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PRISONER REENTRY AND REINTEGRATION

**PERSPECTIVES OF THE WOMEN INVOLVED IN OUTCARE'S
ST JOHN OF GOD WOMEN'S PROGRAM**

Melissa Lackner
Bachelor of Arts (Justice Studies)

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Criminal Justice

School of Law and Justice
Faculty of Business and Law
Edith Cowan University

2012

:

In loving memory of my mum, Eda.

You are always with me.

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

Promoting and supporting the successful transition of prisoners into the wider community following release is a challenge that has received increasing attention on the part of both researchers and policymakers alike, especially considering the great costs to the community of crime and incarceration. Consequently, literature in this area has grown considerably, spurred by criminal justice interests in reducing recidivism and social justice interests in improving the opportunities and life circumstances of returning prisoners. This literature has however, traditionally been comprised of international studies based exclusively on male populations or with disregard for the differentiation between males and females. Although there is now a slowly growing body of female-specific literature, fuelled by the increasing imprisonment rates among women, more remains to be learnt about the specific experiences and needs of female prisoners, especially from an Australian perspective.

Recognising the need to address the paucity of Australian-based female-specific knowledge, this study explores the release concerns and service needs of female prisoners returning to the Perth metropolitan community. Drawing upon the narratives of eleven women who sought post-release support from Outcare's St John of God Women's Program, this research highlights two outstanding and interrelated themes. Firstly, following release there is a distinct need for women to develop a personal sense of *stability* within the community, including in particular, the establishment of safe, affordable and appropriate housing, financial security, the maintenance of sobriety, relational connection or reconnection, and immersion into prosocial pursuits. Secondly, in achieving such stability and, more importantly, maintaining it, there is a clear need for *support* for women, both in personal and non-personal terms. Ultimately, this research points to the critical role of comprehensive and female-focussed throughcare programs and services that can address critical short-term release needs, and provide opportunities for long-term self-sufficiency and sustainability. Furthermore, such services need to be encouraged as a crucial component of the criminal justice system, to ensure that women do not 'slip through the cracks'.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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Chapter one

Introduction: ‘Making it on the outside’

Background: Understanding prison’s revolving door

Regardless of one’s support or criticism regarding the use of imprisonment in sentencing, it continues to play a vast and important role in our criminal justice system. With ever increasing prison populations evident in most advanced countries around the world, imprisonment is a response driven by four fundamental principles: incapacitation, retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation (Bartol, 2002, p. 415). When a person is sentenced to a term of imprisonment the two major goals of incapacitation (via the physical removal of the offender from the community) and retribution (via the deprivation of liberty) are evidently achieved. However, the vast majority of prisoners will eventually be released from prison. Of the 29,106 prisoners in Australian prisons at 30 June 2011, only 5% were serving a life term or other indeterminate sentence, with the remaining sentenced prisoners having a median aggregate sentence length of 3 years and 3 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2011, p. 13). Moreover, recidivism statistics suggest that, for the majority, prison experiences fail to have any deterrent or rehabilitative effect in preventing future offending, with over half (55%) of all Australian prisoners having previously served a sentence in an adult prison (ABS, 2011, p. 11).

Such a high rate of recidivism, as similarly apparent in the United States and the United Kingdom, has metaphorically been referred to as ‘prison’s revolving door’. It is a problem that has received increasing attention on the part of both researchers and policymakers alike, especially considering the great costs to the community of crime and incarceration. According to the latest figures from the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services (WA DCS), it costs \$291.51 per day to keep an adult offender in custody, which reflects an annual cost of over \$106,000 per prisoner (WA DCS, 2011, p. 108). This is not to mention other collateral and social costs of imprisonment that are impossible to measure, including those flowing from health care, unemployment and other welfare supports, social isolation, family breakdown and homelessness (Willis, 2004). It is therefore incumbent on the community to identify successful strategies to promote and support the successful transition of prisoners into the wider community following release.

Prisoner reentry and reintegration

To this end, the topic of prisoner reentry and reintegration – the transition that prisoners make from the custody and control of a correctional institution into autonomy within mainstream society – has become a pressing concern, both internationally and in Australia. Prisoner reentry has emerged as a lens through which to view the numerous issues related to the process of a prisoner’s incarceration, release, and subsequent failure or success on the outside. Insights into these processes provide a critical avenue for guiding policymakers in developing and coordinating new programs and services to assist in assimilating ex-prisoners into productive lives within their families and communities. Consequently, literature in this area has grown considerably, spurred by criminal justice interests in reducing recidivism and social justice interests in improving the opportunities and life circumstances of returning prisoners.

The need for Australian-based female-focussed inquiry

The large breadth of prisoner reentry literature has widely documented the manner by which prisoners typically come from, and return to, dire social and economic circumstances that may contribute to their offending and/or re-offending behaviour. This literature has however, traditionally been comprised of international studies based exclusively on male populations or with disregard for the differentiation between males and females. For this reason, the generalisability of the particular findings of such research is ambiguous, with arguments that male-oriented research may not accurately capture the experiences of female prisoners, and further, that the needs of female prisoners may vary across borders, countries and cultures (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003).

In explaining the lack of attention to the specific needs of female prisoners, it has been suggested that the relative infrequency of female offending in comparison to that of men has historically provoked little official concern (NSW Department of Corrective Services (NSW DCS), 2005; Salomone, 2004; Victorian Department of Justice (VIC DOJ), 2005). National and international statistics demonstrate that women have a consistently lower rate of officially recorded crimes than men, and those that are recorded appear to be comparatively less serious and less violent than those committed by men (NSW DCS, 2005; VIC DOJ, 2005). In Australia, female prisoners represent only 7% of the total prison population (ABS, 2011, p. 8). Yet, despite their consistently small numbers throughout the world, women’s prison populations have soared over the past twenty to thirty years. Between 1984 and 2003, the Australian female prison population increased by a massive 209%, compared to an increase of 75% among their male counterparts (Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC),

2004, p.1). Furthermore, statistics attest that, like male offenders, female offenders released from prison typically lack necessary support structures and subsequently fall back into former patterns of behaviours and associations, which then lead them back to prison as recidivists (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; VIC DOJ, 2005). In 2008, 69% of women surveyed in Western Australian prisons had previously served a sentence in an adult prison (WA DCS), 2009, p. 30).

The disproportionate growth of women in prison, along with evidence of high recidivism rates, demonstrates the need for in depth inquiry into issues specific to female prisoners facing release. Such knowledge is necessary to adequately prepare the criminal justice system and other associated agencies for the optimal management of the growing population of female prisoners and releasees. Accordingly, there has been an increased interest in examining the situation of female prisoners and there is a slowly growing body of female-specific literature (NSW DCS, 2005; Galbraith, 2006). Nevertheless, with the majority of this research originating from within the United States and the United Kingdom, more remains to be learnt about the specific experiences and needs of female prisoners transitioning to the community within the Australian context, and more specifically, within the Western Australian context.

Aim and scope of the study

Recognising the need to address the paucity of Australian-based female-specific research in the area of prison release, reentry, and reintegration, the present study explores the release concerns and service needs of women returning to the Perth metropolitan community from the confines of prison. In doing so, this study draws on the narratives of released women who have sought post-release support from Outcare, the largest community-based service provider for prisoners in the Perth metropolitan area. Specifically, it explores the perspectives of clients involved in Outcare's St John of God (SJOG) Women's Program, a comprehensive female-specific throughcare program that provides specialist support services for women returning from prison, including counselling, outreach support, employment and, in particular, accommodation, through the provision of short-term crisis-care housing. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to understandings regarding the situation of women returning from prison in Western Australia. With this knowledge, recommendations will then be made for developing more appropriate management strategies for returning female prisoners, addressing the challenge of how society can support women

who are trying to ‘make it on the outside’, that is, to beat the odds of recidivism and build meaningful lives within their communities.

Overview of the study

Having introduced the challenge of prisoner reentry, highlighted the importance of Australian-based female-focussed inquiry, and subsequently outlined the aim and scope of this research, Chapter two proceeds by reviewing contemporary prisoner reentry literature. By establishing a research-focused view of current understandings regarding prisoner reentry and reintegration, Chapter two establishes the contextual background of this research and further develops the significance of continued research in this important area, particularly with female populations. Chapter three then outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this research. Encompassing a holistic and female-focussed perspective, it draws upon Carlen’s (1988) work on women, crime and poverty, lending to gendered pathways into crime, Goffman’s (1961; 1963) concept of ‘total institutions’, informing issues of institutionalisation and stigmatisation, and Cullen’s (1994) social support theory, together with Miller’s (1976) relational theory of female development, emphasising the importance of relationships, especially among women. Chapter four follows with a summary of the research processes involved in this study. This begins with a statement of the research purpose, research design, and research questions, along with a brief outline of the SJOG Women’s Program. This is followed by a detailed description of the research methods, including the recruitment and sampling of participants, the data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the coding and analysis techniques employed.

Following the development of the contextual, theoretical, and methodological underpinnings of this thesis, chapters five to eight present the analysis of the qualitative data collected from released prisoners involved in Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program. Chapter five characterises these women’s experiences of imprisonment, exploring both the productive and counterproductive nature of the experience, from its rehabilitative potential to its institutionalising effects, which can have a lasting impact on the individual and their return to ‘freedom’. Chapter six examines women’s initial experiences following release from prison, characterising the ‘point of release’ and the available (or unavailable) support that these women have as they transition from the dependent status of ‘prisoner’ to an ‘independent’ status within the wider community.

Chapter seven explores women's experiences of the barriers to, and importance of, securing safe, stable and affordable housing – a significant marker of post-release stability and a crucial precursor to achieving other post-release goals, such as a mother's reunification with her children. Chapter eight examines women's narratives of change and processes of internal transformation as they endeavour to move forward after prison. In particular the chapter explores the social and emotional context of women's post-release environments. Included are relationships with family, children and peers, as well as internal relationships with personal identity, particularly regarding issues with substance use and addiction, and the pursuit of employment and other vocational or educational endeavours. Lastly, with consideration for the contextual and theoretical understandings behind women's experiences of, and in, the criminal justice system, Chapter nine reflects upon the analyses of women's prison release narratives presented in the four analysis chapters, finally making recommendations for policy and practice that can facilitate the successful community reintegration of women after release from prison.

Chapter two

Prisoner reentry and reintegration: A literature review

This chapter reviews contemporary prisoner reentry literature, with the aim of establishing a research-focused view of the current understandings regarding prisoner reentry and reintegration. Although the situation of women is the main concern, considering the paucity of literature specific to women returning from prison, this review also draws on national and international research based on both male populations and mixed-gendered populations. In reviewing this literature, this chapter highlights substantive findings and critical themes regarding the challenges of prisoner reentry and the implications they have for rehabilitative programs and support services that can facilitate a smoother transition into the community. In doing so, it presents the contextual underpinnings of this thesis and emphasises the significance of continued research in the area of prisoner reentry and reintegration, particularly from a female-focussed perspective, and within the Australian, and more specifically, the Western Australian context.

Drawing key themes: A snapshot of studies in prisoner reentry

The continual cycling of offenders from prison, to the community, and back to prison, has led to the common perception that current custodial and community corrections practices are failing, neither helping the offender nor protecting the public (Broadhurst, 2006; Melbourne Criminology Research and Evaluation Unit (MCREU), 2003; Petersilia, 1999). With this view in mind, researchers have conducted various studies with post-release prisoner populations, often male parolees, with the aim of providing the knowledge required to make recommendations for best practice in relation to prisoner reentry. Such research seeks to provide an understanding of the reentry process, reporting what actually happens between release from prison and recidivism or successful reintegration, thereby addressing the challenge of how society can support released prisoners who are trying to beat the odds of recidivism.

A study conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice in New York examined the day-to-day experience of being on parole and reintegrating into the wider community from the

perspectives of forty-nine parolees released from New York State prisons (Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999). Acknowledging that prison release represents an important turning point, being a time of choosing between criminal and non-criminal involvement, and thus the critical nature of the first few weeks, the study interviewed participants two weeks prior to release and several times throughout the one month period after release. The study found that many parolees at reentry receive little opportunity and even less support for conventional social adjustments; yet, many have a strong desire to 'turn their lives around', viewing prison release and reentry as an opportunity for change (Nelson et al., 1999). From the respondents' reports, it was found that effective release preparation was seriously inadequate and that actual release processes were rather abrupt, with many participants re-entering the community alone, despite the need for immediate and direct intervention. Also, though most respondents viewed parole supervision positively, a common criticism was the lack of support and assistance from parole officers. This was especially important with regards to referrals for issues such as substance use problems as well as employment, which was the most pivotal issue of the whole reentry period and was seen as a critical and necessary sign of their ability to change.

These findings suggest that support from the moment of release, including pre-release planning, particularly in relation to job seeking and linking up with community treatment programs, is beneficial to post-release success. The study also found that positive relationships with family and friends were extremely important in providing support for change, especially in avoiding drug use and friends who are likely to be negative influences (Nelson et al., 1999). This emphasises the importance of supportive relationships in successful reentry and suggests that establishing and re-establishing such relationships could be a significant initiative in easing the transitional process.

A similar study was conducted more recently by Stephen, Harker, Guild, Paul, and James (2005), who sought to further develop understandings of the prison-to-community adjustment by interviewing fifty-one parolees three times over a period of three months after their release from prison. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, Stephen and colleagues (2005) focussed on the importance of various aspects of the family network, but also examined the effects of employment, peers, drug use and housing. Their findings suggest that, within the family network, important factors for facilitating the transition from prison to the community include: having a number of close relationships with family members along with minimal conflicted relationships, having family members who were not criminally involved, and for those with children, having a good quality parent-child relationship. In

addition to the overall network of family relationships, avoiding socialisation with peers who may provide negative influences, living in stable accommodation, acquiring employment, and having confidence in one's ability to discontinue drug use, were also found to be important factors influencing recidivism (Stephen et al., 2005).

O'Brien's study (2001a), one of the less abundant studies explicitly focussed on re-entering women, further supports these findings. O'Brien (2001a) identified and interviewed eighteen women who had successfully negotiated the transition from prison to the wider community to examine the strengths and resources they used to manage their reintegration. All of the women to some degree identified similar 'markers' that signified their success. These were: securing stable accommodation, maintaining employment, having supportive relationships, and having a sense of self-efficacy in their ability to change and succeed after release. These findings further emphasise the potential benefits that providing support in areas of accommodation, employment, and maintaining and re-establishing relationships, can have for improving people's chances of success after they leave prison.

Whereas O'Brien (2001a) utilised a sample of successful parolees, Hanrahan, Gibbs, and Zimmerman (2005) explored parole release from the perspectives of offenders who were unsuccessful at parole and had been returned to prison. Seven revoked parolees from a young adult offender program for men were interviewed twice, exploring their experiences of parole supervision and revocation, and their perceptions regarding supports and impediments to success. Hanrahan et al. (2005) found that although most had an initial desire to succeed, they had little confidence in their ability to make it on the outside. Again, supportive relationships, especially family ties, including those with children, were identified as important to these participants. However, consistent with the findings of Nelson et al., (1999), most of the inmates reported that no support was provided by their parole officers, who seemed to focus on surveillance not rehabilitation. This view is consistent with reports from Petersilia (1999) who suggested that although parole was originally designed to make the transition from prison to the wider community more gradual and to assist the offender in addressing personal problems such as employment and accommodation, parole supervision has shifted away from providing services and more toward monitoring and surveillance. But, as Travis, Solomon, and Waul (2001, p. 21) highlighted, "surveillance alone does not work. Supervision strategies that include some level of treatment or a rehabilitation component in combination with surveillance techniques have been shown to reduce recidivism". Such findings reiterate the importance of providing rehabilitative services to re-entering prisoners, in order to support their efforts at change and encourage community participation.

Exploring the challenges of prisoner reentry

Contemporary literature, such as that highlighted above, indicates the importance of supporting prisoners in their reintegration into the wider community following release. Regarding the provision of such support, the literature elicits several key areas of significance for facilitating successful reentry. These include: obtaining and maintaining employment, addressing substance use issues, having access to supportive relationships, and securing safe, stable accommodation. This section aims to further explore each of these important areas.

The barriers to, and importance of, securing post-release employment

Stable employment is widely recognised as playing a central role in the successful reintegration of prisoners into the wider community. Research has indicated that having a legitimate job lessens the chances of re-offending following release, especially among those with higher wages and higher quality jobs (Borzycki, 2005; Visher, Winterfield, & Coggeshall, 2005). Stephen et al. (2005) found that among their respondents, 28% of those who were unemployed after release were later re-incarcerated, compared to a re-incarceration rate of 12% among those who had successfully secured a job post-release. Such correlations between unemployment, incarceration and re-incarceration are not surprising considering that securing and maintaining a meaningful job is typically viewed as one of the hallmarks of successful adult life (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2006; Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle, & Hardcastle, 2004; Henson, 1990; Nelson et al., 1999).

Employment not only provides an individual with the necessary financial means to support simple human existence, it also provides a sense of identity and purpose, daily structure and routine, and an opportunity to expand one's social network to include other productive members of society (Graffam et al., 2004; Visher et al., 2005). In this way, it can be seen that employment is immediately critical to a returning prisoner's definition and assessment of their emerging relationship to the outside world and may play a pivotal role in their pursuit of a more conventional lifestyle (Graffam et al., 2004; Henson, 1990; Rakis, 2005). Correspondingly, studies examining prisoners' perspectives commonly find that upon release from prison, the task of finding employment is often a number-one concern (Houston, 2001; Nelson et al., 1999; WA DCS, 2009b, p. 9). Yet, national and international data suggest that employment rates of prisoner populations are considerably lower than that of the general population.

Prisoner reentry and reintegration

In Australia, the average unemployment rate for the civilian population aged 15 and over in 2001 was 6%. Comparatively, in the same year the National Prison Census found that 57% of first time prisoners and 67% of recidivists were unemployed at the time of their arrest (Borzycki 2005). More recent statistics suggest much of the same. A statistical report by the University of Western Australia's Crime Research Centre (CRC) revealed that in 2006, the majority of Western Australian prisoners (76.3%) were unemployed at the time of receipt into prison, a rate that had been relatively consistent in preceding years (Loh, Maller, Wrapson, & Walsh, 2009). Meanwhile, the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services' 2008 *Profile of Women in Prison* reported that two thirds (67%) of the women surveyed were not employed prior to their imprisonment (WA DCS, 2009b). This overrepresentation of unemployment among convicted offenders emphasises the link between unemployment, crime and recidivism. The connection however, is multifaceted, and studies focusing on specific samples of offenders have helped to clarify the relationship and further develop an understanding of this overrepresentation by identifying the many potential impediments that ex-prisoners face in both obtaining and maintaining employment.

Firstly, prisoner populations are typically characterised by numerous personal disadvantages that affect their employability. National and international figures suggest that compared to the general population, prisoners have lower levels of educational attainment, poor numeracy and literacy, limited basic life skills and key employment skills, and an inconsistent work history with limited recent experience in stable, legitimate employment (Borzycki, 2005; Graffam et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2001; Rakis, 2005; Sarno, Hearnden, Hedderman, & Hough, 2000). The CRC reported that in 2006 only 43.9% of adult prisoners in Western Australia had a minimum junior high school certificate (i.e. year 10) (Loh et al., 2009, p. 5). Similarly, the 2008 *Profile of Women in Prison* revealed that almost half (48%) of the women surveyed had not completed year ten (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 2).

In addition to poor histories of employment and low educational attainment, prisoner populations are also more likely to be hindered by often co-morbid physical and mental health issues. Due to often poor pre-prison lifestyles, prisoners have a greater risk of presenting with poor general physical health, as well as blood borne and other communicable diseases (Borzycki, 2005; Giles et al., 2004). Mental illness, either diagnosed or undiagnosed, including depression, bipolar disorders and anxiety disorders, as well as severe psychoses such as schizophrenia also occur at higher rates among prisoner populations (Borzycki, 2005; Graffam et al., 2004). Other psychological conditions or behavioural problems include low self-esteem, poor confidence and motivation, as well as anger management issues, and

problems with alcohol and other drug use, to name a few (Borzycki, 2005; Graffam et al., 2004; Rakis, 2005; Sarno et al., 2000). These conditions, whether occurring alone or comorbidly, can have the potential to limit initial employment and threaten sustained employment, therefore endangering successful community reintegration.

Another major barrier to employment among released prisoners is limited finances. Most people leave prison with no savings, no immediate employment prospects, and to add to this, many will have accumulated debt, have poor financial management skills, and a lack of social networks that would help overcome these problems (Borzycki, 2005; (Giles et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2001). The resulting financial difficulties can directly jeopardise the individual's ability to obtain and maintain employment, impacting on interview attendance, the purchase of necessary clothing or equipment, childcare and transportation costs, as well as having broader implications for various necessities such as accommodation (Graffam et al., 2004; Sarno et al., 2000). These issues highlight the critical role that employment and associated economic independence play in the successful reintegration of these individuals, thus the need for released prisoners to be supported in obtaining gainful employment.

These numerous personal disadvantages faced by prisoners, including poor education and job-related skills and experience, physical and mental health issues, behavioural problems, and financial limitations, are also those associated with other vulnerable and chronically unemployed and underemployed populations (Houston, 2001). However, ex-prisoners must also contend with additional impediments resulting from the criminal justice system itself (Graffam et al., 2004; Houston, 2001). For example, prisoners released on parole must satisfy various conditions, such as reporting requirements, periodic drug testing, and mandatory participation in various treatment programs and services (Graffam et al., 2004; Petersilia, 1999; Petersilia, 2001). Although such conditions are designed to act as supervisory and rehabilitative tools, these obligations can interfere with job schedules and limit employment opportunities (Petersilia, 1999).

Furthermore, individuals released from prison are often burdened with the social stigma associated with having a criminal history, which can affect the individual's employability in several ways (Graffam et al., 2004; Houston, 2001; Petersilia, 1999; Petersilia, 2001). Firstly, having a criminal record can simply preclude individuals from various occupations, such as public-sector employment (Borzycki, 2005; Petersilia, 2001; Rakis, 2005; Sarno et al., 2000). Secondly, even in positions where such policies do not exist, research has shown that employers are often nevertheless reluctant to hire individuals with a criminal record, perceiving ex-prisoners as potentially unreliable, dishonest or problematic

employees (Borzycki, 2005; Graffam et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2001; Rakis, 2005; Sarno et al., 2000). Thirdly, whether or not discriminatory attitudes are actually encountered, the experience of imprisonment and the imposition of a criminal record can diminish the individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy, resulting in negative perceptions regarding their own employability, thereby threatening initial employment (Graffam et al., 2004; Rakis, 2005). Finally, these barriers are compounded by the period of incarceration, which results in a lack of recent job experiences and a gap in the individual's employment record that can lead to a real or perceived lessening of job-related skills, as well as weakened social contacts that often lead to legitimate employment opportunities after release (Giles et al., 2004; Graffam et al., 2004; Rakis, 2005; Visher et al., 2005).

