

# JAIL BULLETIN

NUMBER 4

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The Jail Bulletin is a monthly feature of the Crime Commission Update. The bulletin may be used as a supplement to your jail in-service training program if officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz. The Bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for use by your staff. We welcome any jail training material you would like to contribute to the Bulletin.

## FEMALE INMATES

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Jails and prisons are charged with the responsibility of providing care, control and custody of the offender, regardless of age, sex or national origin. On any given day, approximately 375,000 men and women are incarcerated in the nation's correctional institutions - 15,000 of these inmates are women. Jails are faced with unique problems and situations that do not exist elsewhere in the criminal justice system. Many jails in both urban and rural areas are antiquated facilities with substandard conditions. Underfunded and inadequately staffed, these local institutions struggle under the enormous burden of meeting the political, judicial and economic demands the community puts on them.

All aspects of society are experiencing definite changes in the roles of women. In spite of this progress, one sector in which women remain neglected is in corrections. Until recently, female inmates have been "the nation's forgotten women". The primary reason that female inmates have been neglected for so long is that there have been so few of them incarcerated in American jails and prisons. Due to their small numbers, they have been less visible and easier to ignore than their male counterparts. On any given day, 13,500 women are in city or county jails, either awaiting trial or serving sentences. Female inmates make up 9.7% of the total incarcerated population in the United States; 4.4% of prison populations, 6.6% of jail populations, and 12.2% of probation and parole populations. In Nebraska during 1984, 13.8% of all jail admissions were women.

One reason cited for the relatively small number of women incarcerated is the "chivalry factor". Police and judges have been reluctant to hold members of the traditionally weaker sex legally accountable for their behavior, and thus have protected them from the dehumanizing aspects of the criminal justice system. Consequently, women who have been arrested, subsequently convicted and sentenced have been viewed as "very bad women and unable to inspire chivalry - the bottom of the barrel, so to speak" (Velimesis, 1975).

Assessments of female inmates' needs and problems are frequently based on the administrator's (usually male) personal experience with the women in their lives (mother, wife, etc.). Policy-making and program planning based on the experience, value systems and role expectations of those in administrative positions may differ greatly from the real needs and concerns of the female inmate. The general data found in statistical profiles of female inmates is too seldom utilized in the planning of

these programs and services. Yet, this is essential information, for it reflects her current economic and social status, as well as her unique problems and needs. Unfortunately, current correctional efforts and practices reflect and reinforce the traditional view of women and we find this type of policy-making based more on discriminatory practices and out-of-date attitudes and less on realistic planning and down-to-earth needs assessments.

Female inmates have too frequently encountered difficulties in the area of the attitudes held by correctional personnel, who have traditionally been male. Frequently correctional personnel tend to embrace some very traditional views regarding the social roles of women and many cannot easily understand and relate to the backgrounds, lives, experiences and dilemmas of the female inmates they work with. Effectively dealing with the unique aspects of the female inmate's experience requires definite skills and understanding on the part of jail staff. A historical area of difficulty in women's corrections has been a lack of diversity in appropriate role models for female inmates. Efforts should be made to actively involve the female inmate with female staff members and women in the community who represent a wide diversity of life-styles, experiences and value systems.

It is essential for jail personnel to realize that the standard procedures of arrest and admission may be perceived as very threatening and personally degrading to the female inmate. This is especially true when her initial reaction to the procedures of routine search and booking are responded to by jail staff as an intrusion or disruption of their routine duties which for staff have become a "taken-for-granted" procedure. An evaluation of the immediate necessity of these procedures and both empathy and understanding when the procedures cannot be modified are essential in minimizing a potentially traumatic experience for the female inmate. The jail environment and personal interaction with staff is extremely important in determining the behavior and attitudes of the female inmate. The traditional approach has always been something must be done to or for the inmate, rather than with her. Jail staff need to view the female inmate and her needs from an individual needs assessment perspective - what she feels she needs rather than what we think she needs.

