

Beyond Violence, Victimization and the Penal State: Empowerment Pathways for Female Incarcerated Students

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Incarceration rates are on the rise in Australia, particularly for women. For female prisoners, issues of class, gender and race intersect to compound disadvantage and create cycles of victimization, incarceration and isolation. Strategies for facilitating the successful reintegration of female prisoners need to acknowledge that women's experience of incarceration is bound up with their experiences of both interpersonal and structural patriarchal violence. The University of Southern Queensland's digital education projects in Australian correctional centres aim to reduce recidivism and break the cycle of victimization through education and tailored tertiary and pre-tertiary programs for incarcerated students. For 25 years USQ has been the largest provider of higher education in Australian correctional centres. Driven by a strong equity and social justice agenda we are particularly focused on meeting the needs of LSES (low socio-economic status), CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse), Indigenous and female incarcerated students through holistic approaches that recognise learners in social, political and cultural contexts. This includes recognising the barriers to social inclusion, successful reintegration and equitable participation in education faced by victims of gender-specific violence.

This paper reports on the particular and complex challenges currently faced by female incarcerated students, and our attempts to provide empowering alternatives through tertiary and pre-tertiary education. It address the gap in feminist literature on the link between domestic violence, incarceration and educational disadvantage, employing a poststructuralist feminist analysis to unpack the false dichotomy between female 'victim' and female 'offender' in mainstream criminal justice discourses.

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