Overall, it is apparent that incarceration reduces the employment opportunities of offenders, who typically have had limited employment experiences to begin with (Bloom, 2006; Petersilia, 1999). Research suggests that even among those ex-prisoners who are able to secure post-release employment, these are often second-rate and low-wage jobs that provide little inspiration and can even diminish self-esteem and motivation to change or sustain change (Borzycki, 2005; Graffam et al., 2004; O'Brien, 2001a). Given the hardships that ex-prisoners face regarding employment, along with indications of the link between unemployment, crime and recidivism, the implementation of programs and other initiatives to minimise potential barriers and increase employment rates among individuals with a criminal history should be a major concern among policy makers and the community as a whole. If these individuals are to participate in the community legitimately, a condition expected not only by governmental criminal justice authorities but also by wider society, it is important that they are given the opportunity to do so. Criminal justice agencies must therefore begin to carefully consider all avenues for promoting post-release employability, including both custodial and community-based interventions, such as vocational education, skills training, and job placement services (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Borzycki, 2005; Graffam et al., 2004; Henson, 1990; Visher et al., 2005). However, as Solomon, Johnson, Travis, and McBride (2004, p. 4) highlighted, "because the link between employment and crime is complicated by other factors, including housing, health care, and drug treatment, employment is only one component of a multifaceted approach to assist returning prisoners".

Addressing substance use issues: Reducing substance-related harm and recidivism

Alcohol and other drug problems are often one of the most problematic factors impacting on the lives of many offenders. Compared to the general population, offending populations exhibit substantially higher rates of licit and illicit drug use and harmful drug taking activity (Borzycki, 2005; MCREU, 2003). According to the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program, which monitors illicit drug use among police detainees in several sites across Australia on a quarterly basis, sites routinely have around 60-80% of detainees testing positive to drugs including methylamphetamine, benzodiazepines, cocaine, cannabis, heroin and MDMA (AIC, 2006; Mouzos & Smith, 2006; Schulte, Mouzos, & Makkai, 2005). These high rates of substance use are consistent with the Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) study conducted in 2000. The study examined the lifetime offending and drug use of adult sentenced male prisoners in Western Australia and found that 80% were regular illicit drug users, with 50% reporting a high level of drug dependence (Western Australian Department of Justice (WA DOJ), 2003a). There is also a correspondingly high incidence of drug use and dependence specifically among the female prison population. In 2005, 77% of women surveyed in Western Australian prisons reported regular or dependant drug use during the six months prior to arrest (WA DCS, 2006, p. 76). Similarly, in 2008, 78% of women surveyed in Western Australian prisons defined themselves as having a problem with substance abuse (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 77).

Although more is to be gained in knowledge regarding the relationship between substance use and criminal behaviour, research demonstrates a consistently strong correlation between substance use, criminal activity, and re-offending (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Howells, Heseltine, Sarre, Davey, & Day, 2004; WA DOJ, 2003b). According to the DUMA data, in 2005, more than a third of the 3,786 detainees interviewed reported that at least some of their offending behaviour was drug-related (Mouzos & Smith, 2006, p. 5). Furthermore, detainees who were classified as drug dependent were arrested an average of three times in the past 12 months compared to an average of 0.6 for detainees who had never used drugs in the past 12 months (Mouzos & Smith, 2006, p. 6). Statistics also indicate that drug-related offences comprise a significant proportion of female offences. In Western Australian prisons, 69% of women surveyed in 2005 reported that their substance use was related to their offending, and 48% reported that they were under the influence at the time of their offence (WA DCS, 2006, p. 79). In fact, at 30 June 2005, women were more likely than men to be in

prison for illicit drug offences (14% of women compared to 10% of men) (ABS, 2007, p. 356), lending to the significance and severity of drug use among women prisoner populations specifically.

As highlighted by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), “any attempt to impose a standard definition on such a complex phenomenon as drug-related crime is necessarily reductive” (EMCDDA, 2007, p. 2). However, a definition encompassing four categories has typically been suggested as an aid to conceptualising the issue of ‘drug-related crime’ (Australian Government, Attorney General’s Department (AGD), 2011; EMCDDA, 2007; 2009; U.S. Department of Justice (US DOJ), 1994). Firstly, there are ‘psychopharmacological crimes’, which are those crimes resulting from the consumption of either licit or illicit drugs, whereby the pharmacological effects of acute intoxication or chronic use, such as impaired judgement, irrational or violent behaviour, excitability, irritability, disinhibition, drastic mood swings, paranoia, and psychosis can result in a range of offences including public order offences, assaults and other violence. Secondly, there are ‘economic-compulsive crimes’, which are those crimes committed by dependant users to financially support addiction, including, for example, break-and-enters, extortion, stealing, and street prostitution. Thirdly, there are ‘systemic crimes’, which are those crimes generated by the system of drug trafficking and distribution, which typically involves incidents of violence between users and dealers, or rival drug manufacturers and suppliers, committed in order to establish and protect drug markets. Finally, and most directly, there are ‘drug law offences’, which are those crimes associated with the violation of laws prohibiting or regulating the possession, use, manufacturing, distribution and trafficking of illicit drugs. Driving under the influence of alcohol and other drugs is also included in this category of drug-related crime (AGD, 2011; EMCDDA, 2007; 2009; US DOJ, 1994).

Despite these simplistic definitions and categorisations of drug-related crime, the relationship between drugs and crime is not simple, linear, nor universal. Therefore, no definition can account for the whole complexity of the drug–crime nexus (EMCDDA, 2007; 2009). Nevertheless, considering the overrepresentation of substance use and dependency issues among prisoner populations, as well as evidence suggesting the link between substance use and offending, it is clear that the provision of substance use programs for this population needs to be a major area of rehabilitative activity. This is especially important considering the substantial costs associated with the misuse of alcohol and other drugs, not only to the individual but also to the broader community (Howells et al., 2004; Martin, Butzin, Saum, & Inciardi, 1999). The Western Australian Department of Justice reported that crimes

associated with drug use are estimated to cost the State \$220 million every year (WA DOJ, 2003b). Aside from the great economic cost of drug use to the justice system there are also significant costs relating to the individual's health and the associated costs to the health care system, as well as a multitude of other social costs and individual harms that are impossible to measure (Howells et al., 2004; Martin et al., 1999; WA DOJ, 2003b). These include potential links to a range of life stressors such as family breakdown, social isolation, financial difficulties, unemployment, homelessness, and psychological distress or illness, which, among prisoner populations, can present serious impediments that hamper successful family and community reintegration (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Borzycki, 2005; Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, 2011).

With cycles of relapse and recidivism resulting in repeated contacts with the criminal justice system, there is the conception that if treatment can reduce substance use and promote a more conventional and productive lifestyle, then a corresponding reduction in crime and other substance-related costs will follow (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Borzycki, 2005; Howells et al., 2004; Martin et al., 1999; MCREU, 2003). Correspondingly, national and international criminal justice policies have responded to the need for more proactive drug treatment strategies within correctional systems with the implementation of various preventative, diversionary, retributive, and rehabilitative initiatives (Howells et al., 2004). Regarding custodial and community-based interventions, initiatives identified as particularly valuable include methadone maintenance treatment, substance abuse education, cognitive behavioural therapy, 12-step programs, and therapeutic community programs (Pearson & Lipton, 1999). Research in these areas has indicated that people who attend treatment tend to do better than those who do not enter or who drop out of treatment, with reduced rates of illicit drug use, improved health outcomes and lower rearrest and recidivism rates (Hiller, Knight, & Simpson, 2006; Howells et al., 2004; Inciardi, Martin, Butzin, Hooper, & Harrison, 1997; Martin et al., 1999; Melnick, Hawke, & Wexler, 2004; Pearson & Lipton, 1999; Wells & Bright, 2005).

Various studies have also reported that reductions in recidivism can be increased when custodial treatment is supplemented with community-based aftercare (Hiller, Knight, & Simpson, 1999; Howells et al., 2004). A quasi-experimental study by Hiller et al. (1999) found that relapses to drug use and crime were especially common during the first 90 days after discharge from prison. However, community-based aftercare can help to prevent these unfavourable outcomes by offering a continuum of intensive support and treatment into the post-release setting, easing the abrupt transition from prison to the community, assisting

stability in both living arrangements and employment, and helping the returning prisoner to cope with pressures associated with negative peer influences (Hiller et al., 1999). These findings suggest that community-based initiatives can maximise long-term reductions in recidivism by providing a supportive environment and services to ex-prisoners at risk of relapse.

In Western Australia, a commitment to tackling offender drug use has been demonstrated by the development of the Justice Drug Plan which was released in May 2003 (WA DOJ, 2003a; 2003b). The plan is the official correctional response to substance use among offenders in Western Australia, providing a blueprint for tackling the multitude of drug-related issues that confront the criminal justice system. The Government has committed \$2.135 million annually to implement the comprehensive plan which constitutes part of the State's Community Re-entry Program for Prisoners, which aims to provide increased support to prisoners upon release (WA DOJ, 2003a; 2003c). Based on international evidence which suggests that drug treatment reduces criminal activity (WA DOJ, 2003b), the Justice Drug Plan is also consistent with the Western Australian Drug and Alcohol Strategy, endorsed in Parliament in August 2002. The primary goal and approach of the Western Australian Drug and Alcohol Strategy is harm minimisation, acknowledging the importance of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies in the minimisation of the harms and risks associated with drug use. The Justice Drug Plan therefore features a range of strategies and services that are to be considered and implemented in the aim of creating a safer and healthier community by reducing drug use and associated offending behaviour, while also minimising all forms of drug-related harm (McGinty, 2002; WA DOJ, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c).

The role of relationships: Supporting reentry and reintegration

It is not surprising that post-release studies commonly find that the individual's social environment, particularly their social networks of family and peer relations, represents yet another major factor in understanding the reintegration of prisoners into wider society. Especially important are supportive relationships which can play a pivotal role in reducing the strain of reentry and facilitating successful reintegration (Hanrahan et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 1999; O'Brien, 2001a). The following subsections discuss the significance of such supportive relationships, including those with family, friends, and children, as well as parole officers and transitional support staff.

Family.

Often, the most important supportive relationships come from family members, particularly parents and/or siblings, with existing research providing strong empirical evidence that the family of a returning prisoner may have a significant impact on post-release success or failure (Naser & Visher, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; O'Brien, 2001a; Stephen et al., 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003). Prosocial and supportive families can provide various types of both material and emotional support that is critical to successful reintegration, especially at the point of release. For example, living with family members is often the most frequently cited post-release option for accommodation, an obvious priority need (MCREU, 2003; Nelson et al., 1999; Stephen et al., 2005). Such an arrangement can relieve the pressure associated with having to find accommodation prior to, or upon release, a process that may be especially daunting to a returning prisoner. Even if this is only a temporary arrangement, supportive families can also provide assistance in finding more permanent housing (MCREU, 2003; Naser & Visher, 2006).

Studies have also found that as well as housing assistance, some families are also willing to provide some financial support (Naser & Visher, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; Visher & Travis, 2003). More importantly though, families can provide vital assistance in helping the recently released prisoner to secure a job or job training, offering an opportunity for economic independence, which as previously discussed, is an essential component to improved post-release outcomes (Naser & Visher, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; Stephen et al., 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003). This assistance is especially important since incarceration often leaves the individual with segregated social networks which means they may lack important informal contacts for obtaining work (Graffam et al., 2004; Sarno et al., 2000). Furthermore, studies also find that family members may provide some form of, or means for transportation, as well as childcare, which can be essential to maintaining employment (Naser & Visher, 2006; Stephen et al., 2005).

Equally important to this tangible assistance with housing and employment is the emotional support that families can offer in the form of acceptance and encouragement (MCREU, 2003; Naser & Visher, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; Stephen et al., 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003). This often also includes actively encouraging abstinence from drugs and other antisocial activities and influences (Nelson et al., 1999). Such emotional support can be extremely valuable, with researchers commonly finding that the returning prisoners who appear to be the most optimistic about the future, and who often demonstrate greater success

in employment and abstinence from drugs, are generally those who are members of strong, supportive families who accept and encourage them (Naser & Visher, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; Visher & Travis, 2003).

Clearly, for returning prisoners, the availability of a supportive family unit can be their greatest support system. However, it is also important to note that not all families are welcoming and supportive of their returning family member, and in some cases, family can actually be part of the problem (MCREU, 2003; Naser & Visher, 2006; Stephen et al., 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003). For instance, some released prisoners may return to families that are embedded with issues such as drug use and/or criminal involvement (MCREU, 2003; Stephen et al., 2005). The previously described study by Stephen et al. (2005) reported that 33% of their sample had at least one other family member who had been on probation or incarcerated, and these factors were seen as contributing to parole violation and recidivism. Similarly, 32% of Non-Aboriginal women surveyed in Western Australian prisons in 2008 reported that family members had some criminal involvement. The corresponding statistic for Aboriginal women within the same sample was an alarming 97% (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 57). Statistics such as these suggest that an individual's criminal involvement and reintegration may be dependent on the structure of their family and the extent to which they provide a prosocial versus an antisocial influence (Naser & Visher, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003).

Nevertheless, problems can also arise even where an antisocial influence is not present. For example, there may be conflicted relationships within the family network that may contribute to the released prisoner's difficulties. In some cases, these relationships may be complicated by past experiences and unrealistic expectations (MCREU, 2003; Naser & Visher, 2006; Stephen et al., 2005). The family's attempts to help and support their recently released family member may take the form of criticism, suspicion, supervision or restrictive control over their behaviour. Situations like these can potentially lead to feelings of distrust and to the deterioration of family relationships, often interfering with rather than facilitating change (MCREU, 2003).

On the other hand, some returning prisoners may simply not have any family network to draw upon. In 2008, one-third of Non-Aboriginal women (33%) and one-fifth of Aboriginal women (19%) surveyed in Western Australian prisons reported being distant or estranged from their relatives (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 58). Further, a small percentage (8%) indicated that their relationships with family had deteriorated during their stay in prison (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 58). Similarly, research suggests that incarceration can jeopardise valuable supportive relationships with imposed physical and geographical isolation and minimal

contact visits (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Listwan, Cullen, & Latessa, 2006; Naser & Visher, 2006). Not to mention other hardships faced by families including frustration and other personal feelings that family members may hold regarding the individual's incarceration and criminal behaviour that could potentially lead to alienation and relationship breakdown (Listwan et al., 2006; MCREU, 2003; Naser & Visher, 2006).

In this way the vital role that families can play in the reintegration process of their returning family members can be significantly undermined. It may therefore be beneficial for practitioners to develop programs and services designed to maintain important ties and reinforce positive relationships (Listwan et al., 2006; Naser & Visher, 2006; Stephen et al., 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003). Such programs could direct efforts at involving and supporting the families of prisoners by facilitating better pre-release communication and preparing them for post-release circumstances (Naser & Visher, 2006; Stephen et al., 2005).

Although there has been little research into the effectiveness of actual reentry programs involving families, the few program evaluations that do exist have revealed promising results. These studies have found that such programs can effectively strengthen the family support network, thereby improving the transition process of recently released prisoners (Listwan et al., 2006; Naser & Visher, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003). For example, the evaluation of an innovative program in New York City, La Bodega de la Familia, that provides crisis intervention and case-management services to drug users involved in the criminal justice system and to their families, achieved results including decreased substance use and fewer physical, mental, and emotional problems (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001; Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002). Although reduced recidivism was not an explicit goal of the La Bodega program, the evaluation also found some evidence of a positive impact on re-offending rates (Sullivan et al., 2002).

On the whole, the research regarding programs designed to promote supportive relationships, along with evidence of the importance of such relationships to the reintegration process of returning prisoners, suggests that their implementation can be of value to criminal justice policies. However, although researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have recognised the value in providing family-based programs and services, they could benefit from a greater understanding of the circumstances faced by returning prisoners and their family members, including the hardships experienced and the types of assistance that would be beneficial (Naser & Visher, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003).

Friends.

Beyond immediate family connections, perusing or resuming relationships with friends can also represent an important avenue for post-release support for prisoners. As with positive relationships with family, including parents and siblings, prosocial friendships can be a source of valuable material and emotional support, providing comfort and easing any anxieties and loneliness that can be associated with prison release. The establishment of stable and prosocial peer networks is also an important indicator of social integration (Nelson et al., 1999; Stephen et al., 2005). However, at the same time it is important to note that reuniting with old friends, particularly those with whom friendships are based on drug use and/or other delinquent behaviour, is viewed as a major obstacle to successful reintegration (Nelson et al., 1999; Stephen et al., 2005).

Findings from numerous studies support this view. Stephen et al. (2005) found that reentering individuals who went out with friends four or more times per week were much more likely to get into trouble and return to prison. Apparently, socialising with old friends may prompt a return to old habits (Stephen et al., 2005). For example, initial estrangement from drug using friends may be resolved by using drugs with them. Subsequently, researchers often report that many released prisoners are aware that staying away from old friends will be critical to their successful reintegration, and some released prisoners demonstrate an active attempt to avoid particular friendships, especially those based on offending or drug use (MCREU, 2003; Stephen et al., 2005). This is consistent with Western Australian data which indicated that many of the female prisoners surveyed in 2008 acknowledged the need to stay away from former networks in order to not re-offend (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 57). Yet, although this may indicate a positive break with the past, with 63% of women surveyed indicating that they had friends with criminal involvement, and 43% of these women describing *most* of their friends as criminally involved (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 57), this also has major implications for social isolation upon release.

Children.

Within family relationships, parent-child bonds can also be an important influence in the reintegration process. Evidence suggests that parent-child relationships can significantly reduce the risk of re-offending and have a positive impact on reintegration into the community following release from custody (Queensland Department of Corrective Services (QLD DCS), 2003; VIC DOJ, 2005). For example, Stephen et al. (2005) found that although

being a parent was not related to post-release success, the quality of the parent-child relationship appeared to be a significant factor. Among their mixed-gendered sample, those parents who had lived with their children prior to incarceration, had some type of contact with their children while in prison, or described their relationship with their children as 'excellent', were less likely to return to prison. Thus, it seems that maintaining and developing parent-child bonds can help returning prisoners adjust to life outside of prison, as well as help to constrain further criminal involvement (Stephen et al., 2005).

Despite this important role however, maintaining, developing and re-establishing relationships with children throughout imprisonment and after release can be a difficult task (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goulding, 2004). Firstly, the current carer of the child and/or the incarcerated parent may have reservations regarding the appropriateness of the prison environment for their children (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Secondly, even where visits are welcomed by both parties, the geographical isolation of many prisons along with the costs of travelling may thwart efforts (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002). Furthermore, prison visitation rules and regulations are often not conducive to the maintenance of parent-child relationships, with strict visiting hours and restrictions to physical contact (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goulding, 2004). As a result of barriers like these, over a third of mothers (38%) surveyed in Western Australian prisons in 2005, reported receiving no visits by former dependents (WA DCS, 2006, p. 51).

Regardless of whether contact with children during the period of imprisonment is limited or not, research typically demonstrates that the majority of women who were caring for their children immediately prior to imprisonment intend to resume caring for them upon release (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; WA DCS, 2006, p. 53). But again, there are many barriers that parents have to overcome in order to maintain or regain their parental and custodial rights following imprisonment, especially in situations where the child has been placed in foster care or state custody (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Parents must demonstrate that they are able to take care of and provide for their child adequately, with proof of sustained employment and financial stability, a permanent and appropriate residence, and no further involvement in any criminal activity (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Yet, imprisonment often results in the loss of accommodation and employment opportunities, so, although reunification with their children may be of upmost importance to parents released from prison, it is often hindered by financial difficulties and housing problems (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; WA DCS, 2006).

Prisoner reentry and reintegration

This situation stresses the importance of assisting returning prisoners with employment and housing issues. Furthermore, assisting prisoners and ex-prisoners to maintain and enhance their family relationships ensures that the child is not punished for their parents offending, and can also assist with rehabilitation (QLD DCS, 2003; VIC DOJ, 2005). Challenges regarding custodial and community-based initiatives in this area include balancing the needs of the parent with the best interests of the child, the provision of a range of options for family contact, and ensuring that departmental policies and procedures recognise parental rights and responsibilities, as well as the value of encouraging and maintaining strong parent-child bonds (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Goulding, 2004; QLD DCS, 2003).

Parole officers and transitional support staff.

Relationships with parole officers can also be important to an individual's reentry and reintegration into the community. Many parolees report that having a parole officer that is willing to be flexible to each individual's situation by responding to changing circumstances and modifying conditions when appropriate, can help to facilitate successful reintegration (Nelson et al., 1999; O'Brien, 2001a). Parole officers can also provide further assistance in addressing personal problems by offering advice, encouraging participation in programs aimed at rehabilitation, and using their knowledge of services to make appropriate referrals in areas including employment, accommodation and substance use problems (Nelson et al., 1999).

However, as previously highlighted, although a supportive parole officer may be beneficial to a parolee's reintegration, many parolees report a lack of support and assistance from their parole officer, with criticisms regarding a perceived focus on surveillance as opposed to rehabilitation (Hanrahan et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 1999; Travis et al., 2001). This surveillance agenda is the result of well-documented ideological shift away from rehabilitative philosophies and towards a 'tough on crime' orientation to crime control, evident in Australia and around the world by the mid 1980s (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Broadhurst, 2006). Additionally, with an increasing number of parolees and limited resources with which to manage them, parole officers are often left with large case loads that simply do not permit intensive case management and the provision of intensive support services (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Petersilia, 1999; Travis et al., 2001). The result has been a movement towards a focus on establishing prison-like controls over prisoners released into the community. Monitoring and surveillance activities have been escalated and parole

violations are often dealt with more punitively with fewer support services being offered (Broadhurst, 2006; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Petersilia, 1999; Travis et al., 2001). It has been suggested that even parole services that claim rehabilitation goals still continue to be almost entirely focused on control-orientated activities (Petersilia, 1999).

Furthermore, it should be noted that parole is not available to all prisoners. In 2006 there was 8,983 prisoners released on parole orders in Australia (ABS, 2007, p. 357). With an estimated average of 30,000 prisoners being released each year, it is evident that the majority are released into the community unconditionally upon the completion of their prison sentence. This means that they are not subject to any post-release supervision or services through community corrections agencies (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003). This, coupled with evidence that even prisoners released on parole may not receive rehabilitative services due 'tough on crime' orientations towards supervision, emphasises the importance of implementing transitional support for all prisoners being released from prison, whether they are on conditional release or not (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Ross, 2005). Such transitional support services and the associated development of relationships with transitional support staff can be an important source of support, especially where the individual lacks positive social support networks within family and friendship groups (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 2004).

The barriers to, and importance of, accessing safe, stable and affordable accommodation

The important role that safe, stable accommodation plays in the successful reintegration of returning prisoners has long been recognised, especially since most people would agree that having a home is critical to human well-being. Recidivism studies commonly find that stable, socially supported housing is clearly associated with staying out of prison and increased social integration (Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2002a; 2006; Borzycki, 2005; Hinton, 2004; O'Brien, 2001a; Stephen et al., 2005). For example, Stephen et al. (2005) found that almost one third of the parolees in their sample who reported living in temporary accommodation were later re-incarcerated. Meanwhile, no re-incarcerations were reported among the parolees who indicated that they were living in more permanent accommodation. Yet, despite the apparent value that stable accommodation may have in reducing recidivism, many returning prisoners find that the process of securing such accommodation is plagued with multiple barriers and challenges (Hinton, 2004; MCREU, 2003; Ogilvie, 2001).

Firstly, incarceration often results in the loss of any housing secured prior to incarceration due to absence and failure or inability to maintain rental or mortgage payments. This is a common scenario which can be extremely disheartening for those individuals who were living in secure accommodation prior to going to prison. Moreover, this failure to maintain payments may also result in the individual acquiring a substantial debt, as well as a poor tenancy record that may disadvantage future efforts at securing accommodation (Baldry et al., 2002a; Hinton, 2004). Although public housing agencies do have policies for holding tenancy for individuals serving short sentences, usually for up to three months with a minimal rental contribution, there is no such leniency in the private rental market (Hinton, 2004). Often, only those individuals who are serving short sentences of a few weeks and who have the support of family and friends have any hope of maintaining their pre-incarceration housing (Hinton, 2004), again emphasising the importance of supportive relationships.