Fewer rehabilitation opportunities and programs are provided for female inmates due to their small numbers. Women in jails have received even less attention than those held in prison systems. The nature of the jail makes providing programs and services even more difficult, especially for women. The LEAA Task Force Study (1975) points out that in many jails, women are locked in their cells all day because no other provisions have been made for them. Recreational, educational and vocational services may not be available due to the lack of supervisors, inadequate facilities and the taboo of mixing men and women in such situations.

The sources of inadequacies in the jail setting include short term commitment, limited programs, limited staff and physical space considerations. The female inmate is usually confined in jail for a short period of time. 59% of these women are awaiting arraignment or trial and have not yet been found guilty of the offense they were charged with. The majority of rehabilitation programs have been developed for male inmates and women's programs have evolved only as extensions of these practices. In jails where programs are available, women are frequently denied participation due to lack of space or to prevent contact with the male population. Because it is difficult for a small local facility to house the female inmate due to space considerations, she is often transferred to a larger facility farther away from her family and friends. The great distance frequently causes a deterioration in family relationships.

An increasing number of female inmates are demanding equal treatment through the courts and the courts are frequently deciding in their favor. The 4th, 8th and 14th amendments protect the rights of female inmates to equal treatment. Correctional programming is affected by such factors as the size and location of the facility, the size of the budget and the philosophy of the administrator. These reasons, as well as the expense, the inconvenience and the small number of female inmates will not justify the continuation of unequal practices in the eyes of the courts.

### PROFILE OF FEMALE INMATES

In order to provide relevant programs and services for female inmates confined in jails, it is necessary to look at their characteristics. National statistics indicate that the majority of these women are young, unemployed, poor, relatively uneducated and unmarried.

Age: 73% of female inmates are under 30 years of age. The median age is 25 years. For misdemeanants, the median age is 24. For felons, the median age is 27.

Race: 52% of female inmates are members of minority groups. 50% of the women are black and Native American Indians and Hispanics are overrepresented in proportion to their numbers in the general population. (Glick & Neto, 1977)

Marital Status: 80% of female inmates were unmarried at the time of incarceration. 60% have been married at least once. 20% of female inmates were married at the time of incarceration, but only 10% were living with a husband. Of the 80% unmarried: 27% were single, 19% were living in a consensual relationship; 28% were divorced or separated; and 6% were widowed.

Dependents: 73% of the female inmates had borne children and 56% were caring for their children at the time of confinement.

Education: 60% have less than a high school education. The median educational level was 10.5 years of schooling. The average grade level reached was between the 7th and 9th grades.

Job and Economic Status: Most women lacked viable job skills to enable them to enter and stay in the work force. Most of these women have no financial resources. 66% were unemployed prior to incarceration. 30% were dependent on welfare, unemployment or social security for their economic support. 25% depended primarily upon resources such as loans from family or friends. 92% have an annual income of less than \$10,000 and 58% had less than \$3,000 annually.

Substance Abuse: Histories of drug abuse were another prevalent characteristic. 64% were drug users and of those, 68% used drugs daily prior to incarceration.

Offenses: Women's crimes are characteristically nonviolent or victimless. Over 20% of female inmates were involved in economic crimes. The Uniform Crime Report (1978) centers female arrests around nonviolent offenses such as forgery and counterfeiting, fraud and embezzlement, and larceny. Larceny is the one index crime in which women have a high arrest rate and seems to be the most serious offense among female offenders. Women also play a major role in arrests for victimless crimes such as prostitution, intoxication, vagrancy and narcotic drug violations. 25% of the women committed drug-related crimes and 15% committed violent crimes. One third of female inmates had experienced their first arrest under the age of 17 years.

