware of their situation and that of their family members. In this way, referral would be possible before a crisis arises.

Alcohol and drug services

A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER of the older women in prison had a problem with abuse of substances including prescription medication (from both traditional and modern practitioners). The use of alcohol has been associated with their offence. This long-term addiction is not likely to

be dealt with by a sentence of imprisonment which does not mandate treatment, and alcohol treatment services do not exist. Substance abuse, as well as their life style adopted before imprisonment, makes women in prison more susceptible to a wider range of physical health problems than men. While they may not have an extensive history of drug use, their susceptibility to physiological ailments and vulnerability after drinking is a matter of great concern. Access to good, appropriate psychological health care is therefore, important for women in prison. Since prison officials are responsible for the health and mental health referral of inmates, they should be trained in the early diagnosis of certain conditions so as to effect timely referrals.

No research has been done in Botswana about the impact and extent of alcohol and other drug use on women's bodies or lives and the effect this has on their families and children in particular. Research is needed to evaluate the effects of alcohol on women and how these matters affect their decision-making power in unprotected sex. Strategies should be developed to prevent women, particularly young ones, from getting involved in drug use or excessive alcohol use. Professionals who know about female biology and are experts on substance abuse and mental disorders should participate in such studies. The knowledge base of health professionals should also be increased in this context.

Although most studies on female offenders focus on those who are in custody, other women with alcoholic and abusive partners, whose lives are affected by addiction, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse issues are worth studying as well.

Services for survivors of violence

THE FACT THAT A large number of women cited abuse as contributing to their problems with the law suggests that abuse is related to female criminality but further research is needed to clarify the role that violence plays in female criminality. This is a serious societal issue and needs to be addressed by the criminal justice system. Abused women experience a profound lack of control during their abuse, and may have difficulty with authority figures. The women's emphasis on unemployment and financial problems suggests that economic marginalization may also be a factor leading them to crime and should be studied further, especially

if dependence may prevent a woman from running away when violence escalates.

Survivors of violence may also engage in unhealthy coping strategies. Therefore, abused women are likely to be re-traumatized—a condition that could prevent them from benefiting from services offered, if trauma-related issues are not addressed directly. Women in prison, especially those with a history of abuse, should also receive services that help them understand how the abuse they suffered has contributed to their involvement in crime. Programming should focus on alternative ways of dealing with abuse. Finally, prison staff should be educated about the potential difficulties experienced by survivors, so that the interactions between staff and inmates do not exacerbate abuse-related difficulties.

Conclusion

WHEN THE CONDITIONS of incarceration are examined, it appears that the imprisonment of women is coming more and more to resemble that of men. Once in prison, patriarchal assumptions and male dominance continue to play an essential role in the treatment of women. Because women constitute a minority of the total prison population, it is difficult, though essential, to organize resources to deal specifically with them. Concern with male prisoners has dominated the programme philosophy, standards and perception of the prison programme development. As a result, these programmes do not address the special needs and concerns of women effectively. Society must change the way it views women who are trying to survive against all odds in the community and who later become involved in acts of crime. This must be done by focusing on policy change in existing agencies that provide gender-sensitive services, so that they can respond closely to their needs voiced by the women themselves.

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