As highlighted in previous discussions regarding the significance of support from families, many prisoners come to rely on staying with family members as an option for post-release accommodation. Data collected from over 200 prisoners from Victoria and New South Wales found that whereas 24% were in family accommodation prior to imprisonment, 36% expected to be with their family upon release (Baldry et al., 2006, p. 23). The study concluded that where such post-release family accommodation is associated with stability, it is similarly associated with staying out of prison (Baldry et al., 2006, p. 26). An earlier report by Baldry et al. (2002a, p. 16) however, found that despite having expressed intentions to live with parents or other family members, a majority of these participants were living in other arrangements at three months post release, including alone, with friends, in hostels or shelters, or even on the street. For many of these individuals, the family option represents only a very short-term solution with the reality of living back with parents and other family members presenting unexpected problems, including, for example, relationship strain and family breakdown (Baldry et al., 2002a; Travis et al., 2001).

For those returning prisoners who do not have a positive family support network or are unable to return to family and friends, the housing options upon release are limited (Hinton, 2004; O'Brien, 2001a; Ogilvie, 2001; Stephen et al., 2005). First of all, securing accommodation is usually dependent upon the availability of a sufficient and steady income, but as previously highlighted, prisoners typically leave prison with no savings and no immediate employment prospects (Hinton, 2004; MCREU, 2003; Ogilvie, 2001; Travis et al., 2001). Although Centrelink does organise crisis payments to prisoners upon release in the aim of promoting a smoother transition into the community, it is unlikely that these payments

will be sufficient to cover all housing costs including bond and rent in advance payments, as well as utility connection fees (Hinton, 2004; Ogilvie, 2001). Released prisoners also frequently have a history of non-payment of rent, neglect or damage to the property, and sometimes threatening or violent behaviour which means they often do not have rental references and they are likely to be viewed by housing agencies as highly undesirable tenants (MCREU, 2003; Travis et al., 2001).

As a result of these barriers, private housing is most likely to be beyond the immediate reach of many people leaving prison, and they must therefore turn to public housing options (Hinton, 2004; MCREU, 2003). However, accessing public housing tenancies is not without its own difficulties. Most importantly, there is usually a long waiting period before these opportunities become available. In most jurisdictions in Australia a public housing transfer could take up to two years (Hinton, 2004; MCREU, 2003; Ogilvie, 2001). It may be expected that this waiting period could be reduced by pre-planning for accommodation during the incarceration period; but, this is often not the case. In fact, until recently prisoners could not apply for public housing through any of the priority categories since prisoners are classified as being under state care and therefore are not regarded as 'homeless' (Ogilvie, 2001). Although this has changed and applications are now accepted from prisoners with the involvement of a social worker, they still cannot be classified as a 'category one' applicant, and so, upon release, the applicant often remains at the bottom of the priority list (Hinton, 2004; Ogilvie, 2001). It has also been documented that prisoners are often unaware of the exact date of their release, which can further complicate preparation for post-release needs including accommodation (Baldry et al., 2002a; 2006; Ogilvie, 2001).

Initiatives designed to improve the placement of prisoners into stable accommodation upon release requires close cooperation between organisations including housing, justice and welfare providers. Australian jurisdictions have seen this collaboration with the development of the Supported Assistance Accommodation Program (SAAP). SAAP is a nationally coordinated program which aims to assist those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through a range of support and transitional supported accommodation services. Although the program is not specifically focused on housing for ex-prisoners, since it includes all individuals at risk of homelessness, it has been responsible for providing crisis, short term and medium term housing, as well as transitional support to prisoners reintegrating into communities across Australia (ABS, 2007; Baldry et al., 2002a; Hinton, 2004).

As well as SAAP, state governments have implemented various other initiatives. For instance, Western Australia developed a State Homelessness Strategy in 2001, identifying

one of its primary goals as assisting people to exit the criminal justice system. The strategy has provided funding for general and additional public housing for those leaving prison, with \$5.5 million being allocated for 65 units of accommodation for prisoners on release and people with mental health problems. Funding was also provided for more supported accommodation for returning prisoners and for developing more flexible ways of providing accommodation and support within the private sector, with \$2.36 million being allocated to support prisoners post release by assisting direct transfer into stable accommodation, therefore bypassing crisis facilities (Hinton, 2004). In 2003 the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services reported that funding would be provided for non-governmental organisations such as Outcare, which aim to provide services, including accommodation, to ex-prisoners upon release in order to facilitate successful reintegration (Hinton, 2004; Ogilvie, 2001; WA DOJ, 2003a). The Western Australian Department of Housing and Works also committed to making 40 homes and units available for offenders leaving prison (WA DOJ, 2003a). Nevertheless, it is obvious that the issue of finding suitable, stable accommodation is still a daunting process for many Australian prisoners returning to the wider society. Considering the importance of safe, stable environments in promoting positive social adjustments and successful reintegration upon release from prison, it is evident that more coordinated support services are necessary.

Additional problems specific to female returning prisoners

The research examined above demonstrates that returning prisoners are commonly plagued by problems including poor education and limited skills accompanied by unemployment and a lack of financial independence, problematic substance use and dependency, poverty and housing issues, as well as social isolation with poor supportive relationships (Hanrahan et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 1999; Ross, 2005; Stephen et al., 2005). Although most of this knowledge comes from international research most commonly based on male populations, a slowly growing body of female-specific literature, fuelled by the increasing imprisonment rates among women, has often delineated comparable findings (NSW DCS, 2005; Galbraith, 2006). As with male offenders, many female offenders enter the correctional system with limited education, poor employment histories, problematic substance use, and are often at risk of being homeless upon release, with limited support networks that could provide assistance in these areas (QLD DCS, 2003). In addition however,

female prisoners often have to deal with other distinctive female-specific problems (Byrne & Howells, 2000; NSW DCS, 2005; Galbraith, 2006; Salomone, 2004; VIC DOJ, 2005).

Firstly, women's experiences of imprisonment and release are often affected by their role as a mother, and in many cases, as the primary care giver of their children. Western Australian statistics show that nearly three quarters of women in prison in 2005 were mothers, with almost half of all women with children being single mothers (WA DCS, 2006, p. 48). Unlike the situation for men in prison, whose children usually remain in the care of their mothers, women in prison must often rely heavily on temporary carers to look after their children (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goulding, 2004; McGrath, 2000). According to mothers surveyed in Western Australian prisons in 2005, 71% of women who were carers of dependent children at the time of their imprisonment reported that their children were in the care of family members, most commonly their parents. Meanwhile, the father of the children was reported as the carer in only 26% of cases (WA DCS, 2006, p. 50). However, for women who do not have someone who can look after their children while they are in prison, their children may be placed in local authority or foster care, a situation which again stresses the importance of family and supportive relationships (Caddle & Crisp, 1997).

For dependent children, the impact of their mother's imprisonment can lead to instability and dislocation which may in turn result in serious emotional and behavioural problems (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; VIC DOJ, 2005). Meanwhile, for the mothers, the punishment of imprisonment is compounded by their separation from their children, which can lead to emotional distress including feelings of helplessness, frustration, guilt and depression, as well as anxiety over the type of care their children are receiving and over fear of losing custody and being seen as bad mothers (Armytage, 2000; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goulding, 2004; VIC DOJ, 2005). Such emotional distress is often widespread, being apparent even among mothers who view themselves as inadequate parents or who did not have custody of their children at the time of imprisonment (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goulding, 2004). This anxiety and stress experienced by imprisoned mothers as a result of enforced separation from their children can impede their capacity to address issues related to their offending behaviour and thus the process of rehabilitation (QLD DCS, 2003; VIC DOJ, 2005).

Additionally, since many women have carer responsibilities for their children, this may have implications for other important areas of their reintegration, especially in obtaining and sustaining employment. Like men in prison, women in prison often have lower levels of education and job-related skills, along with a poor employment history compared to the

general population (VIC DOJ, 2005; WA DCS, 2006). However, for mothers returning from prison, attempts at pursuing financial independence through work is often even further hampered by their care-giving responsibilities. As a result many women are often highly dependent on government aid and welfare services (VIC DOJ, 2005). In 2005, 72% of women surveyed in Western Australian prisons reported that government benefits were their primary source of income prior to their arrest (WA DCS, 2006, p. 60).

Secondly, compared with male prisoners and women in the general community, female prisoners are more likely to have serious mental health issues (Byrne & Howells, 2000; QLD DCS, 2003; VIC DOJ, 2005). The *Survey of Women Prisoners in Western Australia in 2005* identified that 53% of women had a diagnosed mental health issue (WA DCS, 2006, p. 66). The complex impact of mental illness can be integral to women's offending and may demean any attempts for rehabilitation or prevent them from accessing the programs, services and supports that may promote successful reintegration following release from custody (Byrne & Howells, 2000; VIC DOJ, 2005). Being in prison can also exacerbate mental health issues and, if left unmanaged, this can heighten the risk of self-harm and harm to others (VIC DOJ, 2005).

Thirdly, more women than men experience sexual, physical and psychological abuse and these experiences often appear to contribute to women's criminality and shape their patterns of offending (Byrne & Howells, 2000; Galbraith, 2006; VIC DOJ, 2005). Eighty-eight percent of the women surveyed in Western Australian prisons in 2005 reported having experienced some form of abuse either as an adult or in their childhood, with half experiencing abuse in both childhood and adulthood (WA DCS, 2006, p. 70). The most common types of abuse reported in adulthood were physical abuse followed by emotional abuse with most related to domestic violence (WA DCS, 2006, p. 70). For these women, access to victim support services, including sexual assault services, is vital to their recovery process and to breaking subsequent cycles of abuse, as well as improving their rehabilitation outcomes (VIC DOJ, 2005). Furthermore, since domestic violence appears to be a major contributing factor, it is essential that women returning from prison are given assistance in relation to securing safe, suitable, and stable housing to ensure that they do not have to return to abusive relationships as an only option for housing, a situation which appears to commonly occur (McGrath, 2000; QLD DCS, 2003).

Fourthly, there is evidence that compared to men, women are more affected by labelling and the negative stigmatisation attached to imprisonment, as well as self-shame, which is often a major issue during the reintegration process (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

Internalised self-shame, whether derived from embarrassment or guilt, along with perceptions of negative community attitudes can often constitute punishment well beyond the actual time women offenders serve (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Such feelings can be extremely debilitating, leading to social isolation, as well as diminished confidence and self-efficacy in one's ability to change and to succeed after release, which can severely impede successful reintegration and may even contribute to further deviance (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goulding, 2004; Harm & Phillips, 2001; McGrath, 2000).

Overall, it appears that although female prisoners may represent a lower risk offender group when compared to male prisoners, current research suggests that they often encounter more complex problems and challenges throughout their incarceration and within the release setting. As Baldry et al. (2006, p. 26) similarly concluded from their pre-release data from over 200 Australian prisoners, despite being involved in less serious crime than men, women were more socially disadvantaged as a group. Ultimately, female returning prisoners represent one of the highest need groups within society, and necessary attempts to reintegrate this high-need group must address the problematic issues and challenges that these individuals confront.

The overrepresentation of Indigenous women in Australian prisons

Finally, in discussing the specific circumstances of female prisoners in Australia, it is necessary to also acknowledge the enduring and intensifying overrepresentation of Indigenous women within the Australian prison system. The overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians, both men and women, at all stages of the criminal justice system, has been well documented. It became a particularly heightened issue of concern following the publication of the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) in 1991, which attributed Indigenous overrepresentation as the primary factor underlying their high rate of custodial mortality. The Royal Commission reports laid a solid foundation for governments to address the challenge of Indigenous overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, identifying the importance of overcoming the systemic discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage that Indigenous people face in Australian society (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (ATSISJC), 2001). Yet, despite its 339 recommendations, two decades on, it is evident that the RCIADIC has had limited success in effecting positive change, with the level of Indigenous incarceration remaining unacceptably high and continuing to rise.

Despite constituting only 2.5% of the total Australian population (ABS, 2012, p. 138), the 2011 national prison census reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners comprised just over a quarter (26%) of the total prison population; a rate 14 times higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts (ABS, 2011, p. 8). Within Western Australia, the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous imprisonment rates is the highest in the nation, at 18 times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners (ABS, 2011, p. 50). As at 30 June 2011, 38.1% of all adult prisoners in Western Australian prisons were Indigenous (WA DCS, 2011, p. 35). However, the statistics regarding women specifically are even more alarming, with the same 2011 prison census identifying 43.5% of women imprisoned in Western Australian prisons as Indigenous (WA DCS, 2011, p. 33). As highlighted by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Indigenous women are currently incarcerated at a rate higher than any other group in Australia, making them the fastest growing prison population in the country (ATSISJC, 2002; 2005).

Amid this bleak picture, there has been a growing awareness in recent years of the need to understand the specific cultural needs of Indigenous women in corrections. The increasingly available data suggests that their rising rate of overrepresentation is a problem that must be understood in terms of the ongoing impact of colonisation and dispossession on the culture, laws and traditions of Indigenous communities, and the pervasive social marginalisation and economic disadvantage that such cultural breakdown has manifest itself in (ATSISJC, 2002; Blagg, 2008). Although circumstances of socio-economic disadvantage are also experienced by non-Indigenous people and by Australian communities more generally, statistical data reveals that Indigenous people continue to do worse than other Australians across virtually all key indicators of disadvantage, including life expectancy, health, education, employment, income, and criminal offending and victimisation (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), 2007).

Many Indigenous women in Australia today live well below the poverty line. They are more likely than non-Indigenous women to be unemployed, to have carer responsibilities for children other than their own, to receive welfare payments and to have finished school at an earlier age (ATSISJC, 2005; SCRGSP, 2007). Indigenous women are also more likely to be a victim of violence, in both adulthood and childhood, and also more likely to live in communities where violence, alcoholism or other substance abuse issues are prevalent (ATSISJC, 2005; SCRGSP, 2007; Willis & Moore, 2008). Furthermore, once imprisoned, recidivism statistics also indicate that Indigenous women are at greater risk of returning to prison. According to the 2008 *Profile of Women in Prison*, 91% of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander women surveyed had a prior adult imprisonment under sentence, compared with 47% of non-Indigenous women surveyed (WA DCS, 2009b, p. 29). “These factors combine to make Indigenous women a particularly vulnerable group, highlighting the complexity of their needs upon release from prison (ATSISJC, 2005).

The need for the rehabilitative agenda in crime control

The literature reviewed in this chapter has demonstrated that released prisoners, both male and female, are often confronted by a range of social, economical, physical and psychological problems that can severely impact upon their reintegration into the broader community and may become substantial impediments to leading crime-free lives. The prevalence of such problematic circumstances stresses the importance of the development of support services and rehabilitative programs addressing these problems, thereby assisting prisoners to re-establish themselves in wider society, as well as reducing subsequent recidivism and other social problems (Broadhurst, 2006; Petersilia, 1999; Ross, 2005). In light of evidence that suggests that men and women have different and varied needs, it is also essential that such prisoner reintegration initiatives employ a gender-responsive philosophy, with female-specific strategies emphasising the unique needs and risks of female prisoners both within prison and upon return to the community (NSW DCS, 2005; Galbraith, 2006; Salomone, 2004; VIC DOJ, 2005).

The provision of such programs and services may have the potential to improve the life circumstances of the individual offender, and also promote the reintegration of responsible, law-abiding and self-supporting citizens, therefore protecting the public from possible re-offenders (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Broadhurst, 2006; Josi & Sechrest, 1999; Ogilvie, 2001; Petersilia, 1999). Furthermore, the inclusion of rehabilitative initiatives into policy agendas is in line with international human rights law such as the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* which enumerates that imprisonment should not inflict punishment beyond that of the deprivation of liberty and should not hinder reintegration into society after imprisonment (Tkachuk & Skinnider, 2005).

In providing essential support services to returning prisoners, the concept of throughcare has received increasing attention from researchers and policy makers (Kinner, 2006). Throughcare refers to the provision of services that commences in custody and continues after release into the community, emphasising continuity of care for prisoners. It acknowledges that post-prison aftercare and support are necessary to provide prisoners with

the best opportunity for successful reintegration into society, and that best outcomes for returning prisoners may arise when aftercare commences before release (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Borzycki, 2005; Kinner, 2006). By providing continuous care that spans the gap between prison and community, throughcare allows for pre-planning and preparation for release, linking prisoners with the communities to which they will eventually return (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Biles, 2005; Borzycki, 2005; Ross, 2005). It also helps to reduce dislocations in treatment by supplementing any participation in custodial programs with community-based aftercare where necessary (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Biles, 2005; Borzycki, 2005; Ross, 2005). In this way, throughcare seeks to minimise the adverse impact of imprisonment and maximise the potential for rehabilitation (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Biles, 2005; Borzycki, 2005).

Although the implementation of throughcare programs and other support services that cater to the needs of returning prisoners have generally received support from researchers and policy makers, the availability of such services is limited and has traditionally been made available only by voluntary or charitable organisations (Ogilvie, 2002; Ross, 2005). However, recently some initiatives have been introduced into government policy agendas in a number of Australian jurisdictions (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Biles, 2005; Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Kinner, 2006). In Western Australia various government initiatives have been made available to both men and women returning from prison through collaboration with community-based service providers including Outcare Incorporated (which the current research draws from) and Ruah Community Services (HREOC, 2004; Ogilvie, 2002). Nevertheless, these community-based service providers still often rely heavily on charitable organisations for the funding of programs and services that are not covered by government funds (Outcare, 2007).

Conclusion: The context for this research

The female-specific knowledge that is currently available suggests that women returning from prison, including those within Australia, are an extremely high need group within society, experiencing multiple and complex problems that can hamper their reintegration into the wider community. Upon release they often confront a lack of finances, employment, accommodation, and difficulty with re-establishing relationships, as well as the re-emergence of possible substance related problems. Additionally, women also often have to deal with other underlying problems such as concerns about children, high levels of physical,

mental and emotional health issues, histories of abuse, and debilitating perceptions of negative social stigmatisation resulting from imprisonment.

This contemporary knowledge highlights the importance of providing specialist support services for women returning from prison, developed and delivered to address their specific needs. Outcare's SJOG Women's Program is one such example. Yet, although there is some availability of prisoner reentry support services and programs in Australia, it is important to note that Australian research into best practice regarding prisoner reentry and the delivery of such services is not well developed. Consequently, the few programs that do exist, especially those designed specifically for women, are often under-resourced, under-funded, and are not based on strong research or rigorous evaluation (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Kinner, 2006; Ogilvie, 2002).

Additionally, since research into prisoner reentry and reintegration is primarily based within the United States and the United Kingdom, little is known about the nature and characteristics of the particular disadvantages of the returning prisoner population in Australia, and even less is known specifically about women (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Ogilvie, 2002). Within the Western Australian context, female-focussed research is particularly limited. Aside from various government-based reviews and statistical prison data, such as the WA DCS's *Profile of Women in Prison* reports, as well as inspection reports of Bandyup Women's Prison and Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women from the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS, 2003; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2011), the only contributions that have been made are that of Goulding (2004), who examined the 'impact of imprisonment on women's familial and social connectedness'. The qualitative study, which drew upon the perspectives of 52 women who were either nearing release or newly released from Western Australian prisons, demonstrated the multiple and complex challenges that female prisoners face, emphasising the need for the development of evidence-based programs that cater for the needs of women specifically.

Overall, in more effectively meeting the needs of Australian prisoners, and in particular, female prisoners, it is evident that further Australian-based research is necessary. The Australian Institute of Criminology has acknowledged this point and have subsequently emphasised the importance of prisoner reentry research within the Australian context (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003). The Australian Institute of Criminology has also suggested a research agenda including firstly, a review of what programs and services are effective, secondly, an analysis of the risk factors that make Australian ex-prisoners vulnerable to re-offending, and thirdly, an examination of the protective factors that can help prevent such

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offending and assist in prisoner reintegration (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003). With advances in these areas of research, more effective ways to approaching prisoner return within Australia can be established. In response to these issues, this research makes necessary contributions to an understanding of the particular disadvantages that Western Australian female prisoners face through the qualitative exploration of the perceptions of the women involved in Outcare's SJOG Women's Program. In doing so, this research will provide recommendations for improving gender-responsive strategies and facilitating more successful integration of female prisoners into the wider community.

Chapter three

Theoretical framework: A holistic and female-focussed perspective

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis, highlighting key bodies of literature that provide a holistic and female-focussed platform for exploring prisoner reentry and reintegration. In examining the perspectives of women involved in the SJOG Women's Program, this research draws upon Carlen's (1988) work on women and crime, Goffman's (1961) writings on institutionalisation, Cullen's (1994) social support theory complemented with Miller's (1976) relational theory of female development, as well as strengths-based perspectives in social work. Together, these works offer significant insights into prisoner reentry and reintegration as they provide frameworks to consider both environmental and individual factors that impact upon the reintegration period, as well as examining female-specific motivations for, and processes of, connecting with social support services, such as the SJOG Women's Program. Firstly though, this discussion begins by introducing the ecological perspective, which sets the foundation for this research.

The Ecological Perspective: The person-in-environment view to human existence

In sociology, there continues to be an endeavour towards an understanding of the relationship between social structures and individual attitudes and behaviour (House & Mortimer, 1990). This ongoing 'structuralism versus individualism' debate seeks to determine the influence of the social, economic, and cultural conditions imposed upon individuals, compared to the existence of innate characteristics of human nature or individual personality (Gannon & Freidheim, 1982; van Krieken et al., 2006). The ecological perspective, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of both structuralism and individualism, assuming a person-in-environment view to human existence (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; van Krieken et al., 2006).

The ecological perspective suggests that doing well in life depends on a multitude of factors that encompass individual talents and motivations, as well as class background, and ethnic and family heritage. In this way, the human condition may best be defined as 'freedom

within structural limits', lending credit to Karl Marx's famous dictum, "Men (sic) do make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, not under conditions of their own choosing, but rather under circumstances which they find before them, under given and imposed conditions" (Marx, cited in van Krieken et al., 2006, p. 14).

In line with this perspective, this thesis assumes a holistic understanding and approach to prisoners, their offending behaviour, and their processes of reintegration. It takes the view that although individuals encompass the ability to determine their own lives and make their own choices, it is clear that individualism is not enough. An individual's social environment and/or social-class position not only affects their socialisation, and therefore the development of certain characteristics of personality and cognitive functioning, it can also determine the inequality of opportunity that they may experience, for example, a student's access to, and participation in, higher education (Gannon & Freidheim, 1982; House & Mortimer, 1990). Therefore, the life circumstances of marginalised groups such as prisoners cannot be fully understood without reference to experiences shaped by poverty, educational and vocational disadvantage, race and gender (ACT Prison Project Office, 2002; Gannon & Freidheim, 1982; House & Mortimer, 1990).

The pre-prison environment: Women, crime and poverty

In her work on women in crime, Carlen (1988) sought to explain their involvement in the criminal arena in terms of both structural and cultural forces. In the fashion of the structuralism versus individualism debate, Carlen (1988) asked two important questions: 'To what extent is an individual free to shape her own actions, identity and consciousness independently of the economic, ideological and political circumstances in which she finds herself?' and related to this first question, 'What is the relationship between criminal justice and social justice in general?' (Carlen, 1988, p. 107). With these two questions in mind, Carlen (1988) examined the oral histories of thirty-nine female offenders, with the aim of facilitating an understanding of the complex interplay of class and gender in the women's criminal careers.