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SOCIAL NEEDS

1. Mother-Child Relationship:

One of the greatest concerns for incarcerated women is the separation from their children. Regardless of race or age, these women expressed guilt and shame that they had committed crimes that separated them from their children. For many women with drug and alcohol problems, extended incarceration may be the first opportunity they have had without the influence of these substances to consider the effect their behavior may have upon their children. Incarceration produces a great deal of anxiety over the welfare of the inmate's children and what damage the separation may be doing to their relationship. Witnessing the arrest of a parent is a trauma that may last a child's lifetime. The separation from the mother, often occurring without notice or explanation and the subsequent moves from one institution, agency or foster home to another leads to feelings of insecurity, fear, confusion and anger in a child which can result in severe emotional problems. When a mother is sentenced it is essentially the same as if her children were also sentenced. The needs of a female inmate in relation to her children requires special staff attention and understanding. Expanded child visitation rights and support services such as parenting skills, counseling and legal aid in custody and non-support cases are all important. Parenting skills, education and counseling could be provided by jail staff or volunteers.

2. Family Relationship:

Since her family may be a focal concern of the female inmate's, every effort to retain communication with family members is critical. This may be accomplished through visitation or use of telephone privileges. Jail policies and procedures which restrict this type of communication can be modified in many circumstances without significant cost or a lessening in security. The continuation of the family relationship during incarceration and opportunities for physical contact with her children may, in itself, diminish the potential of personal crisis for the female inmate. The retention of these supportive relationships can greatly lessen the fear and loneliness of incarceration.

3. Child Care and Custody:

Another definite concern is the custody and care of the woman's children during her confinement. The children may be housed and cared for by family members or friend. In cases where these child care resources are not available or deemed unsuitable by social service agencies, the children may be placed in foster homes. The extent to which the woman participates in the decision-making process to determine the custody of her children is usually limited. The careful arrangements made by the female inmate may be reversed or ignored by authorities who "know what is best" for the child. Whether the inmate-mother should retain or relinquish her parental rights during or following incarceration involves both moral and legal decisions. It has been argued that incarceration per se does not provide adequate evidence that a parent is unfit and that the courts should consider additional factors, such as the mother's relationship to the child prior to incarceration, any evidence of parental neglect or abuse, and the causal relationship between the criminal act and the mother's ability to effectively perform her parental role.

#### 4. Social and Survival Skills:

Female inmates may need education in survival and social skills prior to release into the community. Interpersonal skills as well as instruction in physical appearance and personal hygiene may also need to be emphasized.

#### PHYSICAL NEEDS

##### 1. Substance Abuse Treatment:

Women have higher recorded levels of drug abuse, hypertension and general health problems than male inmates. In rural areas, few local treatment centers are readily available and providing drug or alcohol treatment may entail traveling long distances. Resources need to be sought out in the local community that are capable of providing drug and alcohol counseling for female inmates.

##### 2. Gynecological/Obstetrical Services:

Women's health concerns differ from men's yet little realistic acknowledgement of this exists in most correctional programs. Medical care within jails is frequently limited to admission examinations and jails may have to rely solely on nearby medical services in the community for additional care. Lack of gynecological care for incarcerated women is not only dangerous, but can potentially be deadly and there are seldom special health care programs provided for pregnant women. Use of contraceptive pills which require continuous daily dosage are often interrupted because they are not available in jail. It is extremely important that specific medical services be identified within the local community to serve the needs of female inmates. Women should also be provided with information regarding contraception, prenatal care, venereal disease and pregnancy to assist them during incarceration and after release.

##### 3. Physical Fitness:

Female inmates, like male inmates, need a means of remaining physically fit to boost their morale, self-esteem and general health. The jail environment contains factors that are not conducive to physical fitness such as starchy foods, little physical activity and forced idleness. Recreational programs may be limited to watching television or playing cards and board games. These activities do nothing to promote physical fitness. Female inmates frequently receive less opportunities to participate in active physical exercise due to a higher priority placed on the larger male population's access to these programs.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

##### 1. Mental Health Counseling:

Most women in jail have problems and concerns that might be alleviated by the provision of counseling services. Some of these problems include anxieties over disintegrating family relationships, concerns over finding employment upon release, poor self-image and drug and alcohol problems. The lack of autonomy, feelings of powerlessness, low self-worth, and the stigma of incarceration create reactions to the jail environment which may include despondency, frustration, heightened tensions, anxiety and apathy with an exaggerated dependency on those in authority. Women's mental health problems frequently take specific directions in areas of depression or anxiety-related neuroses. Professional counseling is not generally offered in jails. The only counseling that may occur is often provided by a sympathetic staff person who takes the

time to listen to the inmate's problems and concerns. Jails which do not offer counseling services for inmates may need to rely on community mental health centers. Clergy and church volunteers also can serve as an important resource to the jail. The church can be a vital link to the outside and provide a support system for the female inmate.

## 2. Support:

Supportive counseling need not be professional and in many areas, the resource of a mental health professional is not readily available. Facilities should be closely linked to programs and services which can provide crisis intervention counseling. It is extremely important to provide jail staff with in-service training for effectively dealing with crisis situations since staff members are commonly the only immediate resource available.

## 3. Affection:

Interpersonal relationships among women in institutions have been found to be more central than those of their male counterparts who are incarcerated. Fox (1975) emphasizes that "most women in prison describe attempts to establish rapport with at least one other person, so as to communicate on a feeling level." In order to alleviate the isolation and loneliness and to establish a sense of identity and belonging, incarcerated women may engage in homosexual relationships or create institutional "families". Thus, the homosexual relationship itself is a survival response to the conditions of extended confinement. Most women do not continue in this sexual orientation once released back into a predominantly heterosexual society.

## ECONOMIC NEEDS

### 1. Vocational Training:

Vocational training is one of the female inmate's greatest needs (American Bar Association, 1976). Many crimes committed by women appear to have been motivated by economic reasons. Economic instability and lack of education make vocational training essential to her economic well-being. The National Study of Women's Correctional Programs found that the most frequently offered training programs in jails and prisons include clerical skills, cosmetology and food services. The LEAA Task Force Study (1975) concluded that "such work experience as the female gains is of the most menial and unskilled nature and is irrelevant to the sophisticated labor market in major urban centers to which the majority of the population will return." The likelihood that a female inmate will be employed in similar positions and once employed, that these types of jobs will provide them with adequate economic resources is minimal. The correctional system fails to the extent that it does not prepare these women to earn a living upon reentry to society.

### 2. Employability Skills:

Most female inmates need more than just vocational training. Most jail programs typically do little to offer new economic choices, either in vocational training or employability skills. Over 90% of female inmates will have to support themselves or their families when they return to the community. Their low skill levels, poor self-esteem and lack of familiarity with employment practices increases the need to orient them to the work world. Support programs should include job readiness training, locating child care services and retaliatory techniques for dealing with job discrimination and sexual harassment.

### 3. Education:

Because of the educational level and economic status of female inmates, this program area is one of the most important in terms of eventual adaptation to life outside the jail. Educational skills are essential to independent living and economic survival as well as increasing self-confidence and self-esteem. In the Glick and Neto study (1977) it was pointed out that "many jails housed so few sentenced women that educational programs were not economically feasible, although such programs might be available on the male side of the jail." Correspondence courses through local community colleges provide a selection of course offerings and do not require segregation of male and female inmates which involves additional staff. Other types of educational programs offered by facilities across the United States to aid female inmates in developing independent living skills include basic survival skills, health education, money management skills and an orientation to legal rights and procedures.





QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspections.

SUBJECT: FEMALE INMATES, #4

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

1) What proportion of females are in the total U.S. inmate population? \_\_\_\_\_

2) What is one reason given to explain the lack of programs for female inmates?  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) List four characteristics describing the female inmate:  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4) List two needs of the female inmate that are social in nature:  
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5) List two needs of the female inmate that are physical in nature:  
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\_\_\_\_\_

6) List two needs of the female inmate that are psychological in nature:  
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7) List two needs of the female inmate that are economic in nature:  
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\_\_\_\_\_

8) List four problems jails have in providing programs and services for female inmates:  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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CREDIT: 1/2 hour credit for Jail In-service Training requirement