The main feature identified by Carlen (1988) in this ethnographic study is the issue of poverty (Carlen, 1988; Smart, 1989). With most of her sample being working class women who had little or no access to good jobs, Carlen (1988) found that, marginalised by both poverty and isolation, many young women believe that they have nothing to lose by engaging in criminal activity, a frame of mind which she coined the 'sod it syndrome' (Carlen, 1988, p.

32). For these women, crime, most commonly property offences, was seen as the best method of solving their financial problems and getting some control over their lives, providing a better standard of living, an outlet for their energies and talents, and a network of non-judgemental friends (Carlen, 1988). In this way, crime was seen to be chosen as an ‘individualistic’ remedy to ‘structuralistic’ social inequalities.

In addition to the impact of poverty, Carlen (1988) identified three other significant factors affecting the life circumstances of the thirty-nine women and becoming constituents of the women’s law-breaking. These were: having been in Care¹, drug or alcohol addiction, and the quest for excitement. Nevertheless, as Carlen (1988) highlighted, these three factors also possess an element of poverty. Firstly, children who are admitted into State care commonly come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Secondly, substance use has long been linked to poverty, often as a means of relief from disadvantaged life circumstances. And finally, since legitimate forms of ‘excitement’ require money, illicit forms are often more attractive to individuals suffering the deprivations of poverty.

Carlen’s (1988) portrayal of poverty as a critical issue to offending behaviour is well supported. As discussed in Chapter two, connections have long been drawn between women’s (and men’s) involvement in the criminal justice system and the inequalities, hardships, and suffering they experience within society. Women in prison have often suffered disproportionately from a tangle of social problems and deprivations such as homelessness, inadequate health care, education, and employment opportunity, drug or alcohol related problems, and/or mental and emotional difficulties (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Carlen, 2002; O’Brien, 2001a; Richie, 2001).

With evidence of such deprivations within the life histories of women in prison, Carlen (1988) puts forward the argument that women are born into conditions structured by class and gender relationships, and that these relationships are greatly influential in the development of their criminal careers. Rather than instilling the structuralist view that poverty leads to crime, Carlen (1988) suggested how poverty is “woven into the fabric of these women’s lives, reducing their options, crippling their morale, and rendering them outsiders” (Smart, 1989, p. 521). She concluded that under certain economic and ideological conditions, an individual is more likely than not to enter the criminal arena. This is not to imply that the individual has no choice and should therefore be absolved from responsibility

¹ England’s care system whereby children are admitted into the care of local authorities because their families are too poor to look after them, or where Care Orders are imposed on troublesome children, usually for status offences, such as running away, staying out late, or being aggressive (Carlen, 1988).

for their actions. However, individual human will is viewed as just *one* factor in shaping an individual's life history (Carlen, 1988). As Box (1987) articulated:

Although people choose to act, sometimes criminally, they do not do so under conditions of their own choosing. Their choice makes them responsible, but the conditions make the choice comprehensible. These conditions, social and economic, contribute to crime because they constrain, limit and narrow the choices available. Many of us, in similar circumstances might choose the same course of action (cited in Carlen, 1988, p. 162, emphasis in original).

Carlen (1988) acknowledged that this explanation of crime neither accounts for 'crimes of the rich and powerful' nor does it explain why the majority of the seriously disadvantaged and the powerless do not become recidivist criminals (Carlen, 1988, p. 12). Consequently, there has been disagreement with representing women in prison as victims of class and/or gender inequalities or abuses. Yet the fact that the majority of people in prison come from the lower socio-economic groups cannot be denied. Many women will have entered prison as a direct result of their social circumstances and upon release they are exposed to the same circumstances that contributed to their criminalisation in the first place (Carlen, 2002; Petersilia, 1999; Petersilia, 2001). As such, Carlen (2002) stressed that public services must be made to take account of the needs of released prisoners not only on the basis of crime reduction arguments, but also more straightforwardly in the name of social justice, suggesting that it is "surely ... desirable that one objective of imprisonment be to ensure that prisoners are released from prison in a better state than when admitted" (Carlen, 2002, p. 15).

Carlen's work provides an obvious backdrop to discussions of prisoner release from the perspectives of women, lending to the compelling argument that "understanding their life histories is essential for understanding women prisoners" (Belknap, 2007, p. 77). Her work offers a framework for theoretical analysis that is not only female-specific, it also forces us to address potential underlying issues of structural disadvantage by impelling us to question the extent to which social circumstances, especially in socioeconomic terms, are critical to women's offending. This is especially fundamental to the analysis of the narratives of released women who have sought the support of social services such as Outcare and the SJOG Women's Program, which this research is anchored in.

The prison environment: The effects of institutionalisation

In discussions of prisoner release, it is not only important to examine the individual's social environment outside of the prison, and thus their 'pathways' into crime, which

Carlen's (1988) work is concerned with, it is also important to develop an understanding of the impact of the prison environment itself. Goffman's (1961) symbolic interactionist theories are drawn on to address this area, exploring the released prisoner in the context of their incarceration and introducing the challenges of prison release and the need for transitional support.

Goffman's (1961) key concept was that of the 'total institution', an institutional setting in which every aspect of the life of its members is controlled (Goffman, 1961). Goffman (1961, p. xiii) defined the total institution as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situation individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life". Although, his work was initially centred on mental asylums, it is explicitly obvious that prisons serve as a clear example of a 'total institution', which Goffman (1961) argued are designed and operated in such a way that promotes the institutionalisation of its inmates. Within these institutions, inmates are cut off from wider society and are expected to live according to institutional rules and procedures, including a strict schedule of when and how certain activities, administered by the institution, are to be carried out (Goffman, 1961; McCartney, 2006; van Krieken et al., 2006). These rules are enforced by staff who possess certain powers over inmates, including the power to discipline misbehaviour with corrective sanctions, creating a staff-inmate split and often fostering a 'them and us' mentality among the inmates (Goffman, 1961; McCartney, 2006). Further, the individual is stripped of their personal identity and any previously held social roles, and a new inmate identity is imposed upon them through a process that Goffman (1961) termed the 'mortification of the self'. Within the prison setting this includes the issuing of a uniform and identification number and the dispossession of their personal belongings (Goffman, 1961; Lemert & Brenaman, 1997).

This highly structured nature of the institution takes away all that characterises adult life on the outside such as "self-determination, autonomy and freedom of action" (Goffman, 1961, p. 43). Goffman (1961) argued that this reinforces the individual's dependant status, and as a result, adjustment to the outside community, where they have to become responsible for themselves, can be a difficult task (Goffman, 1961; Ross, 2005). For instance, in a female-focused qualitative study conducted by O'Brien (2001), one released prisoner reflected that "the controlling prison culture reinforced the lack of planning for future responsibilities that women face when they exit the institution" (O'Brien, 2001a, p. 292). Consequently, many inmates leaving the institution experience anxiety about leaving the

security and predictability of prison (Goffman, 1961; McGrath, 2000) and upon release many admit they would actually prefer to go back because “it was easier” (Hinton, 2004, p. 37).

As well as the potential development of this ‘institutional dependency’, Goffman (1961) suggested that total institutions can have negative socialising effects on inmates’ attitudes and behaviour, where prison can actually “serve to socialise less experienced offenders into criminal lifestyles” (McCartney, 2006, p. 11). In this way, prisons can become a ‘school for crime’, with prisoners leaving the institution with more advanced criminal skills than when they entered (Carlen, 1988, p. 154). However, even for prisoners who leave the institution with genuine intentions for leading crime-free lives, they are often confronted by the disappointments of stigmatisation or as Goffman (1963) articulated, their ‘spoiled identity’. This spoiled identity is not only perceived to be spoiled by the wider society to which they return, but also by the individuals themselves as a result of the ‘mortification process’, through which they accept the label of ‘prisoner’. Consequently, upon return from the institutional setting, the individual’s social position within their community is often even further disadvantaged than it was prior to their imprisonment (Goffman, 1961; 1963).

In line with Goffman’s (1963) ideas, Carlen (1988) also identified stigma to be a major issue for women returning from prison. She found that most women perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as being damaged by criminalisation and that their criminal record had rendered them outsiders and marked them as unemployable for life. As such, Carlen (1988) argued that criminalisation can “effect a further narrowing of already meagre life chances” (Carlen, 1988, p. 137). Furthermore, female offenders are often more deeply affected by their stigmatisation than their male counterparts because they are seen as being ‘doubly deviant’ (Heidensohn, 1987, p. 20; Worrall, 2002, p. 49). That is, they not only violate the law as criminal offenders, they also break gender role expectations and are seen as unfeminine, unnatural and abnormal (Heidensohn, 1987). A more recent female-focused study, focussing on this issue of stigma, similarly found that upon release into the community, women often experience a degradation process as a consequence of both society’s labelling, as well as internal mechanisms of self-shaming, resulting from embarrassment about having been in prison (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) argued that this degradation often constitutes punishment well beyond the actual time women offenders serve within the prison, and may contribute to further deviance since social exclusion is often a contributory factor in a person’s criminal activity (Carlen, 2002; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

Overall, Goffman's (1961) work suggests that the effects of labelling and the stigma attached to imprisonment, the socialising effects on attitudes and behaviour, and the disruption of community and family ties, as well as institutional dependency, can result from institutional isolation (Goffman, 1961; Lemert & Brenaman, 1997). Consequently, upon release, prisoners are often likely to be even less integrated and more isolated, challenging their chances of enjoying a prosperous law-abiding life in the future (Carlen, 1988; Goffman, 1961). These insights into institutionalisation emphasise the importance of bridging the gap between prison and the community, easing the transition period and thereby minimising the adverse effects of imprisonment and promoting reintegration (McCartney, 2006). In this way, Goffman's (1961) ideas advocate the implementation of throughcare programs, such as the SJOG Women's Program.

Although these ideas were formed by Goffman in 1961, current researchers (see for example Haney, 2003; 2008; McNown Johnson & Rhodes, 2007) continue to draw upon Goffman's (1961) work in their discussions of the processes of prison adjustment, recognising Goffman (1961) as a key contributor in the development of theories of institutionalisation. Further, an Australian study, conducted in 2006, investigated the applicability of Goffman's (1961) theories to the current prisoner experience of incarceration and concluded that "it is clear that Goffman's theories of the effects of institutionalisation are still relevant in contemporary Australia" (McCartney, 2006, p. 21). As such, Goffman's (1961) theories of institutionalisation ideally extend Carlen's (1988) work as a framework for the analysis of discussions of prisoner release by expanding our understanding of the released prisoner's social environment to include the prison environment and the lasting effects of prison life. Through Goffman's (1961) consideration of the nature of incarceration, and the effects of institutionalisation and stigmatisation, his ideas have the potential to inform the experience of prison release and the need for transitional support. His work encourages a consideration of how well, and to what extent released prisoners are able to move beyond their 'offender' status and reintegrate into society, which is of primary importance to this research.

The post-release environment: Relatedness, connection, and support

As well as examining the release concerns and particular disadvantages of women exiting prison, this research also deals with service delivery and programming for women in these circumstances. It is therefore necessary to also examine theoretical perspectives that

pertain to programmatic issues regarding women specifically as they re-enter the wider community. Considering their multiple and complex needs, theories that focus on the relevance of 'support' can provide particularly useful tools in interpreting discussions of prisoner release and analysing the importance of addressing women's post-release needs.

Chapter two outlined the importance of supportive relationships in reducing the strain of reentry and facilitating successful reintegration. Relationships, after all, "provide the means by which people connect with each other and function within their communities" (Wolff & Draine, 2004, p. 457). In line with such discussions, and akin to concepts of 'social capital' (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1986; Reisig, Holtfreter, & Morash, 2002; Wolff & Draine, 2004), social support theory, described by Cullen (1994), suggests that social relationships and more specifically, the support they provide, is essential to healthy human development (Cullen, 1994; Cullen, Wright, & Chamlin, 1999). Such social support includes the provision of affective resources, or emotional support, such as affirmation, encouragement, compassion and love, as well as instrumental resources, or practical support, such as shelter, food, money, or childcare, as well as advice and guidance (Cullen et al., 1999; Stevens, 2006; Strauss & Gregory, 2001). This support can be supplied within intimate or confiding relationships and other personal social networks, but can also be a property of the individual's immediate community, or the wider society (Cullen et al., 1999; Stevens, 2006).

According to social support theory, the provision of these various kinds of social support, within mutually supportive relationships, reduces the risk of crime and other personal pathologies by building and reinforcing internal defences within the individual against criminogenic tendencies or influences, connecting the individual to prosocial activities and opportunities, and providing the resources that allow individuals to cope with hardship through non-criminal means (Colvin, Cullen, & VanderVan, 2002; Cullen et al., 1999; Stevens, 2006). Thus, in line with Carlen's (1988) reflections, social support theorists argue that individuals caught in a web of neglect and disadvantage, deprived of love and nurturance, are placed at risk for a life in crime. Further, this notion is reinforced by empirical evidence that suggests that social support is inversely related to individual offending (Cullen, 1994).

Unlike control theorists who stress the importance of harsher punishments, which are seen to act as a deterrent from criminal behaviour, social support theorists argue that preventing crime requires doing something *for* a person rather than *to* a person, with the view that "crime is best addressed not through greater amounts of control but by increasing social

support” (Cullen et al., 1999, p. 190). Accordingly, social support theorists suggest that by building more supportive social arrangements and improving the quality of people’s lives, social support can help organise a progressive approach to crime control (Cullen et al., 1999).

In line with social support theory, Miller’s (1976) relational theory advocates the need for social support, stressing its importance especially among women, by describing the different ways in which males and females develop psychologically. According to Miller (1976, p. 83), women (more so than men) “stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others”. In the words of Covington (2003, p. 5) more recently, the relational model of women’s development and growth asserts that “women develop a sense of self and self-worth when their actions arise out of, and lead back into, connections with others”. Thus, for women, autonomy and separation are not perceived as successful adult goals. Rather, their primary motivation is to build a sense of connection with others, traditionally with parents, families, children and partners, and these relationships are central to their core identity, functioning and growth (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Covington, 2003; De Cou, 2002; McCampbell, 2005).

Relational theory and social support theory mutually suggest that social support networks are essential for women in general terms, and more specifically, in the pursuit of reducing their risk of involvement in criminal behaviour. However, women offenders often grow up and live in situations where social support networks are either lacking or are highly dysfunctional and do not promote positive relationships (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, & Deschenes, 2003; Klein, Bartholomew, & Hibbert, 2002; McCampbell, 2005). Often, women offenders are even drawn into criminal activity because of their need to be connected with others (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; McCampbell, 2005). These insights emphasise the importance of providing effective social supports for women coming out of prison, with the development of services that would allow women to “learn about and experience healthy relationships as part of the intervention process” (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003, p. 56).

Correspondingly, literature regarding service provision and case management within the criminal justice context has recently taken the trend of favouring the strengths-based or empowerment model, especially among women (Agllias, 2004; Clark, 2006; Clark, Walters, Gingerich, & Metzler, 2006; Healey, 1999; Morash, Bynum, & Koons, 1998; Richie, 2001; van Wormer & Boes, 1998; Walters, Clark, Gingerich, & Meltzer, 2007). In line with concepts of relational theory, the strengths-based approach emphasises mutually respectful relationships, with a focus on collaboration rather than confrontation, and solutions rather

than problems. Within this approach, social workers acknowledge the socio-political context of women's offending, with themes of empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, personal responsibility, respect and dignity, and a supportive environment, taking precedence (Agllias, 2004; Clark, 2006; Clark et al., 2006; van Wormer & Boes, 1998; Walters et al., 2007).

By taking into account women's tendency to be concerned with interpersonal relationships, the strengths-based approach appears to be well suited to women's learning and communication styles. Furthermore, as suggested by Goffman (1961), released prisoners often find their very selfhood defined by their crimes and are likely to have pessimistic views regarding therapy and authority figures (Goffman, 1961; van Wormer & Boes, 1998). For such persons, a positive approach is essential to engage the individual in the casework relationship. Clearly, as Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003, p. 56) suggested, "a relational context is critical to success in addressing the reasons why women commit crimes, their motivations, the ways in which they change their behaviours, and their reintegration into the community". Understanding relational theory and the value of relationships, connections and social support, can inform the need for gender-specific programs and services, such as the SJOG Women's Program.

Linking the theoretical fields

To summarise the perspectives presented within this chapter, the works of Goffman (1961) and Carlen (1988) describe certain factors and circumstances that may influence involvement in criminal behaviour and affect processes of prisoner reintegration. These perspectives offer a platform for theoretical analysis which, in line with the ecological perspective, recognises that individuals occupy autonomy in their decisions that may lead them to prison, but also insists on the examination of the influential effects of certain environmental factors, such as the inequality of opportunity and the effects of institutionalisation often experienced by those who come into contact with the criminal justice system. These circumstances stress the need for support upon release from prison, a notion which can be informed by Cullen's (1994) social support theory and the relational model of women's development (Miller, 1976). Together, these two theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding female prisoners' needs upon release, as they attempt to reintegrate into the broader community, and also offer considerable insight with regard to female-focussed service delivery and programming. Furthermore, discussions of the value of

relationships and the strengths-based approach provide a foundation for a review of the management of women returning from prison, and in particular, the examination of the SJOG Women's Program and its delivery and approach. Figure 1 presents a theoretical model developed for the purposes of this research. It illustrates how these key bodies of literature are related with each other and how they fit into the research context, depicting theory that informs practice and research, and research that informs practice and theory.

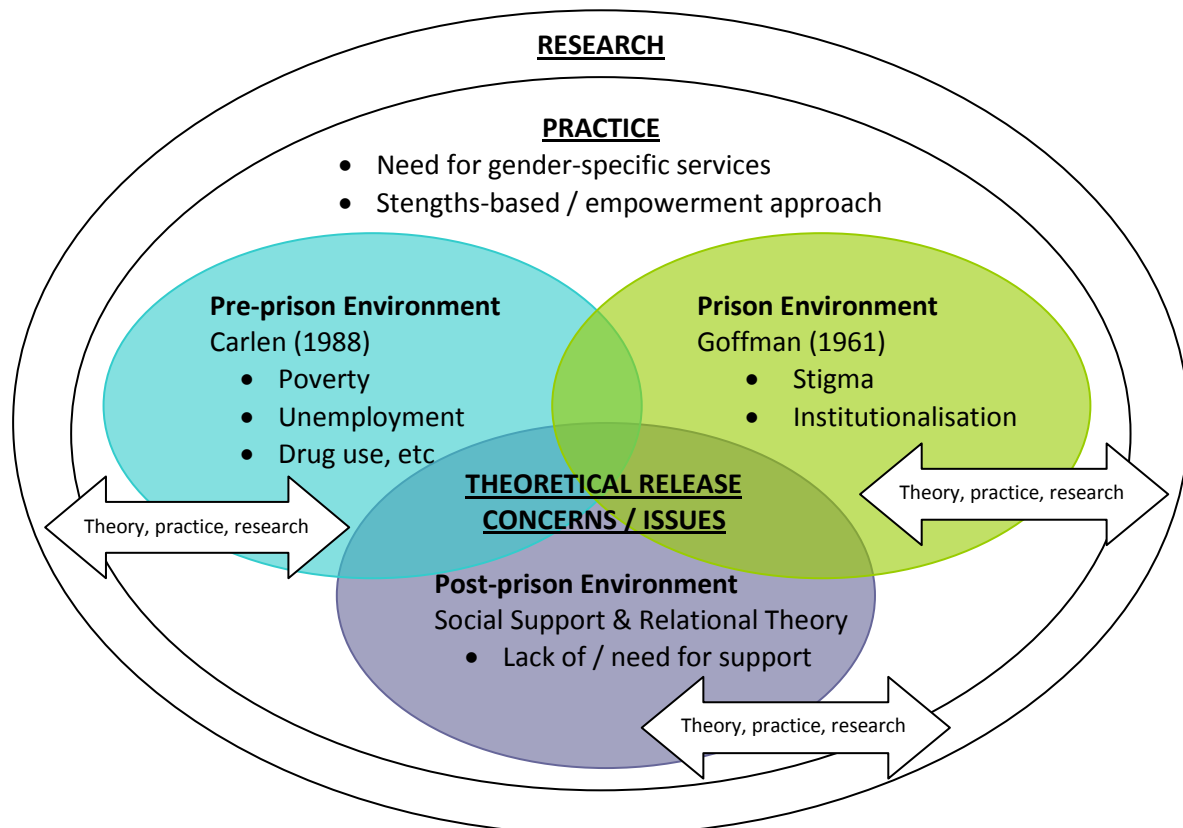


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

Conclusion

The key bodies of literature described within this chapter provide significant insight into the lives and characteristics of incarcerated and previously incarcerated women and the factors that shape their behaviour. Together, they form a holistic and female-focused theoretical framework for prison release that insists on the relevance of taking into account what has transpired in a woman's life prior to the time when she faces the decision to break the law. At the same time, it stresses the lasting effects that the prison experience itself can have on the individual. And finally, it provides a foundation for the analysis of the post-

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release setting and processes of post-release support and service delivery for women involved in the criminal justice system. The analysis chapters that follow draw on these ideas to explore the release setting as perceived by women involved in Outcare's SJOG Women's Program.

Chapter four

Research methods: Eliciting women's prison release narratives

This research explores the release concerns and service needs of women returning to the Perth metropolitan community from the confines of prison. In doing so, this research presents a qualitative study based on the narratives of women participating in Outcare's SJOG Women's Program. This chapter provides a detailed description of the research processes involved in the compilation of these data. This begins with a statement of the research purpose, research design, and research questions, as well as a brief outline of the SJOG Women's Program. The chapter then turns to an in-depth description and justification of the research methods employed, including the recruitment and sampling of the participants, the data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the coding and analysis techniques.

Research purpose, design and questions

In criminology, and more specifically, in prisoner reentry research, "the real people actually involved in the crime are curiously missing" (Kuhlmann, 2005, p. 3). Yet, released prisoners have the potential to make considerable contributions to prisoner reentry research, having unparalleled insights into the process of prison release, problems encountered upon release, and potential recidivism and re-incarceration. For this reason, exploratory studies of prison release as seen through the eyes of the prisoners themselves are essential in developing a clear and accurate picture of the release setting. These principles, emphasising the 'voices' of the incarcerated and/or the formerly incarcerated, are forged on the foundations of 'convict criminology' (Kuhlmann, 2005; Richards & Ross, 2001). Though convict criminology traditionally refers to the scholarly work of academics with personal histories of incarceration, it also represents an emerging perspective in the field of corrections and criminology that argues for the primacy of ethnographic methods, particularly the use of convict or insider perspectives, in criminological research more generally (Richards & Ross, 2001).

Acknowledging the value of ethnographic accounts, as a “powerful vehicle for understanding” (Christian, Veysey, Herrschaft, & Tuban-Carbone, 2009, p. 15), this study utilises Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program (with the approval of Outcare’s chief executive officer) as an opportunity for research that can establish a greater understanding of the situation of female prisoners returning to the Perth metropolitan community. Employing a narrative inquiry style, semi-structured interviews with women participating in the SJOG Women’s Program provided the primary data for analysis. These interviews sought to explore these women’s perceptions about prison release and life within the outside community, as well as their participation in the program, based on the following three research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What factors/circumstances prompt women to enter into relationships with support groups such as Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program?
- **Research Question 2:** What kinds of post-release problems do women face following release from prison and what kinds and combinations of services/support do they view as necessary or of any particular value in addressing these problems?
- **Research Question 3:** What is the relevance, importance and value of the SJOG Women’s Program to the women?

These research questions were designed to act as a starting point from which an interview schedule could be derived for the elicitation of data that could make critical contributions to Australian-based female-specific knowledge in prisoner reentry and reintegration, particularly within the Western Australian context. Furthermore, by exploring the above questions from the perspectives of clients involved in the SJOG Women’s program, it is suggested that this research has the potential to: 1) specifically, inform and enhance program content and delivery, and 2) more generally, provide recommendations for improving gender-responsive strategies and facilitating more successful integration of female prisoners into the wider community.

The St John of God Women’s Program

The SJOG Women’s Program is one of the few female-focussed transitional support programs currently available in Australia. The Western Australian program was established in 1998 in recognition of the need for specialist support services for women returning from prison. Outcare, Western Australia’s only specialist non-government prisoner support agency,

coordinates the program, with funding provided by the Sisters of St John of God. Acknowledging the criticality of the transition period from prison back to the community, the program is modelled on concepts of throughcare and case management, connecting with women in prison within the three months prior to their release and providing transitional support up to six months after their release (Outcare, 2007).

With an average caseload of 31 clients per month and one case manager (Outcare, 2006), the program encourages pre-release planning and provides post-release assistance in relation to accessing benefits and government agencies, identifying employment prospects, addressing issues relating to their children, as well as providing counselling and referrals where necessary. The program also offers short-term crisis-care accommodation to help released female prisoners settle back into the community. At the time of data collection, the SJOG Women's Program had seven units of accommodation available, with each client staying for up to three months, after which referral assistance and support is provided in seeking more permanent housing.

Methods

Participant recruitment

A "critical first step in any research is to identify and recruit research participants" (Shaw, 2005, p. 842). In this regard, Outcare's willingness to cooperate and contribute was imperative to this research, especially considering the difficulty associated with locating and recruiting prison and prison release populations (Bosworth, Campbell, Demby, Ferranti, & Santos, 2005; Shaw, 2005). Outcare's tenure as one of Australia's leading service providers for prisoners and released prisoners was the basis of the decision to approach Outcare for the purposes of research, recognising the organisation's significant and longevous contributions to the support and advocacy of prisoners. Contact was initially made with Outcare in early 2007, regarding the prospect of prisoner release research. Following a meeting with the CEO, who upheld the importance of Western Australian based female-specific research in the area of prisoner release, I was granted access to Outcare's SJOG Women's Program as an avenue for research and participant recruitment.

With the CEO's support, the recruitment of the participants in this project was assisted by the SJOG Women's Program case manager(s), who provided a means of initial contact with clients and potential participants. Assistance in this area included various activities carried out by the case manager independently or with me collectively, including

verbally informing potential participants of the research project, issuing participant invitation/information sheets, supporting my participation in ‘tag-along’ sessions as a means of ‘meet-and-greet’ with clients, and identifying those who expressed interest in participating in the research and subsequently releasing contact details to me. With this assistance, I was then able to contact potential participants directly (usually via phone) to formally invite them to participate in the project, both voluntarily and anonymously, and further, to make arrangements for an interview, if they chose to be part of the research project².

In total, eleven participants were recruited during a rather lengthy recruitment period from February 2008 to July 2009. At times the process of securing an interview required persistence, with multiple cancellations and subsequent rescheduling. In other instances, participants were more spontaneous, offering their time at first contact. Although the assistance of the case manager(s) was crucial to securing these interviews, this method was not without frustrations. Firstly, over the seventeen-month recruitment period, the SJOG Women’s Program incurred three changeovers in management. This meant that I had to initiate collaboration with three different case managers, while allowing each time to settle into their role as the coordinator of the program. This was often a major cause of delay in data collection, in conjunction with the smallness of the program and the slow turnover of clients. Further, although the opportunity for research was enthusiastically supported by Outcare’s CEO, this enthusiasm did not necessarily translate down to lower levels, where the involvement of the case manager(s) in the recruitment process was sometimes perceived as an inconvenience. It is acknowledged that such ‘practice versus research’ attitudes were simply the product of the case manager(s) concerns regarding time management and significant case loads. Nevertheless, this was often another cause of delay in participant recruitment and data collection.

In line with research on the recruitment of qualitative research participants among ‘hard-to-reach’ populations, such as prisoners and released prisoners, the women participating in this research were each given a stipend of \$20 (Davern, Rockwood, Sherrod, & Campbell, 2003; Shaw, 2005). This token payment was provided as reimbursement for their time, and a necessary acknowledgement of their contribution as a most critical component of the research. Research regarding such participant reimbursement demonstrates that it can be an effective strategy in securing an adequate level of response, which may be especially important among prisoner and released prisoner populations (Davern et al., 2003;

² All of the women that I made personal contact with proceeded as participants.

Martinez-Ebers, 1997; Shaw, 2005). Research also suggests that while such monetary incentives encourage greater participant willingness, they do not appear to affect the quality of the data collected (Davern et al., 2003; Martinez-Ebers, 1997).

Among the participants in this research, the \$20 participant payment was received with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Some participants appeared to be impartial to the monetary incentive, expressing their willingness to participate even before receiving knowledge of the payment. For others, the payment was a crucial ‘deal sweetener’. Nevertheless, in line with Grady’s (2005) observations, even where the monetary incentive appeared to be a significant driving force for participation, other motivations also appeared to come into play. These motivations included having the opportunity to ‘tell their story’, having someone to talk to who had a genuine interest in what they had to say, boredom or ‘not having anything else to do’, as well as simple altruism, curiosity, or a personal interest in the research. Overall, the token payment was viewed as a necessary component of this research, if not in the aim of maximising participation rates, then simply as a means of reciprocity – in return for these women’s willingness to share their critical, yet personal, knowledge and experiences.

The participant sample

The final sample consisted of eleven participants, recruited primarily from within the SJOG Women’s Program, with the only criterion for selection being based on the willingness of the individual to engage in the research project. Nine of the eleven participants were recruited from within the program directly via the case manager’s introduction or referral, while two were recruited via snowballing method. Of these two, one had been sharing one of Outcare’s two-bedroom crisis-care units with another participant, and the other was a friend or acquaintance of another participant and had never been involved with Outcare or the SJOG Women’s Program. Although the sample size may be viewed as somewhat modest, it was the “deep understanding permitted by information-rich cases” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180), that was of value to the qualitative product, and furthermore, is the “hallmark of all qualitative inquiry” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 183). Simply, by engaging with this small group of women, a more personalised, in-depth, and richly textured understanding of their release experiences was able to be achieved – a task that would have been difficult with a larger sample (Marshall, 1996; Sandelowski, 1995). Further, the richness and quality of the data obtained were such to achieve informational redundancy and theoretical saturation, as outlined by

Sandelowski (1995), while allowing for the detailed analysis of the data demanded by narrative studies (Sandelowski, 1995).

For the purposes of developing an understanding of particular sample characteristics Appendix A presents a tabulated outline of the participants' demographic and background information, which may also be a useful reference in interpreting later analysis. Of the eleven participants, only one identified as an Indigenous Australian³ with the other ten being Caucasian Australian. Ages ranged from 27 years to 49 years with an average age of 34 years. Nine of the women had been sentenced prisoners with sentences ranging from one month (not including remand) to 39 months, with an average sentence length of 16.5 months. Of the remaining two (who had not served time as a sentenced prisoner) one was remanded in Bandyup for 3.5 months before being transferred into residential rehabilitation via drug court. The other was remanded in Bandyup for 4 months before being granted home detention while awaiting her court date. Including remand time, the average actual time served in custody (for their most recent offence) was 11.3 months, with a range from 3 months to 30 months.

Although questions regarding actual offences and/or charges were not included in the interview schedule, these were nevertheless divulged by each of the interviewees throughout the interview process. Among the eleven women, offences included: one driving without a licence, one arson, one assault, one aggravated armed robbery, five drug-related charges including selling and supplying, and two stealing and/or burglary charges. For six of the eleven participants, this was their first contact with the criminal justice system. Of the remaining five, one had experienced juvenile detention, another had experienced juvenile detention and one other previous incarceration period, and the other three had multiple experiences of incarceration: One described three periods of incarceration, and the other two had 'lost count', with approximately 12 years of incarceration and re-incarceration each.

At the time of the interviews, the average release period that had elapsed was 3.8 months, with a range from 3 days to 12 months. Four of the women had been released without orders, five were on parole or intensive supervision orders, and of the remaining two, one had just completed a residential rehabilitation program via drug court and the other was on home detention. Regarding the women's involvement with Outcare and the SJOG

³ Given their overrepresentation among prison populations, as highlighted in Chapter two, the value of considering the differential experiences of Australian Indigenous prisoners in comparison to non-Indigenous prisoners is acknowledged. However, this is not considered within the scope of this research, which instead examines the female experience of prison release and reentry more broadly. Nevertheless, the underrepresentation of the Indigenous perspective here is recognised as a limitation of this research, and it is an issue that is discussed in greater detail in Chapter nine's discussions of 'limitations, reservations and future directions'.

Women's Program, six made contact with Outcare during the course of their imprisonment, one during her drug court imposed rehabilitation following remand in prison, whereas three only made contact after their release upon referral by their parole officer or advice from a friend or acquaintance, and one had never had contact with Outcare or the SJOG Women's Program at the time of the interview. Eight of the women were housed in the SJOG Women's Program short-term crisis-care accommodation at the time of the interview. Of the remaining three, one was living with her mother (after having just moved out of Outcare's housing due to end-of-lease), another was in shared private rental, and the third was in short term stay at the Carlton Hotel in East Perth with the recommendation of the SJOG Women's Program case manager.

The interviews

Eleven interviews were conducted over a sixteen month data collection period, commencing in March 2008 and concluding in July 2009. Each of the interviews consisted of a one-off, one-on-one, semi-structured interview, lasting for, on average, forty-five minutes and ranging from between twenty-five minutes to an hour and twenty-five minutes. These interviews took place either at Outcare's head office in East Perth or at the participants' then current place of residence, which was most commonly one of Outcare's SJOG Women's Program crisis-care accommodation units. Given the personal nature of the interview subject matter, this one-on-one approach, utilising these known settings, was considered as the most appropriate means for data collection. Not only did this approach act to provide a secure environment that assured confidentiality and anonymity, it also minimised the participant's inconvenience; both of which are particularly important aspects in research with 'vulnerable' populations (Finch, 1993).

Following pre-interview introductions and discussions detailing the research purposes and procedures, as well as assurances of the strictly voluntary and confidential nature of the research (discussed further below under 'ethical considerations'), the participants signed a consent form. With the permission of the interviewees, all of the interviews were digitally audio-recorded for transcription and thematic analysis and interpretation. This method was viewed as essential to the research process, where, as highlighted by Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1990, p. 134), the preservation of authentic data, via audio-recording, not only allows for 'greater analytical depth', but is also a crucial factor in enhancing rapport by allowing for 'more natural conversation' and enabling the full and non-distracted attention of the interviewer.

Each of the interviews proceeded firstly with the completion of a demographic data questionnaire (see Appendix B). This questionnaire was composed to obtain important background information, including ethnicity, education, employment, accommodation, marital status, maternal status, and criminal history and incarceration details. The questionnaire also served as both an ‘ice-breaker’ and a ‘warm-up’, allowing an opportunity to establish a sense of familiarity and rapport before delving into ‘the harder questions’ of the semi-structured interview component. Addressing the research questions outlined above, the interviews loosely followed an interview schedule (see Appendix C) that focused on three key areas of the women’s prison release experiences. These were: 1) their individual motivations for participation in the program, 2) their expectations and perceptions of the reentry period, and 3) the value of their participation in the SJOG Women’s Program. This included an identification of the various problems they had faced and supports they had received regarding factors such as reconnecting with children and other family or friends, employment and financial problems, accommodation, and substance use, as well as the meaningfulness and availability of opportunities presented to them that supported a law-abiding lifestyle, all of which were categories outlined as important to prison release within the literature reviewed in Chapter two.

The research relationship: Involvement, trust and emotionality

According to Shaw (2005), participants with ‘problem experiences’, such as prisoners, often exhibit a great deal of apprehension and nervousness when facing queries into their personal lives by researchers. Taking into account this potential discomfort towards research, various measures were taken to engage and involve the participants in a way that sought to minimise such feelings. Firstly, a conscientious effort was made to foster a welcoming and permissive atmosphere that would encourage trust and rapport, by directing interview proceedings in a rather informal manner. For instance, attention was paid to self-presentation, ensuring that both my manner and attire were very casual, offering a friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased attitude, thereby maximally avoiding the creation of a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Finch, 1993; Hallowel, Lawton, & Gregory, 2005; Oakley, 1981).

Further, as Oakley (1981, pp. 32-33) suggested, in order for an interview to be successful, it must have “all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation, with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching”. With this in mind, each of the interviews were designed to proceed as a relaxed discussion, following the interview schedule (Appendix C),

yet allowing the interviewees to forge their own directions, emphasising the importance of their own views and experiences. Thus, rather than eliciting responses from a strictly formatted schedule, the interviewees were positioned throughout the interviews as the ‘experts’, with myself, as the interviewer, adopting the position of ‘learner’ (in line with Goulding, 2004). In this way, the interviews offered a platform for discussion in which the information that was to be disclosed would not be challenged, disputed or disapproved, enabling the interviewee to talk freely and fully (Benney & Hughes, 1984; Oakley, 1981). Furthermore, the use of a semi-structured interview format was viewed to be particularly important in this research since previous research has shown that survey-type interviewing is unsuited to the production of good sociological work on women (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Finch, 1993; Oakley, 1981).

It was also acknowledged that, just as it is important to be encouraging and accepting of the information that the interviewee offers, it is also important to be encouraging and accepting of the emotion that may arise within the interview setting (Benney & Hughes, 1984). Although research methods literature has traditionally been contrary to this view, encouraging emotional detachment for the sake of objectivity, the value of emotional acknowledgment has more recently been accepted in qualitative inquiry, with the view that failure to do so would objectify the research participant (Benney & Hughes, 1984; Bosworth et al., 2005; Hallowel et al., 2005; Shaw, 2005; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Furthermore, since the relationship between the researcher and the researched forms the basis for all qualitative research, this “necessarily involves the presence of the researcher as a person”, which cannot occur without the presence of emotions and involvements (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 161). In line with this view, personal responses to the participants’ narratives were allowed for by sharing a degree of emotional reciprocity, and engaging genuine attempts to connect with their experiences, thereby humanising my presence as ‘the researcher’ and reinforcing the significance of the narratives that were offered (Shaw, 2005; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Ethical considerations

Considering the potentially sensitive nature of prisoner release research, along with the personal nature of the interview process, various measures were taken to ensure an ethical approach. Before the commencement of data collection, ethics approval was granted by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). In line with the HREC guidelines, each participant was required to sign a consent form prior to engaging in the interview. This consent was sought only after the participant was issued with an information

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sheet that outlined the research purposes and procedures, as well as the voluntary nature of participation in this research project. It was ensured that all participants were aware that their consent could be withdrawn at any time and that they may decide not to respond to any one, or more, questions without consequence. Also, acknowledging the possible vulnerability of the prisoner and/or released prisoner status, participants were informed that as a released prisoner, their decision to participate or not, as well as any personal views expressed, would not affect their affiliation with Outcare and the SJOG Women's Program, the Department of Corrective Services, or any other organisations.

As well as stressing the voluntary nature of participation, the information sheet and pre-interview discussions also emphasised and reaffirmed the strict confidentiality of the participant's disclosures and identities. Pseudonyms were collaboratively allocated at the beginning of each interview, and following the interview, all audio-data were transcribed with the omission of any real names or other identifying information. Also, in ensuring complete confidentiality, the proper security of data was followed regarding the storage and disposal of original materials, including the audio-data of all of the interviews.

Acknowledgement was also made regarding the potential for the evocation of emotional sensitivities during the interview process, especially regarding the personal nature of the interview subject matter and of qualitative prisoner research generally. In accommodating for this possibility, I made prior arrangements with the SJOG Women's Program case manager(s) regarding the potential need for the referral of any emotionally affected participants to appropriate counsellors. The case manager was identified as an effective first contact in the case of such an event, from which further referral could be made if necessary. As such, all participants were assured that they could approach their caseworker regarding any potential challenges, discomfort or trauma that may stem from discussions of prison release issues, ensuring that such an event would be dealt with in a sensitive and professional manner.

However, it can be noted here that while these precautions were necessarily taken, and in fact, discussions of sensitive, and sometimes painful, personal issues and concerns did arouse emotion, the interview process generally provided a salutary atmosphere, rather than a traumatising one. Many women expressed their delight with the experience upon conclusion of the interview and were appreciative of the interest that was shown to their personal experiences. This is in line with research that suggests that qualitative interviewing may have some therapeutic benefits for some women, specifically in the way that it provides participants with the opportunity to express personal thoughts and feelings relating to

individual experiences within a ‘safe space’ (Finch, 1993; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Oakley, 1981).

Coding, analysis and interpretation

With an interest in developing an understanding of women’s post-prison needs, and informing policy and services, the women’s narratives were directed by an interview schedule that expressed two key questions: 1) What are the most striking issues and concerns that women face following release from prison? and 2) What type of support do women need to ‘make it on the outside and stay out’? Upholding Minichiello and others’ (1990) view that the transcription process is a valuable method of promoting familiarisation of, and immersion in, the raw data – critical to detailed analysis – the data thus collected were transcribed by myself. The transcribed data were then subsequently organised thematically for analysis based on the premise that “qualitative analysis is generally about maximising understanding of the one in all of its diversity” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180).

The thematic analysis, which involved tracing patterns and general relationships within the interview data, revealed broader themes loosely based around the ‘when, why, who, and what’ of ‘support’. That is, ‘when’ support is necessary: referring to issues of throughcare and post-release assistance; ‘why’ support is necessary: referring to the significance of prison experiences and post-release adjustment, along with the experience of instability, both pre- and post-incarceration; ‘who’ support comes from: referring to the experience of both negative and positive relationships; and ‘what’ areas of support are necessary: referring to specific release needs, which, in line with current scholarship in the area, included the familiar themes of housing, children, substance use issues and employment. The ensuing chapters present the analysis of these data, drawing upon concepts derived from the review of prisoner reentry literature in Chapter two, as well as the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter three.

Chapter five

A womb or a tomb: Women's experiences of imprisonment and its lasting impact

It really affected my life ... it really does affect you in heaps of different ways.
– Kelly

It does change you a lot. – Jessica

Although it may be a tired cliché to assert that prison changes a person, the assertion nevertheless holds truth, and like many significant experiences throughout one's life-course, prison can have a lasting impact. As Haney (2003, p. 4) stated: "few people are completely unchanged or unscathed by the experience". Acknowledging that the impact of the prison experience will have a significant influence on the way in which individuals experience 'release', this chapter characterises the institutional context and assesses its impact on the individual and their return to 'freedom'. In addressing this, the chapter examines both the productive and counterproductive retentions of imprisonment, positioned within the framework of 'total institutions' as described by Goffman (1961). Firstly, the chapter explores the rehabilitative potential of imprisonment, looking to issues of treatment, recovery and personal growth that women may experience on the inside. The chapter then discusses the alternatively institutionalising effects of imprisonment, exploring women's attitudes towards their impending freedom, including issues of institutional dependency, release anxiety, and alienation that women may experience as they face the uncertainties of life on the outside. In doing so, the chapter exposes the imminent challenges of prison release and the need for transitional and post-release support, setting the foundation for the proceeding chapters which extend these discussions to issues of resettlement in finer detail, looking to women's specific post-release concerns.

Women's positive retentions of the institutional experience

What released prisoners retain from their institutional experiences is crucial to their transition and settlement into the wider community. Optimally, such retentions will be of a constructive nature. However, in the contemporary debate over the nature of the prison's

impact on the prisoner, it has typically been its negative aspects that are most vociferous, with reoccurring themes of stigmatisation (Carlen, 1988; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Goffman, 1961; 1963) and institutionalisation (Goffman, 1961; Haney, 2003; 2008; McCartney, 2006; O'Brien, 2001b) dominating prison literature. Proponents of these themes argue that for some, prison appears to serve no other purpose than to perpetuate the negative stereotyping and criminalisation of its inmates; reinforcing a 'dependant status' (Goffman, 1961), leaving them with, as Goffman (1963) articulated, a 'spoiled identity', and rendering them 'outsiders' (Carlen, 1988). Comparably, most women in this research identified, and experienced, the negative effects in the disruption of community and family life, the stigma associated with having been a 'prisoner', and the potential or actual institutionalising effects of imprisonment – that are discussed later in the chapter.

Remarkably however, in line with Duncan's (1988; 1996) work that described the 'positive images' of prison, the majority (73%) of the participants reflected on their term of imprisonment as having a generally positive impact on their lives. It could be suggested that such favourable reflections of prison may be, as Duncan (1988, p. 1235) suggested "coloured by a desire to suppress the more unpleasant experiences [of incarceration]", and may simply portray the resilience of women who focus on its "uplifting aspects" in order to justify 'wasted time'. Nevertheless, for these women, experiences of incarceration were viewed as positive in three ways: 1) it provided an 'escape' from chaotic lifestyles and negative environments, 2) it acted as a catalyst for constructive change in the way that it facilitated a different view of the world and their lives, and 3) it provided (to a debatably limited degree) an avenue through which women could access programs facilitating their rehabilitative, educational and vocational development.

1. Prison as an 'escape': Freedom from outside tensions and temptations

In line with Carlen's (1988) work on women, crime and poverty, and broader criminological literature, the women who participated in this research had typically led lives marked by a tangle of social problems and deprivations. When asked about their lives immediately prior to their imprisonment, all the women described untenable social histories that were commonly referred to as "hell", "madness", "chaos", "off track" and the like. These were lifestyles typically characterised by instability, particularly problematic substance use and/or addiction, among other poverty issues including unstable housing or homelessness, unemployment, welfare dependence, and financial insecurity. Some of the women were also heavily involved in crime, mostly property crime and/or drug dealing. Domestic violence and

other influential negative relationships were also characteristic issues for some of the participants.

Given the unstable and chaotic nature of their pre-prison lifestyles, many of the women identified their term of imprisonment as affording them a much needed ‘down-time’ or ‘time-out’, lending credit to Duncan’s (1988; 1996) image of prison as a ‘refuge’, “an island of calm amidst the hurly-burly” (1996, p. 11). By offering women a form of stability, that is, in terms of food, shelter, clothing, and routine, prison provided a sense of relief from the “hell”, “madness” or “chaos” of everyday living on the outside. In this way imprisonment was frequently depicted as an avenue of ‘escape’ from the pressures and influences of the free world.

In particular, imprisonment allowed women the opportunity to break free from unhealthy environments and other negative influences in terms of both their destructive personal relationships and their problematic use of alcohol and other drugs. This was the case for Hannah who, having described her pre-incarceration lifestyle as “consumed” by addiction and drug dealing and supported by anti-social networks, reflected positively on her term of imprisonment:

I think it has been a positive thing because I managed to get off the drugs. You know I could never get away from all of it. I always had the people there and I had nowhere else to go. So it gave me the chance to, you know, I’ve actually wiped everyone off – apart from everyone that’s close to me, my family and that. – Hannah

In coerced isolation from wider society, women, like Hannah, found that their term of imprisonment offered a unique opportunity for a ‘clean slate’. By isolating women from their usual social milieu and interrupting their accustomed means of use, imprisonment not only induced abstinence from drugs, but also offered a means of forfeiting relationships with individuals who had supported their drug use and offending in the past. This is in line with the findings of, for example, Bui and Morash (2010, p. 7) who determined that “incarceration stimulated the dissolution of relationships with drug-using and criminally active people, either because the separation caused the relationship to disintegrate or because women decided to end it”, and furthermore, that such changes in network relationships are necessary for positive post-release outcomes⁴. For Hannah, her separation from her drug-using peers led

⁴ In depth discussions regarding the influence of peers and necessary changes in network relationships appear in Chapter eight.

to a realisation: “They weren’t really my friends. You know, I just had something that they wanted [drugs], that was it. ... None of them came to visit me or anything [in prison].”

Like Hannah, other women similarly portrayed prison as a means of escaping the grips of substance addiction, particularly in the manner by which it interrupted their using lifestyles, with all of the participants reporting abstinence throughout the course of their imprisonment. For some women, their abstinence throughout custody was credited to their experience of the inaccessibility of drugs within prison, as Susan, who had been a chronic heroin addict, stated: “The thing was, is that there was no way that I could get ‘on’ in jail and that’s it. It was over, so I had no choice but to get over it, you know what I mean”. On the other hand, other women reported some availability of drugs within prison, but suggested that their simple displacement out of their normal using environments was enough to encourage a decision to become abstinent, as Louise stated: “I mean girls in there; they still get drugs in there. But what’s the point of doing drugs in prison”. Meanwhile, for some women, it was the risk involved with use, as a result of custodial surveillance, that promoted their abstinence, as Jodie explained: “There is drugs inside. ... But I had a lot more to risk than a lot of people in there. Like I was getting urines [urinalysis] all the time because my charge was selling and supplying ... so it learnt me to say no”.

One way or another, by interrupting their usual means of use, imprisonment forced what White (2009, p. 151) terms “crisis-induced abstinence”, removing women from the problematic substance use that had plagued their pre-incarceration lifestyles. For some women, this forced abstinence came at what was perhaps a crucial time for intervention. As Jodie reflected: “I look back and I don’t even know who the hell I was back then so that’s pretty drug fucked. ... If they hadn’t have jailed me I would be dead today, probably”. Susan, who revealed fifteen years of heroin addiction, recovery and relapse, similarly said of her prison experience:

It saved me. Jail saved me ... who knows where I’d be now if I didn’t go to jail. So yeah, it was hard but it was good at the same time. Coz it helped me get off the drugs. It got me healthy. – Susan

As Susan suggests, although imprisonment is undoubtedly a hardship for anyone, for some women it auspiciously acted to interrupt the inertia of self-destructive behaviour paths associated with addiction, and for some, this may have even been the difference between life and death. For these women, prison was thereby perceived as ‘positive’ in the way in which it was experienced as “a place where one is protected from oneself” (Duncan, 1996, p. 23),

displacing women out of their own harmful, potentially fatal environments, and into one of relative stability.

The interventionist possibilities of prison were also evident in circumstances of domestic violence and victimisation, in line with the findings of Bradley and Davino (2002). Their research, paradoxically titled, *When prison is 'the safest place I've ever been'*, determined that “the perceived relative safety of the prison environment needs to be placed in the context of the often-severe interpersonal violence that has been pervasive throughout [women's] lives in family and other social contexts” (Bradley & Davino, 2002, p. 356). Correspondingly, for some women in this research, prison not only enabled their ‘escape’ from drug using environments and associated social networks, it also offered women ‘breathing space’ from unhealthy or abusive romantic relationships. For Sarah, who had endured years of domestic abuse in a previous marriage, prison allowed her to identify a new relationship as similarly unhealthy:

My ex-husband was quite abusive ... eight years worth of being put in hospital, scars everywhere [pointing to a scar by her eye]. Yeah, quite violent ... I'd only just split up with [him], gotten into a new relationship ... and that's how I got locked up because he was actually an accomplice in the crime. Then I broke it off in prison. Coz at the time I just didn't realise but then I thought: 'Nah this is wrong because you've got me locked up'. Yeah, not good. – Sarah

Another woman, who similarly revealed the influence of an abusive relationship, described how she was driven to ‘hand herself in’ to police on burglary charges (of which she claimed to be innocent) in her pursuit of refuge from her partner's escalating abusive behaviour:

We were having problems and he just started getting worse. And I didn't reach out as much as I should've ... And then I went and put myself in for something that I didn't do, just to get away from him. Yeah I think I just wanted to run away again. – Louise

Both of these women, having experienced their imprisonment as a form of necessary respite from abusive or negatively influential partners, were able to reassess their relationships both with their partners and with themselves:

I'm a lot stronger now ... I do care for him a lot ... but I mean I've got to concentrate on me, to know where I'm going and heading in the right direction. ... And I know I can get out there and do it – be strong and go forward. – Louise

I'm more cautious of relationships now ... I have got a date on Friday [laughs] but nothing serious. I'm just sort of trying to find my own way. I'm looking after myself more or less. And that feels good. – Sarah

These prisoner dialogues suggest that incarceration allowed women, as victims of destructive, toxic, or abusive relationships, time to heal emotionally while gaining some form of independence from the controlling men in their lives. Further, by revoking their dependence on men⁵, these women appeared to develop a degree of self-sufficiency and self-reliance with regard to personal relationships that was never apparent previously, and in some cases, these women were able to emerge from prison with perceptions of increased emotional strength.

Overall, imprisonment, for these women, offered an 'escape' from the tensions and temptations of the chaotic and unstable lifestyles in which they had typically become engrossed. Confined to the prison, these women ironically found 'freedom' from the addictions and toxic relationships that had held them captive on the outside. In this manner, imprisonment was viewed as positive in the way by which it served as a necessary, perhaps even 'life-saving', means of intervention. At the same time though, it is apparent that women's positive images of prison here – as a place of safety and stability – in fact typically reflects actual negative aspects of life in freedom, as similarly highlighted by Van Tongeren and Klebe (2010) and Warren, Hurt, Loper, and Chauhan (2004).

An important point of consideration here, is that although imprisonment may offer women an escape from their negative environments, for some it may be nothing more than a temporary (and potentially counterproductive) solution. For example, for women who identify prison as a primary means of escaping abusive relationships, basic needs for safety and protection may persist upon release. As Richie (2001, p. 376) pointed out, many women, upon release from prison, "continue to be as vulnerable to abuse as they were when they were arrested", and in many cases women may be "returning to abusive relationships or high-risk environments". As such, it is evident that released prisoners need extra services if their punishment is to serve any useful purpose at all, as the discussions below highlight.

⁵ It should be noted here that in many cases dependence on men was simply displaced with dependence on the correctional institution, the consequences of which are examined in detail later in the chapter.

2. Prison as a catalyst for change: Deterrence, self re-evaluation and change initiation

Beyond granting women reprieve from their typically problematic and potentially life-threatening pre-prison environments, imprisonment was also portrayed as positive in the manner by which it represented, for many women, a crucial ‘turning point’ in their lives. As Lofland and Stark (1988, p. 138, cited in Cloud & Granfield, 2004, p. 188) write, turning points occur at the “moment when old lines of action were complete, had failed or been disrupted, or were about to be so, and when they faced the opportunity (or necessity), and possibly the burden, of doing something different with their lives”. For many of the women in this research, imprisonment provided this disruption or signposted failure that enabled a new perspective on their lives and often stimulated processes of cognitive appraisal or self re-evaluation associated with self-change (Granfield & Cloud, 2001; Klingemann et al., 2001). In doing so, imprisonment was depicted by a majority of participants as a catalyst for constructive change, in much the same vein as, for example, O’Brien (2001b, p.67) who discussed how women were able to “experience prison as if it were a growth-fostering environment”, Duncan (1996, p. 32) who described prison as a “matrix of spiritual rebirth”, and Bui and Morash (2010, p. 13) who described imprisonment as a “rude awakening”. As one woman articulated:

I actually thought it [prison] would do me good. And I actually learnt from it and that’s probably what’s made me pull my socks up a bit and go ‘Hey get your shit together’ ... ‘Get your head together’. And that’s what it did to me ... it’s certainly done a positive thing for me. Not that I’d ever do it again! But it did. I actually came out going, ‘Wow, time to pull your head in’. – Sarah

As Sarah reveals, although the experience of imprisonment itself may not be a positive one (as Sarah expressed not an experience that one would like to repeat), for some women, it nevertheless played a positive role in its service as a ‘wake-up call’, indicating some success in the deterrent nature of imprisonment. By provoking mental processes of self-re-evaluation and forcing women to weigh the costs and benefits of their behaviour, the experience of imprisonment was often critical to the recognition of ‘problem behaviour’, and the subsequent commitment to, and initiation of, constructive change. This theme of prison as a catalyst for constructive change was particularly relevant to issues of problematic substance use and addiction. While issues of addiction, recovery, and self-change take precedence in Chapter eight, its prevalence as an influencing factor in the formation of ‘positive’ images of

prison cannot be ignored here, with many women crediting their experience of prison as a major factor in overcoming substance use issues.

For Sarah, imprisonment played a large part in her recognition of her problems with alcoholism and in her subsequent recovery. Having turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism, Sarah described her pre-prison perception of her use as, “Not a problem, more of a comfort.” But, from the confines of prison, Sarah formed a new view:

I got locked up and I thought ‘I can’t drink again, look what it’s done. I’ve gone into a bad relationship and I’m locked up. Just simply because I’m trying to forget my problems. I made more problems. – Sarah

For Sarah, the distance that imprisonment offered enabled her to view the life that she had been leading from an alternate standpoint. With imprisonment perceived as the culmination of her problems on the outside, Sarah was not only forced to reassess her attachment to alcohol, but also to her romantic relationship. Coming to the realisation that both attachments were problematic, Sarah chose instead to pursue in-prison counselling⁶, both as an alternative means of coping, and in her pursuit of recovery and independence.

Another woman, who also suffered significant pre-prison instability due to alcoholism, similarly portrayed her experience of prison as “more positive” in the manner that it offered a new perspective on her behaviour:

When you’re in there, you know you’ve got a problem, don’t you? You know you’ve got to change something. Alcohol was my problem. I was just like: ‘Well I’ve got to just not drink at all’, because ... once I started drinking, I don’t know when to stop. ... And it wasn’t good for my daughters to see that. ... So prison helped with that. I mean it was hard because I didn’t get to see my daughters and my granddaughter and that but I knew they were always there. – Rhiannon

As had been the case with Sarah, imprisonment not only facilitated Rhiannon’s recognition of problematic behaviour but also forced a reassessment of her relationships, particularly in her role as a mother. In the pain of enforced separation from her dependent children, Rhiannon found a motive for change. This in line with research by both Boudin (1998) and Shamai and Kochal (2008) which correspondingly determined that although imprisonment may be a source of pain and maternal distress, the experience can contribute to an improvement in maternal functioning. For Kelly, who described her life prior to prison as “pretty off track ... spending most of [her] money on drugs and partying”, prison similarly

⁶ Custodial opportunities for counselling and other rehabilitation programs are discussed in more detail in the next section.

facilitated growth and development in her role and identity in motherhood by challenging her priorities and encouraging a new personal outlook:

I've learned a lot since I've been in jail ... I care about things heaps more. Like things mean a lot to me. Because you've had it all taken away from ya ... I don't want to be off my head anymore. ... It's helped me realise that I took everything for granted. Just like time with your friends and your family ... when you can't see your kids and you can't be there for them, it just kills ya [fighting back tears]. And it's not fair on them and it's not fair on you. So you know you've got to pull your head in and stop being stupid. – Kelly

Having experienced her imprisonment, and more specifically, the emotional pain, guilt and self-blame of compelled maternal absence and isolation from family and friends, as the real consequences of crime and other problematic behaviour, Kelly found herself rethinking her usual blasé attitude. After serving 3.5 months for driving without a licence, she proclaimed:

Now I don't drive. Like before I was just like, 'I don't give a fuck. Who's going to stop me?!' You know: 'If I wanna go to the bottle shop I'll go to the bottle shop! Let's go!' You know, now it's just like: 'Oh well maybe I'll just catch the bus.' You know, I'm a bit more careful now. – Kelly

With a newfound awareness of her choices and the consequences that may follow, Kelly's example here speaks directly to the deterrent nature of imprisonment. As one of the major goals of sentencing, deterrence theories suggest that prison can diminish levels of crime by providing a strong disincentive (Lerman, 2009). Traditionally viewed as separate or even counterproductive to the rehabilitative function of imprisonment, Bushway and Paternoster (2009, p. 131), echoing Glaser's (1969, p. 328) findings, conversely suggest:

Maintaining distinct boundaries between deterrence and rehabilitation may not be appropriate. Rehabilitation, or desistance, involves real and fundamental change in how a person interacts with her environment. People need incentives to make these kinds of deep structural changes, and prison, or the threat of prison, can provide that incentive.

Like Kelly, other women depicted the pains inherent in serving a term of imprisonment as undoubtedly difficult; yet, retrospectively reflected upon the experience as 'positive' in the manner by which it served its deterrent purpose. Louise described the condition of having "lost everything" as a consequence of crime and subsequent imprisonment, but spoke of this hardship in positive terms, revealing her motivations to do well as 'not wanting to go back':

I've lost everything, going to prison. Since the first time I went to prison, you know the bits and pieces you lose over the years, like photos and personal stuff. And it's just not worth it. In the end, you look back and you go: 'It's not worth it – to go to jail, because you just lose so much.' And I don't want to live in a little cell. ... It's just not a life. This is a life out here. And it's good because you get to see your family and my son ... and that's the best thing. ... So yeah, prison was good like that, you know, influencing me not to come back. ... And if it took three times in prison, then I guess third time lucky. I'm staying out ... Sometimes you've just got to learn. – Louise

Louise's portrayal of her experience of imprisonment depicts the deprivation of liberty, loss of worldly possessions, and separation from family that were typically negative aspects of prison for most women. However, Louise, like others, attributed positive changes to imprisonment, particularly as a result of these adversities, or rather, in her determination to avoid them. After serving three terms of imprisonment, Louise deduced, "You will *always* get caught ... everyone that I know in that 'environment' has ended up in jail". Referring to an environment of crime and problematic substance use and addiction, Louise came to the realisation that continuing down this path would ultimately lead to an unsatisfied and unsatisfactory life of incarceration and re-incarceration. Having witnessed this plight among "older ladies" in prison, Louise declared, "I don't want to be like that". In this way, prison facilitated in Louise, a readiness and commitment to change, in line with concepts of 'avoidance initiated recovery', defined by Granfield and Cloud (2001, p. 1545) as occurring "when individuals experience negative consequences as a result of their substance misuse [or other problematic behaviour] that consequently lead them to discontinue their habit".

Avoidance initiated recovery was also evident in Cassandra's experiences as she discussed the important role that imprisonment played as her 'rock bottom', providing motivation to change in the long road to her recovery from heroin addiction:

I'd been to rehab probably four times before I had gone to jail ... I'd lost custody of my daughter, that didn't stop me from using. I was in really violent relationships, that didn't stop me from using. Then I started doing crime, I got into prostitution, like all that kinda stuff didn't stop me from using. I think it's something that you have to be ready for ... I had to have a lot of rock bottoms. Prison was a rock bottom for me. Like I had to fucken go really low in order to get well, to get better, to get back up again. – Cassandra

Cassandra's experience, like Louise's above, portrays the constructive change of deviant and addicted behaviours as a developmental process. For these women, this process was facilitated by their experience of imprisonment as the tangible 'rock bottom' outcome of their behaviours. It appears that, for some, such a profound 'descent' as imprisonment can act

as a turning point for ‘resurrection’ or ‘renewal’. This is in line with literature that acknowledges the significance of ‘bottom-hitting’ experiences as “a necessary precondition for recovery” (Granfield & Cloud, 2001, p. 1545), producing in the individual a profound awareness of a significant problem (Cloud & Granfield, 2004; Granfield & Cloud, 2001). This ‘bottom-hitting’ awareness was also acutely evident in Jodie’s narrative as she reflected on the perspective-changing experience of imprisonment:

That’s when reality hits ya – when you become straight and you’re in jail and your kids aren’t there. It’s a hard thing to come to grips with, big time, when reality hits for the first time in fifteen years. You don’t even know who you are; you don’t even know how you think. And your kids aren’t there and you’re in jail. Yeah, big reality check. Huge reality check. – Jodie

Beyond simply provoking ‘crisis-induced abstinence’, as previously discussed, imprisonment also importantly signalled to Jodie, her transcendence beyond the boundaries of controllable drug use (in line with Cloud & Granfield, 2004). This was particularly so as a result of her removal from her children, as other women similarly experienced. By pitting her identity and role in motherhood against the conflicted identities of ‘drug-user’, ‘addict’, ‘dealer’, and ‘criminal’, Jodie was awakened to the “reality” of the extent and consequences of her problematic behaviour. Crediting the perspective-changing experience as being crucial to her drug rehabilitation, Jodie went as far as to claim that she “wouldn’t have been able to get off the drugs if [she] ‘didn’t get prison’”:

I suppose it’s a bit harsh, you know, like you come out feeling a bit fucken ‘unco’ about everything. ... But it was the only thing that was going to save me ... coz I just got too far into it to do anything about it. ... I just saw it as no light at the end of the tunnel – until I went to jail. Now I see it from a whole different perspective. ... And I’m out now, you know, 7.5 months out of my life to be straight ... and you’re guaranteed that jail is going to stop ya if anything is going to stop ya. – Jodie

Although Jodie acknowledged the negative impact of imprisonment in its disorientating nature (the implications of which will be discussed later in the chapter), her narrative nevertheless upholds the notion of prison as a catalyst for change. Having returned to the wider community, and to her children, free from the grips of substance addiction that had plagued the last fifteen years of her life, Jodie felt that the 7.5 months she spent in institutional isolation were an acceptable sacrifice. As convict Charles Colson (cited in Duncan, 1996, p. 33) similarly asserted, prison is the price that one must pay in order to “complete the shedding of [one’s] ... old life and to be free to live the new”. As such, for

Jodie, even the potential stigma associated with having been a prisoner was not enough to affect her positive perceptions of the experience:

It doesn't look good. But I think it's been more positive ... definitely positive. ... I had the stigma of being a drug dealer anyway. So it's better – putting prison there – it's a horrible word, but ... I've changed my life. I've done better from it. Like I said I would have been dead otherwise, probably. It's a horrible thing but yeah, I was in an even worse spot, being a drug dealer, really. – Jodie

Taken together, these narratives suggest that despite and perhaps because of negative experiences of imprisonment, many women were able to attribute positive outcomes to the experience. In particular, women credited their prison experiences as influencing them to initiate constructive changes in their lives. Often portrayed as a 'rock bottom', especially among mothers separated from their children, imprisonment provided a sense of enlightenment, forcing these women to reflect on their past and make determinations about their future. In line with theories of deterrence, for many women, these decisions were influenced by their unwillingness to suffer the pains of imprisonment any further.

3. Prison as an avenue for personal development: Rehabilitative, educational and vocational programming

Low levels of educational attainment, unemployment, and histories of drug and alcohol misuse are common factors affecting the lives of female prisoners in Western Australia and other jurisdictions (WA DCS, 2006; 2009b). Consistent with such data, these aspects of social and economical deprivation were evident in the life histories of the eleven women who participated in this research. Among these women, only one was employed prior to her imprisonment. The average highest level of education reached was year 10, with an average graduating level of year 9. Only one woman had graduated from year 12 and proceeded to further education at TAFE. At the other end of the spectrum, one woman had not graduated from her first year of high school. In terms of substance misuse, all of the participants reported some form of problematic substance use and/or dependency. Five women had been imprisoned for drug-related charges, and of the remaining six, four revealed that substance use had in some way contributed to their offending, with the other two admitting that their use had become a problem prior to their imprisonment.

The prevalence of such disadvantage among women prisoners indicates the importance of improving women's custodial opportunities with education, vocation and rehabilitation. This is especially important given that many prisoners clearly desire to

improve their lives. As the narratives discussed in the previous section indicate, for some women, it may be their incarceration that stimulates the realisation of these desires. However, whether women's desires for change are supported by corrective services that claim to "play an important role in providing meaningful, practical and realistic rehabilitation for prisoners" (WA DCS, 2009a) is of crucial significance. The question posed here is whether the imposition of a term of imprisonment can offer constructive developments as opposed to its typically depicted destructive impact, especially given the increasingly recognised opportunity for corrective services to "rehabilitate rather than simply punish offenders" (Craig, 2004, p. 93S).

The women interviewed held mixed views regarding the state of programming opportunities available within the Western Australian custodial setting. One particularly positive example came from Hannah. Having depicted her lifestyle as a 'drug-user', 'addict', and 'dealer' prior to her imprisonment, Hannah, who joked: "I had my own business", referring to selling drugs, had no history of employment and no vocational skills. But, with the educational and vocational opportunities available in Boronia, Hannah described a much more conventional lifestyle following her release:

I'm working in a kitchen as a cook. ... [It] is something that I sort of got into while I was in jail. I was working out of the prison at [a restaurant] and then when I got out [the boss] gave me a job. ... Yeah she's good. She's given me a real good opportunity. ... I like it there. We are like a little family. ... And I've been offered an apprenticeship there and Burswood have offered me an apprenticeship too. So I'm doing pretty well I think. – Hannah

Imprisonment not only offered Hannah an opportunity to escape her drug-fuelled environments and overcome her substance use issues (as previously discussed), it also opened the door to full-time employment, which she identified as a crucial ingredient in her successful reintegration⁷. Having returned to the community with stable employment, an understanding employer, and an offer for an apprenticeship – a far cry from her pre-prison situation – Hannah reflected on her prison experience as positive in terms of the opportunities that it offered. Summing up these opportunities and her positive perceptions of the experience she said: "I did my traineeship in hospitality in prison. I got a job out of it. I've got a list of certificates. I think it was a very good thing."

Another woman similarly discussed how imprisonment influenced her educational and vocational realisations, providing motivation to go back to school:

⁷ The valuable role of employment in the post-release setting is discussed in more detail in Chapter eight.

I want to go back to school now, coz I know I can do it. I did community studies when I was in there and it was easy. And it's what I wanted to do for a long time. I just started it to see if it was like what I thought it was – and it was. ... Now I know I can do it. – Jodie

Having disclosed a long-held desire to become a social worker, Jodie described how these aspirations became sidelined in her pre-incarceration lifestyle, fuelled by addiction and drug dealing. Explaining her immersion into that lifestyle, Jodie spoke of the seduction of 'easy money', stating, "It just started being a slow habit. And then making so much money off it, it became a big habit." However, removed from that lifestyle and placed into the institutional setting, Jodie seized the opportunity to refocus her energies toward educational pursuits. Having successfully completed her community studies course in prison, Jodie's reflections portrayed a sense of accomplishment and renewed perceptions of self-efficacy that allowed her to envisage a new positive direction for herself. As Hughes (2009, p. 89-90) points out, "The value of achieving academic success cannot be underestimated, particularly within the confines of an environment which by its very nature is associated with failure" (Hughes, 2009, p. 89-90).

Both Hannah and Jodie's examples demonstrate the possibilities for women who are able to take advantage of the otherwise dismal experience of imprisonment by making constructive use of their time in educational and vocational pursuits. Within a setting absent from outside influences and concerns, these women were able to leave the chaos of their pre-prison lives behind them and focus on self-development. Doing so, not only offered women a means of "bettering their lives" (Jodie), it also served to inspire confidence within themselves, a crucial personal strength commonly found by prisoner studies to play a pivotal role in overcoming the challenges of reentry and promoting successful reintegration (Hanrahan et al., 2005; Hughes, 2009; Nelson et al., 1999; O'Brien, 2001a).

In addition to educational and vocational opportunities, women also spoke of the availability of health services, counselling, and substance dependency rehabilitation programs in prison. Given the prevalence of substance use problems and physical or mental health issues among women prisoners, these services are of particular relevance. In line with the recent *Profile of Women in Prison* (WA DCS, 2009b), the participants in this research presented with various health related issues. As previously highlighted, all the participants identified problems with substance use. This included issues with heroin addiction, problematic use of amphetamine-type substances, alcoholism and poly-drug use, sometimes along with revelations of 'self-medication'. Some women also revealed physical health issues

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including Hepatitis C infection, as well as mental health issues including depression, bipolar disorders and anxiety disorders. Histories of various experiences of physical, mental and/or sexual abuse, in adulthood and/or in childhood, were also divulged by some participants. Notably, for many of the women, troubled by often long-standing and co-morbid substance use and/or physical or mental health issues, prison provided their first encounter with the appropriate health services.

One woman, who had endured a long history of domestic violence and suffered from untreated depression, described the extent of her problems with alcoholism which had become her means of self-medicating prior to her imprisonment:

I actually drank quite a lot prior to prison. Just to block out everything. It was sort of my therapy. ... I was drinking quite heavily. Not remembering yesterday, let alone last week. It was quite rough. – Sarah

However, with the availability of counselling in prison, Sarah chose not to go down the same path:

They do have the home brew stuff they make up in prison but I wasn't interested in any of that. I just wanted counselling. So I got the counselling and got my depression sorted out and I was on my medication in there and yeah that helped me a lot ... And now that I'm out and my medication is sorted and yep it's all going pretty good – health wise. – Sarah

For Sarah, imprisonment not only provided an 'escape' from abusive relationships, along with an enlightened perception of her problematic coping behaviours (as highlighted previously) it also provided her with the practical resources to support her efforts at change. With counselling and access to medical treatment Sarah was able to overcome her problems with depression, low self-esteem, and substance misuse – the sequence of problems inherent in the cycle of victimisation (DeHart, 2008). With research demonstrating the salience of victimisation as a risk factor in women's criminal behaviour, it is clear that helping women break the cycle is crucial to their desistance as well as to their general functioning in wider society (Bloom & Covington, 1998; DeHart, 2008).

The findings discussed so far suggest that many women in prison desire to improve their lives, and further, when services supporting such desires are made easily available to them, these women are often very keen to become involved. However, whereas the women above portrayed their experiences of custodial opportunities in a favourable light, such positive reports were not universal among all of the participants. Other women found that although they craved rehabilitative means, such opportunities were not engaged due to two

primary reasons. Firstly, many women felt that custodial programming opportunities were not encouraged by prison staff, with women stressing the need for more support and guidance with rehabilitative efforts in prison:

[Some] people don't know that they've got a problem until parole comes up and it's pointed out. ... I knew what my problem was, so I addressed it. But a lot of people who don't realise, or need it to be pointed out – what their problem is – they don't know how to address it ... they're missing the whole point of why they're in there – to address your problem. – Jodie

I think they should be stricter on doing counselling in jail. I got through eighteen months without even being asked about counselling. ... No ... if you were to go to prison screaming, yelling, and carrying on, you'll get what you need. If you're quiet, do as you're told and don't make a sound, you won't get anything. You're invisible. – Cathy

If you're in jail for drugs then you're going to go on urines and going to have to go to drug counselling and all that. But if you're not, then there's nothing that you really have to do. ... But I mean there are a lot of people who are in there and they've got, you know, major drug issues man. – Kelly

Secondly, even when women actively sought out custodial programming opportunities, they were often not easily accessible or unavailable due to limited resources. As Cathy stated, "There's just not enough staff to look after us, let alone do anything else." Other women concurred:

There's only a couple spots really, in education. You've got to be lucky enough to get in there. And you'd think that to better yourself, they would encourage that more. – Jodie

With the courses in there I would take every opportunity to do them. But there's not that much. I mean there's education, but there's always waiting lists and you can't get on and it deters you from going. – Louise

A lot of girls would take it if they had the opportunity to do it. But they're not being given the opportunity to do it. ... And a lot of people are getting knocked back on their parole because they're not doing these courses but yet it's not even available to them. Because there's only ten people that can go in this class ... and these courses are only available twice a year ... so there's nothing you can do, there's nothing there, so what's the point of being there? – Jodie

The concern voiced by these women regarding the lack of program encouragement, direction and availability speaks to the value that these women perceive in such custodial opportunities. These women recognised the importance of addressing problems with substance use and other underlying disadvantage, including unemployment, poor education,

mental health issues, victimisation and other trauma. Imprisonment was viewed as an opportunity for women to address these underlying problems with targeted programs and support services. Yet according to these women's accounts, this opportunity was sometimes wasted. As Jodie had repeatedly referred to 'the point of being in prison', these women appeared to have expected a more structured and institutionalised component to the rehabilitative aspect of their imprisonment. Although women expressed that custodial programming should not be mandatory, for example, as Louise stated, "They should be wanting to help themselves", there was unity in the idea that rehabilitation should take a more focussed approach, with many women in need and want of these services:

Prison should be more about getting women back on their feet, whether it be getting them back with their kids or employment or whatever. And it sort of is but only to a certain extent. – Louise

The officers should know a bit more about [rehabilitation] and point you in the right direction ... they should have more input in guiding people because if you've never been to jail, and you don't know, then you're just going to be set up for failure. – Jodie

Overall, it seems that many women saw the value in rehabilitative, educational and vocational opportunities in prison. Not only were these viewed as providing women in prison with an invaluable option for the constructive use of time, it was also seen as an opportunity to 'better themselves', in the hope of returning to the wider community with new skills and tools that would improve their lives. As one woman said of the opportunities for the constructive use of time within the prison setting: "That's *one* good thing about prison – you can make it so that your time is not wasted" (Susan). Since prisoners, unlike individuals in the free world, "have nothing but time" (Craig, 2004, p. 96S), it is crucial that this situation be used to its advantage.

This however, brings forward the debate of whether prisons, and their officers, should be responsible for the welfare needs of their prisoners (Goulding, 2007). Despite the growing popularity in rehabilitative means within the correctional system, it is apparent that the organizational goal of rehabilitation and associated programming remains a secondary consideration within the custodial setting. This is necessarily due to the prisons' primary responsibility for the incapacitation of its inmates (Craig, 2004; Goulding, 2007). This unavoidable reality stresses the importance of external rehabilitation efforts to support custodial measures – discussions of which will be drawn out in succeeding chapters.

Women's negative retentions of the institutional experience: Institutionalisation and other damaging aspects

The discussions above demonstrate that for many women, prison can have a somewhat positive impact on their lives. For those having become immersed into chaotic lifestyles characterised by crime, substance use, and abusive, controlling, or dysfunctional relationships, imprisonment acted as a form of intervention. However, though the majority of participants were able to reflect upon various positive outcomes of their imprisonment, three women were unable to attribute any positive outcomes at all. Asked a question to the likes of: "How do you think prison has impacted your life", these three women responded:

I dunno. I just don't know how to answer that because I don't know life without jail ... I can't say anything positive about it ... It makes you hard. It makes you weary of everybody. It toughens you up. – Jessica

Twelve years [in and out]. How has it impacted [my life]? It's ruined my future, I believe, in some aspects, in a lot of aspects. I don't think it has ruined my life. I think it's just gonna make my life a hell of a lot harder – to get a normal life happening. – Brenda

I don't think any of it has been positive. I understand having to do the time. I don't understand – it does a lot of damage ... I've lost everything. I lost my house. I lost my kids. Everything. And I don't understand why that has to be. I just don't. – Cathy

In line with Goffman (1961), Haney (2003), and Sykes (1958), who explored the negative impact of imprisonment, these women's experiences highlight the devastating irrevocable losses that can be bestowed upon inmates of total institutions, emotionally, mentally and physically. These unintended negative effects are, as described by Borzycki (2005), the collateral consequences of imprisonment. "They are collateral because they are independent of any crime prevention effects of imprisonment" (Borzycki, 2005, p. 36, citing Tonry and Petersilia 1999). For Cathy, the severed ties with her children and loss of financial assets (that other women similarly experienced) became overwhelming collateral consequences and a cause for acute worry and depression to such an extent that she could perceive no positives in the experience. However, whereas Cathy's negative perceptions of imprisonment highlight the overt loss associated with the disruption of community and family ties, the collateral consequences of imprisonment apparent in Jessica and Brenda's dialogues portray the more subtle effects of institutionalisation – the "psychological changes that occur in the routine course of adapting to prison life" (Haney, 2003, p. 5). As discussed by Haney (2003), manifestations of institutionalisation include institutional dependence,

hypervigilance, emotional over-control, social withdrawal, diminished self-worth, and internalisation of prison culture, which can have severe “implications for post-prison adjustment in the world beyond prison” (Haney, 2003, p.1).

Of note, Jessica and Brenda were in some key ways different from the rest of the sample. Among the women who did perceive positive outcomes from their imprisonment, for the majority, this was their first experience of imprisonment. Only two of these eight women were recidivists, having served no more than two and three terms of imprisonment each. For all of these women, imprisonment was perceived, in some sense, as a ‘rude awakening’, as previous discussions revealed. Conversely, for Jessica and Brenda, imprisonment was portrayed as an internalised ‘way of life’, with both women having served countless terms of imprisonment spanning over twelve years.

Having experienced such prolonged adaption to the deprivations and frustrations of life inside prison, Jessica and Brenda’s responses to questions regarding the impact of their imprisonment were evidently underscored by threads of institutionalisation and broader social exclusion. Like Jessica and Brenda however, women who spoke of prison in a positive light, simultaneously identified the negative aspects of institutionalisation, similarly portraying the manner by which imprisonment hinders rather than helps. Specifically, many women identified the way in which the prison environment fostered institutional dependency and subsequent release anxiety, as well as stigmatisation, alienation and social exclusion, along with the overall disorientating impact of these processes upon release.

Prison as ‘home’: Institutional dependency and release anxiety

In describing lines of adaption to the institutional environment Goffman (1961) identified what he termed ‘colonization’, whereby some inmates experienced a “stable, relatively contended existence” within the institution, unlike their experiences of the outside world, and were therefore described as “having found a home” or of “never having had it so good” (Goffman, 1961, p. 62-63). Although this concept concurs with women’s positive images of prison as an ‘escape’ – a place of protection, safety, and security (Duguid, 2000; Duncan, 1996) – it also highlights the problematic “desirability of life on the inside” (Goffman, 1961, p. 62). For women whose pre-prison (and post-prison) lives were typically marked by the deprivations of poverty, prison undeniably offered a form of stability and security. For some it was the only stability they knew. As Brenda commented: “I’ve been there since I was sixteen. I’m twenty-nine now. That’s the only stable home I’ve ever had”.

This assimilation of the prison with the powerfully-charged symbol of the ‘home’ stems from the nature by which it becomes for its inmates an unconditional provider and satisfier of simple human needs (Duncan, 1996). Within the confines of the prison walls, women found a roof over their head, food on the table, and clothes on their back. The normal concerns and responsibilities that characterise adult life on the outside become obsolete (Goffman, 1961; Taylor, 2008). For some prisoners, this withdrawal from everyday responsibilities is a welcomed reprieve, as Fitzgerald (cited in Duncan, 1996, p. 27) was quoted:

In a way, the less free you are, the more freedom you have. With every rule and locked door you have one less responsibility. ... No worries, no job hassle, no bother about when or what to eat, what to wear. Free of responsibility, returned to a form of infancy.

This appreciation for the ‘freedom’ from economic and social responsibility that incarceration provided was mirrored by women in this research:

In jail the stability is all there. Even though it takes you ages to get use to it. ... You know where you’re gonna sleep. You know you’re gonna get fed. You know what you have to do. You don’t have to worry about anything when you’re in jail. – Kelly

It is easy in there⁸. You got a nice house ... didn’t have to worry about towels, didn’t have to worry about like knives and forks. ... You had nice gardens, you had nice neighbours. ... It was just good. You wake up happy because you don’t have to worry about anything ... life was pretty good in there. – Jodie

This relief from responsibility, imposed by the total institution, gave women the opportunity to concentrate more solely on themselves, in the absence of usual everyday pressures and influences. As discussed above, in many cases this opportunity facilitated the realisation for, and initiation of, constructive change. However, as cited by Taylor (2008, p. 112) “although the inmate is self centred, he [or she] is far from self sufficient”, with imprisonment tending to “aggravat[e] ... already infantile personalit[ies]” (Duncan, 1996, p. 20). As Goffman (1961, p. 56) said of the relief from economic and social responsibilities

⁸ Jodie was incarcerated in Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women, described by the Inspector of Custodial Services as a “first rate facility” (OICS, 2009, p. iii), and touted as setting a new standard in custodial services in terms of maximising women’s potential to “positively, confidently and safely reintegrate” into the community (WA DCS, 2010b). By housing minimum security prisoners in a community-style setting it attempts to allow for a less traumatic transition back to normal life (see OICS, 2007; 2009; WA DCS, 2010b). Women in this research affirmed the positive view of Boronia, describing it as “much better” (in compassion to Bandyup Women’s Prison), “more respectful”, and “more free”.

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within total institutions: “in many cases it seems that the disorganising effect of this moratorium is more significant than its organising effect”.

This ‘disorganisation’ promoted by institutional living is no more relevant than to the issue of prisoner release and reintegration, during which the full impact of this atypical and severe environment becomes most apparent (Haney, 2008). Having been ‘returned to a form of infancy’ within an environment devoid of almost all choice or the need or opportunity to make decisions, a prisoner’s will-power, personal judgment and self initiative are at risk of atrophy. As a consequence, prisoners may come to rely on the institution for making their everyday decisions and meeting their survival needs (Goffman, 1961; Haney, 2003; 2008; McNown Johnson & Rhodes, 2007). Prisoners upon release therefore face numerous challenges as they attempt to re-establish (or in many cases, establish) self-sufficiency within the free world. Malcolm Braly (cited in Duncan, 1996, p. 27) captured the essence of this challenge in his autobiographical account of his experience of prison:

However harshly, the joint mothered us– fed us, kept us warm, treated our ailments– and now, away from home, I could hardly remember to pay the rent, and the gas bill and the phone bill, let alone take proper care of my teeth.

Similarly, women in this research had become accustomed to the “stable, relatively contented existence” that they found on the inside (Goffman, 1961, p. 63), and having become dependent on the provisions, routines, and certainties of the institution, the excitement of approaching ‘freedom’ was often tainted by fear of the ‘unknown’ beyond the prison gates:

I was freaking out. Coz ... not knowing where you’re gonna go and what you’re gonna do – it’s really quite daunting. ... You feel like all the stress is coming back to you. You know, and you’re used to not having to worry about anything. – Kelly

When you’ve been in there for a while, you know, you’re in a comfort zone. And all of a sudden you’re going to get plucked out. You get a little bit scared coming out of there. ... It’s just not knowing what’s going to happen. – Jessica

You get too used to not paying rent, people being around you all the time, being told what to do. It does like affect you, you know. It’s scary coming out and to get that all back – like living a normal life. – Jodie

For these women, leaving the confines of prison meant relinquishing the certainties of life on the inside, only to be bombarded by the demands, responsibilities, and concerns of the outside world. As such, women often spoke of the immense challenges they faced in trying to re-establish post-release independence, in terms of for instance, housing, employment and

social reconnection (issues that are discussed in succeeding chapters). Yet beyond these physical and practical challenges, women also spoke of hardship in the mental and emotional process of readjusting to independent living, or as one woman expressed, ‘getting back to normalcy’. Among many women, this was often reported as the ‘biggest challenge’ or the ‘most difficult aspect of returning from prison’. As one woman said: “It’s just really hard trying to get yourself grounded again” (Sarah). Others responded in a similar vein:

My biggest challenge? I don’t know. That’s a hard one because, it’s everything. Everything ... I guess, just getting back into a normal life. Getting out of that old prison routine. Yeah I was sleeping a lot ... I wasn’t depressed but I wasn’t happy. ... It was hard. ... I think it was just generally feeling a bit lost. I just felt lost. – Cathy

I guess the biggest difficulty with me was just being settled. ... Just getting on with everyday life I suppose. Just waking up and getting out there and doing it. ... Going looking for places ... and just going and doing shopping, and stuff like that – getting back into that routine again. Just getting back out there and into the real world, into big open spaces, and seeing how well I’ll cope this time round. – Louise

I just got use to that life for 7.5 months. And you know now I’m straight and I suppose in that sense it was helpful but it was hard because I was used to that life and now I’ve got to get used to another life. – Jodie

‘Prison is easier’: Stigmatisation, alienation and social exclusion

Upon release, women were not only disadvantaged by institutionally fostered dependence, but also by the shame and stigmatisation of imprisonment, which, as Goffman (1963, p. 31) suggested “has the effect of cutting [the prisoner] off from society ... so that he [or she] stands a discredited person facing an unaccepting world” (Goffman, 1963, p. 31). One woman, who had spent the majority of her lifetime in and out of jail, described the social impact of the stigma attached to her imprisonment:

It has really condemned me ... everyone judges me on it ... I’m pretty much looked at, as scum. It really affects ya. I guess if I wasn’t as confident as I am, it would make me depressed. You get low self-esteem. You feel it too, you know, you feel the looks and you see the chit chat. And it’s fucked. It’s fucked with my life. – Brenda

Brenda elaborated on the issue of ‘acceptance’, the question of which Goffman (1963, p. 19) claimed is a “central feature of the stigmatised individual’s situation in life”:

There's just automatic judgment. And fear. And I don't like that. Like, I don't like causing fear. I want people to treat me normally, you know. I'm not going to bite them – I'm a good person underneath this shit. – Brenda

Other women similarly discussed the stigmatising effects of imprisonment:

It really affected my life. Just the way that I think and things like that. ... I feel daunted by the fact that I've been in jail. ... It worries me that people will look down on me, you know. ... I just think that people are gonna think badly of me if they find out I went to jail. – Kelly

It's the little things like my family, especially my extended family, don't trust me and they think I'm going to steal from them and stuff like that. Yeah, little things. Prison will always impact someone's life dramatically no matter what. No one comes back from jail and goes back to living the good life. – Susan

As a result of such stigmatisation, whether real or perceived, women often reported a degree of social withdrawal upon their release. Some even conveyed a sense of feeling homesick, particularly in relation to the loss of personal support networks formed in prison, along with the unavailability of such understanding and accepting networks on the outside. After all, as Duncan (1996, p. 19) highlighted in her discussions of prison as a 'catalyst of intense friendship', since prisoners are immobilized and share almost every aspect of their lives, they "are better situated to form lasting relationships characterized by affection and trust", especially considering that all other competing forms of relationships, such as work and family, are absent. Correspondingly, when asked: "What was your experience of leaving prison?" one woman responded: "Lonely." She elaborated: "I miss the girls" (Jodie). Others concurred:

I know I don't want to go back to jail. But it's funny because I missed it sort of at first, when I left. I think it was just having that small group of the girls that I knew. – Louise

It's very hard. It's very hard coming out of jail because you're all by yourself. You know, in prison you've got your friends around you 24 hours and then out here you've got no one. – Jessica

Alone in the 'free world', one woman even found herself mourning the support of the prison officers, in line with Stevens (1998, p. 190), who found that women in prison (unlike men) tend to "look to staff, as well as to one another to provide emotional support and nurturing":

The officers come round every day and check on ya and they were all nice, you know, making sure you're ok. Like even the other day one of the officers rang up for me to get one of the girls to ring through – she goes: 'Oh we miss

ya but don't come back' ... And I was like: 'Oh I miss it, miss' ... I never thought I'd say that either but I do. – Jodie

Jodie continued:

I could say I was depressed when I got out. Especially the first two weeks – I'm getting better now but I mean the first two weeks I wanted to go back. It's sad to admit that but it's just easier in there you know. And that's not a good way of thinking. – Jodie

It appears that, within the prison, women found acceptance and support that was unparalleled to that which was available to them in the 'free world', extolling the preferability of prison life, and thus the need for support on the outside. Without such support, it may be as Duncan (1988, p. 1225) suggested, whereby for some people, "the risk of imprisonment constitutes not a deterrent, but an incentive, to commit crimes". Likewise, Brenda, who had described herself as "very institutionalised", said of her latest term of imprisonment: "I wanted to be jailed." Speaking of her numerous experiences of prison and release she said:

Basically I didn't want to get out sometimes ... I didn't feel like I belonged at all [in wider society]. ... So most of my time I went to jail was because I would assault the police just to be locked up. ... It's not like I'm a criminal minded person. I do things to go to jail because I've got no support, I feel like I don't belong, and that's about it. – Brenda

Tainted with themes of stigmatisation, alienation and social exclusion, Brenda's reflections here distinctly highlight the importance of supporting women through prison and release. After all, as previously highlighted, the preferability of prison typically reflects women's dire life circumstances on the outside, "rather than any degree of comfort afforded to them by the prison environment" (Warren et al., 2004, p. 640). As Brenda expressed of her desires for social inclusion beyond imprisonment: "I've always wanted to be normal out here, not in there". However, excluded and unsupported, women like Brenda, may instead "adapt to prison in immature and ... destructive ways. As a result, they [may] leave prison no better, and sometimes considerably worse, than when they went in" (Johnson, 1996, cited in Richards & Ross, 2001, p. 178).

Conclusion

The narratives drawn upon in this chapter portray the conflicting, yet often coinciding, differential effects of a woman's imprisonment, reflecting Spellman's (2010) poetic

summation: “[Prison] can be a womb or a tomb. A womb in which to grow, transform and develop. Or a tomb to overdose on bitterness [and] despair”. On the one hand, imprisonment had become, in many cases, a necessary form of intervention in women’s troubled lives. It provided an ‘escape’ from negative environments, promoted self re-evaluation, and initiated contemplations of behaviour change and productive personal transformation. In some cases, prison also provided the practical resources and programs to support such change. Yet, although the prison environment presented the opportunity for potential benefits in this manner, the very nature of its ‘totalism’ which had allowed these also problematically promoted institutionalisation, typically “reducing the prisoner to the weak, helpless, dependent status of childhood” (Sykes, 1958, p. 75).

Essentially, despite the potential role that imprisonment may play in instigating cognitive reappraisal and self re-evaluation that may lead to positive change in prisoners, it is clear that the institutional environment is typically not one that is favourable to personal development. As Eaton (1993, p.18) suggested “prison affords little space for the development of a sense of self. Or rather the sense of self that is developed in prison is one which is adapted to the prison”. Such adaption to the “deprivation, and extremely atypical patterns and norms of living”, as Haney (2003, pp. 4-5) outlines, “creates habits of thinking and acting that can be dysfunctional in periods of post-prison adjustment”. Overall, given the problematic nature of institutional adaption, particularly with regard to the release setting, it is crucial that attempts are made to ensure that any achievements in positive attitude change, stimulated by the institutional experience, are supported on the outside. Further, it is apparent that a lack of support following release from the infantilising and stigmatising prison may have devastating effects, where there is a clear risk that individuals leaving prison may be in a more disadvantaged situation than when they entered, providing little hope for change.

Chapter six

Regaining ‘freedom’: Women’s initial experiences following release from prison

Coming out of prison ... Oh it was just hectic. Very hard. – Sarah

It is crazy ... it really is, for the first four to six weeks [after release], it really is madness. – Susan

This chapter discusses the often harsh realities that women face as they re-enter wider society from the confines of prison. Carrying on from discussions of the potentially infantilising, stigmatising and disorientating impact of the prison experience (Chapter five), this chapter seeks to characterise the immediate post-release situation of female prisoners. Documenting women’s experiences as they attempt to navigate the ‘free world’ and seek to develop a newfound sense of self-sufficiency, these discussions speak to issues of support. In particular, this chapter identifies the lack of, and need for, transitional and post-release support, both in personal (family and friends) and social (welfare) terms, and emphasises the importance of throughcare and aftercare initiatives as a crucial element of the criminal justice response and a necessary component of imprisonment.

Characterising the point of release: ‘Freedom’, throughcare and support

Prison release can be exciting, bringing an end to the restrictions and deprivations of institutional living. Yet, release can also present a new set of problems and threats (Ross, 2005, p. 169). Upon exiting the structurally stable (but potentially volatile) environment of the prison, where the basic human necessities of food and shelter are guaranteed, and where the enforced daily structure of the prison life ensures routine, the release period brings with it uncertainties that can prove to be overwhelming. As Chapter five highlighted, the disorientating and institutionalising nature of imprisonment (Goffman, 1961), coupled with histories typically marked by instability, including homelessness, substance use issues and other problematic lifestyles (Carlen, 1988), leave many women exiting the prison system in a precarious position. As Borzycki (2005, p. 34) suggested: “Offenders often lack the protective factors that contribute to resilience, yet the moment of release can present a range

of stressors that must be dealt with in addition to long-term disadvantages”. In this research, one woman’s description of her experience of prison release exemplifies the typical concerns and stressors that prisoners face as they attempt to reintegrate into wider society:

Experiencing coming out of prison – just the thought of not having anywhere to go. And it was really hard trying to establish family contact again. Sorting out Centrelink stuff. Finances. Trying to see my kids again ... just trying to sort of get back on my feet ... yeah it was hard. You have to start new. – Sarah

Many participants identified prison release as an opportunity for a ‘new start’, often motivated by a newfound will for constructive change (see Chapter five). However, most typically these women felt as though they were ‘starting from scratch’. This was particularly due to the loss of stable housing either prior to, or as a consequence of, imprisonment or otherwise a history of unstable housing and/or homelessness, as well as isolation from social networks, including friends and family. Additionally, with all the women identifying at least some level of problematic substance use prior to imprisonment, issues of maintaining sobriety upon release often compounded their post-release problems⁹. Given these issues, the importance of structured transitional and post-release support is clear.

In fact, Borzycki and Baldry (2003, p. 2) suggested that “the best outcomes for returning prisoners may arise when factors predisposing a person to criminal activity (criminogenic needs¹⁰) are addressed and when physical and social needs are appropriately supported, both in prison and post-release via throughcare”. As highlighted in Chapter two, the throughcare paradigm is now generally recognised by local and overseas correctional practitioners and policy makers as a ‘best practice’ approach to working with offenders to reduce recidivism and assist community integration (Baldry, 2007; Borzycki 2005). Accordingly, there has been recent movement in developing and implementing programs that cater for the transitional and post-release needs of prisoners (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Borzycki, 2005; MCREU, 2003). The following subsections highlight these documented throughcare implementations, particularly within Western Australia, and contrasts these to the experiences of the women in this study.

⁹ Specific issues of housing, relationships and sobriety will be examined individually and in in-depth detail in succeeding chapters.

¹⁰ Those offender attitudes, beliefs, values and/or behaviours that are linked directly to offending, and that when changed will decrease recidivism, for example, pro-criminal attitudes, substance abuse, poor problem solving, criminal associates, etc (Borzycki, 2005).

Release reality 1 – ‘Kicked out’: Women’s experiences (or non-experiences) of throughcare

In Australia, a commitment to throughcare principles and policies has been documented in various Government reports. According to the 2004 Social Justice Report, the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services demonstrated their commitment to throughcare initiatives by becoming the first state in Australia to provide voluntary support services to offenders exiting prison with the introduction of the community reentry coordination service (Re-entry Link Program) in 2004 (ATSISJC, 2005, p. 27). The Re-entry Link Program provides continuity of support from imprisonment through to release with clients eligible for up to nine months of support (three months prior to release and six months following release). Such support includes life skills development, release preparation and planning, accessing accommodation, as well as employment, education and training pathways, and accessing and/or referrals to other community services and resources. This service is offered in all prisons and covers all regions across Western Australia in partnership with various community organisations including Ruah Community Services and Outcare Incorporated (ATSISJC, 2005). In the 2006/07 financial year the various agencies provided services to 1155 prisoners. Of these, only 18.4% returned to prison as recidivists, which “compares favourably to the 40.6% recidivism rate amongst the overall prisoner population ... an indicator of the success of the program” (WA DCS, 2008, p.4).

Another key achievement in transitional and reentry support services in Western Australia was the appointment of 12 transitional managers (one located at each prison) in 2008/09¹¹. In partnership with other government and non-government agencies, these staff coordinate the reentry services provided to prisoners, seeking to address social exclusion factors and maximise successful reintegration (WA DCS, 2010a, p. 35). Such services include the Re-entry Link Program, as well as supported accommodation services, and family and parenting support services.

Despite these apparent advances in throughcare policy and practice in Australia, research and evaluation on throughcare, though scarcely available, has typically documented an insufficient level of throughcare implementation, suggesting that “throughcare is more a

¹¹ It should be noted that the women interviewed in this research were typically imprisoned prior to the appointment of these transitional managers and thus were unable to draw upon or comment upon this resource. However, prisoners canvassed during the on-site inspection of Bandyup in 2011 by the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services confirmed that they “highly valued the role of the Transitional Manager and found her accessible”. On the other hand though, “there were some prisoners who were oblivious to her role and the services she provides” (OICS, 2011, p. 39), suggesting the need for more rigorous processes of engagement

reality in the rhetoric of departmental documentation and policy than it is in grass roots practice” (Baldry, 2007, p. 12). Reports from the Inspector of Custodial Services go some way to confirming this contention, with the case management system at Bandyup noted for its “failure to consistently recognise and meet women’s welfare needs” (OICS, 2011, p. 33). In fact, during the on-site inspection in March 2011, most of the prisoners who were asked about the functioning of case management at Bandyup were either unaware that they had been assigned a case officer or could not identify their case officer (whose role is to support and inform the prisoner at each stage of the prisoner management and release process) (OICS, 2011, p. 32). In line with such findings, women in this research reported a limited, and sometimes totally lacking, experience of transitional support and release preparation. One woman, who had served a finite sentence, used the term ‘kicked out’ to describe the hasty and abrupt experience of her release from prison:

I got kicked out at 9:30 in the morning and they sent me out with my boxes and gave me a bus pass and that was it ... they don’t organise anything. ... There’s no address you have to go to or anything like that. You just get given a bus pass and get told to leave ... I had nowhere to go, no accommodation, nothing like that, so it was pretty hard. – Susan

Many women, like Susan, found that the institution they had become dependent on – that which clothed them, fed them, and sheltered them – deserted them at the end of their term. Expressions of such ‘desertion’ were similarly evident as another woman spoke of the ‘gap’ in the provision of support from prison into release:

There’s no real rehabilitation in jail. You get drug courses but they don’t care. As soon as you’re out the door they don’t give a shit. They don’t set ya up with anything. ... They really don’t. ... So each one of us that walk out of the gate are doomed to fail. It’s pretty sad. – Brenda

Both Kelly and Sarah agreed:

[Support services] are pretty widely available when you’re in jail – they come and see ya and that. But when you’re out of jail, I mean a lot of it doesn’t get followed through you know. ... They need to make sure it’s continued after they get out. ... There definitely needs to be more following through. – Kelly

They definitely need more, prior to release, they need support so that it’s there and organised for when they get out. They definitely need more support coming into the actual prison itself and counselling and goal setting and help to path the way for when they get out. I just don’t think there is enough of that in there. ... I definitely think there should be more programs set for when they’re released so that there is counselling, there’s rehab, there’s housing, there’s family networking, more of all of that definitely. Because that’s something I feel like I missed out on. – Sarah

Release reality 2 – ‘Coming out to nothing’: The immediate situation of women released from prison

Research has shown that “most people do not emerge from prison or jail with much confidence about their future success, nor are they returning to circumstances that inspire confidence” (Nelson et al., 1999, p. 29). Correspondingly, having been ‘kicked out’ of the institution that many had become dependent on, women in this research popularly depicted the premise of ‘coming out to nothing’. As Kelly articulated:

You get out and you’ve got nothing. You have to start again. And that in itself is depressing. You know, like you’ve got no clothes, and you’ve got no household stuff. So it’s real difficult – to come out and to have nothing. It makes you feel like shit. Like even in jail you live better [laughs]. It’s bullshit. And just everything adds more depression and that just slows you down. – Kelly

Removed from their dependent status as prisoner and confronted with the ‘burden of freedom’, in the pressures of actual day-to-day living, many women, like Kelly, revealed, in line with Duncan (1996, p. 29), a level of “disillusionment with, and repudiation of, the outside world ... where one must earn one’s keep”. This was particularly evident with regard to the financial difficulties that women experienced immediately upon release. Continuing on the theme of ‘coming out to nothing’, women said:

Coming out. What’s the hardest thing? Having nothing. No support. No financial assistance. I got a release cheque, \$270 ... \$270 ain’t gonna do me for the next two weeks. You know, they set ya up to fail right then and there. – Brenda

Money is a big issue ... you get a \$200 crisis payment from Centrelink. But I mean \$200 for a fortnight and you’re meant to get out and not do crime? ... I believe that no one should sit their arse on the dole forever, but when you get out of prison, you’ve got no choice. You don’t walk out of jail and walk into a job, very rarely you do. Some people do. But how can \$200 get someone through a fortnight? It just can’t. You can’t do it. Not if you’re on your own. – Susan

Such financial difficulties can significantly impinge upon a women’s ability to re-establish herself in the community after prison (McIvor, Trotter, & Sheehan, 2009). This is particularly so, given that much female crime is, as Susan’s narrative also suggests, economically motivated, for example to support drug use or survive poverty (Carlen, 1988; McIvor et al., 2009). Being ill-prepared for life on the outside (evidenced by the lack of throughcare described above), compounded with limited finances and tangible assets, many

women were facing significant instability upon release¹². Such instability, identified in Chapter five as a common precursor to imprisonment, is also clearly unfavourable and potentially detrimental to prospects for constructive change and successful reintegration. As Kelly, above, spoke of the manner by which resulting depression “slows you down”, Jodie similarly spoke of the potentially impeding nature of ‘coming out to nothing’, particularly with regard to efforts at sobriety and drug rehabilitation:

Coming off drugs in prison, and then being straight, and then coming back from prison ... it's just like: 'Now what?' ... And when you get out there and you've got nothing ... it sort of sets you up for a bit of a failure. But I mean I'm not going to fail but I can see why a lot of people do. Especially after you've been doing so good inside and then all of a sudden you come out to nothing. ... [Prison] only rehabilitates their mind. It's not rehabilitating their *life*. ... And you know, that's even worse when you've rehabilitated your head and you've got nothing. ... It's good to be rehabilitated but there's nothing there for us to walk out to really. – Jodie

Clearly, for women whose commitment to changing is fragile at best, the sense of hopelessness evoked in ‘walking out to nothing’, leaves them in a distinctly disadvantaged position following release from prison. As indicated by Hampton (1993, p. 159):

The best of inmates' intentions tend to wither when confronted by a post-release world which is largely uninterested and disbelieving. Jail only temporarily replaces existing outside problems with the ones of prison. When you're released to face your old problems, you have even fewer resources than before in terms of housing, friends, or sense of self, with the added stigma of being an ex-prisoner to complete your sense of isolation.

It is clear that prisoners being released back into the community face a multitude of physical and psychological difficulties that they are unlikely to overcome without both practical and emotional support. Consistent with this notion, every woman who participated in this research identified ‘support’ as the most crucial element to ‘making it on the outside’, indicating the necessity of a post-release world that is alternatively ‘interested’ and ‘believing’. This is where ‘social capital’ comes into play.

Release reality 3 – ‘Doing it alone’: The availability (or lack) of ‘social capital’

Social capital refers to the asset of social relations (for example family, informal social networks, relationships established through work and so on, as well as higher level community ties and organisations) through which individuals may access both tangible and

¹² This was particularly in terms of housing, discussed in detail in Chapter seven.

intangible benefits or resources that can help them function independently within their community (Brown & Ross, 2010; Mills & Codd, 2008; Wolff & Draine, 2004). Theorists point to micro-level family relationships in particular as “a significant potential source of social capital” (Mills & Codd, 2008, p. 11).

Prisoner reentry research too emphasises the value of family connections, indicating that tangible and emotional family support can ease the transition from prison to community and may lead to post-release success (Reisig et al., 2002; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; Sullivan et al., 2002). This is also in accordance with Cullen’s (1994) social support theory (outlined in Chapter three), which suggests that social support is essential for healthy human development, having the potential to reduce the risk of crime and other personal pathologies (Cullen, 1994; Cullen et al., 1999; Stevens, 2006). Concurringly, one participant specifically pinpointed the importance of family support in her discussions of the challenges of release and the consequent attractiveness of imprisonment:

It’s just the thought of coming out to nothing, and what happens if they haven’t got that family support. ... Like no wonder they go back to prison, because it’s three meals and it’s a roof over their head, for some people. – Louise

Louise’s comment here concisely extends the theme of ‘coming out to nothing’ to issues of institutionalisation and the importance of post-release support, particularly from family members who, as highlighted in the review of the literature in Chapter two, released prisoners often rely extensively upon for housing, financial support, and emotional support (Naser & La Vigne, 2006). However, although the value of family support within the release setting is clear, the availability of such support is not always sufficient. Of the eleven women who participated in this research, only three (Cassandra, Hannah, and Jodie) reported that their relationships with their families-of-origin were positive in nature, with prosocial and supportive relations. In line with the literature, these women described their families as momentarily important to their reentry experience, attributing their support as the most crucial factor in successfully reintegrating into the community. Beyond the practical support that these women received from their families, including for example, housing, financial assistance, and child-care assistance, these women simply appreciated their family’s presence as a necessary form of emotional support. As Jodie expressed: “I’m glad that I’m not doing it on my own”.

Meanwhile, of the remaining eight participants who did not identify such positive familial relations, two (Susan and Louise) described an estrangement from prosocial family

members resulting from the long-term strain that these relationships endured as a result of their criminal and/or substance using behaviour¹³. Importantly though, in line with research which indicates that many female offenders grow up and live in situations where personal social support networks are either lacking or highly dysfunctional (for example Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, et al., 2003; Klein et al., 2002), the majority of the participants (six of the eleven, or 55%) reported negative familial relations, which varied from poor family cohesion or ‘disengagement’ – as one woman simply said: “Oh, I don’t talk to ‘em” (Jessica) – to the existence of conflict, to histories of violence, abuse and victimisation:

As a kid I was on the street. I lived a couple of years in Kings Cross as a street kid or whatever you want to call it. ... No, no. I haven’t had any [family support]. – Cathy

I don’t have any family ... my mum’s a junkie slut and we don’t talk because of it. And my dad’s dead. And I don’t have any brothers and sisters. When I was in jail and that, like many times I’ve tried to rekindle my relationship with my mother. And when I was in jail she just didn’t give a fuck. ... She wasn’t ever very loving and kind at all [fighting back tears]. – Kelly

My mum doesn’t come and visit me. She’s just not a very nice person. And my dad, he lives in the country so it’s a bit hard for him – Rhiannon

I never really had my family there during the years. I didn’t really talk to my family that much; they wanted nothing to do with me either. I’m like the black sheep so you know ... I never had a good relationship with my mum. I left home at thirteen, I was on the streets. – Sarah

My mum hated me. She abused me mentally, emotionally. My dad did sexually. My mum let it happen. ... It was just fucked up. She didn’t give a fuck for none of us, for me and my brother. ... And I’ve lost him – we were close for years. We were close as fuck, until I went to jail. And then he went to the drugs badly. I don’t know him anymore. I’ve lost him. I don’t have anyone. – Brenda

These women’s descriptions of their family backgrounds give some insight into their ‘pathways’ into crime, revealing issues of poor familial relations and other dysfunctional environments, including abuse, homelessness, and substance use, commonly highlighted by ‘pathways research’ as key contributors to delinquency among women or ‘girls’ (see, for example, Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum, et al., 2003). However, the evident lack of familial support among a majority of women within this sample, as is apparent within both national and international research, also has important implications regarding the need for the

¹³ The importance and influence of familial and other relationships, along with the implications of strained relationships, are addressed in Chapter eight.

availability of support services for women exiting prison. In these situations, where necessary support cannot be supplied by an individual's personal relationships, social support services, supplied within the broader community, may be a returning prisoner's only source of support.

As Rhiannon stated:

Family is important, although some women don't get that kinda support from their family members, if any. So yeah, Outcare and those kinds of organisations are a really great help. ... [My Outcare caseworker] has been really fantastic ... basically she has just been helpful in every way. She has made it a lot easier, where my mum and that just couldn't be bothered. – Rhiannon

Bridging the 'gap': The role and value of community-based social support services and parole supervision

In comparison to negative perceptions, described above, of being 'kicked-out' of prison, 'coming out to nothing' and 'doing it alone', as a consequence of limited social capital or support in both personal and social welfare terms, one woman described a significantly more positive transition into the 'free world':

It was a lot better than what I thought it would be. You know some people freak out about getting out. But I mean I had my job lined up¹⁴. I had money saved. I had the house [referring to Outcare crisis-care housing]. And you know arrangements with my partner and my kids and my mum and that, so that kinda helps I think. So yeah it wasn't too bad at all. I feel like I'm doing really well actually. Especially considering where I was at before. – Hannah

Unlike the experiences of most, Hannah not only had an availability of family support, which has so commonly been found to offer crucial emotional and practical support to released prisoners (Cullen, 1994; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Nelson et al., 1999; Sullivan et al., 2002), she also had positive experiences of pre-release planning and throughcare as a result of Boronia's traineeships and work placements, as well as Outcare's SJOG Women's Program crisis-care housing. This holistic level of support undoubtedly contributed to her movement away from her alienated, drug dealing past, and toward a more constructive future. Hannah's example suggests that post-release success may flourish where an individual is nourished with a *combination of supports* within prison through the transitional period and into the post-release setting. However, as the 'release realities' described throughout this chapter have shown, women rarely leave prison with this kind of stability and support.

¹⁴ Hannah was able to secure post-prison employment as a cook, resulting from a traineeship and work placement that she completed during her incarceration at Boronia.

Prisoner reentry and reintegration

Even for prisoners who are motivated toward constructive change and supported by prosocial personal support networks, this may not be enough. For example, as Flavin (2004) and Martinez (2009) mutually pointed out, some families may simply not have the resources to contend with the additional demands of supporting a family member returning from prison. As one woman said of the need for auxiliary support:

There needs to be more support with all the ‘reality’ stuff, yeah, definitely. There’s only so much support you can get from your family. There’s only so much you can do for yourself. – Jodie

Meanwhile, as previously highlighted, for others, the availability of external support may represent their only chance at survival on the outside. As one woman declared: “The only support that I’ve had is Outcare. That’s the only support of any kind. ... I wouldn’t be here without them. I don’t know where I’d be without them” (Kelly). Brenda similarly stated:

If these [support services] weren’t around I’d be fucked ... They’re very important, I think, life-saving in a sense. Survival-saving. ... I’ve worked out that I’m my only friend at the end of the day. I’ve lost all my family. These services are my only hope. – Brenda

Without such ‘hope’ women may find it extremely hard on the outside:

So many girls come back to jail in that first few months of being released because there’s just no way of surviving without doing something on the side. And you know people think like: ‘Oh fuck now I’ve been in prison there’s no way I can get a job’. And you get that self-doubt about ya. And you know when you lose that confidence it’s hard to boost yourself to try and do the right thing when all you know is the wrong thing. ... So they just end up doing the same old silly things you know. There just needs to be something or someone there to help. Just some kind of assistance to get you through the first couple of months, just until you can get your feet back on the ground. – Susan

They all want a chance. And unfortunately because they get out without that chance, they end up straight to the dealer, straight to the shit, and straight back inside. – Brenda

Reemphasising the discussions above, in ‘coming out to nothing’, which extolled the significance of support, Brenda and Susan’s narratives here indicate that, for some women, even the expectation of immense post-release challenges, may undermine the individual’s confidence, and devastate hopes of a successful reintegration. Without self-confidence, and without support, these women may be vulnerable to resorting to the same problematic coping mechanisms, in crime and drug use, that had led to their arrest, conviction and imprisonment

in the past (McGrath, 2000). This problem again reiterates the need for services that support a prisoner's successful reintegration into the community after prison.

Parole as support?

In relation to the need for structured release efforts and throughcare support, parole philosophy and practice are of special interest since parole was founded primarily to foster prisoner reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration (Josi & Sechrest, 1999; Papanozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Petersilia, 1999; 2001). The Australian parole system was established in 1963, with concern for rehabilitating offenders and reducing recidivism, as well as reducing governmental pressures associated with prison overcrowding and the increasing costs of imprisonment (Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC), 2005; Broadhurst, 2006). Under the parole system, a prisoner is released prior to the expiry of his or her full sentence, and subject to a range of reporting conditions and other requirements, such as participation in various programs, urinalysis or any other drug testing, as well as restrictions of particular associations and/or movements. During this period the parolee may have their parole revoked by the Parole Board, resulting in re-incarceration, for violations that can range from a breach of a parole condition to the commission of another criminal offence (ALRC, 2005; Ross, 2005).

Ideologically, the procedures for parole release and parole supervision are directed towards encouraging rehabilitation of offenders and deterring them from further crime (ALRC, 2005). By permitting prisoners to serve part of their sentence within the community, the parole period provides for a more gradual transition from prison to the community and presents an opportunity for efforts to be directed towards rehabilitative processes, including issues of housing and employment (Petersilia, 1999; 2001; 2003). In line with this view, the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services has emphasised their role in supporting parolees in their return to the community, particularly in regard to finding "a place to work and live" (WA DCS, 2010c). However, within prisoner reentry literature, parole practices have often come under fire due to an apparent shift away from providing services and toward a focus on monitoring and surveillance, resulting from the governmental endorsement of 'tough on crime' mantra (Papanozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Petersilia, 1999; 2001; 2003). Yet evidence suggests that, without the provision of treatment, rehabilitation, and support services, parole or other intensive supervision programs will have "little, if any, effects [on] recidivism" (Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen, & Andrews, 2000, cited in Papanozzi & Gendreau, 2005, p. 459).

Within the current sample, five of the eleven women were on parole or intensive supervision orders. These orders appeared to focus primarily on substance use issues, with drug counselling and urinalysis being the two major requirements in addition to routine reporting. Among these women, parole was typically described as demanding, burdening, stressful, and ‘a pain in the arse’. As one woman said:

It’s hard when you have to go to all these things like see your parole officer, and do urines, and go to counselling, and this and that. How are you supposed to get on with your life when you’ve got all this bullshit? It adds to the stress you know. – Kelly

However, as McIvor et al. (2009, p. 357) found, although women “were not universally positive in their appraisal of parole supervision following release from prison, the support and structure provided by their community correction officers ... were highly valued when they were perceived to address their practical and personal needs” (McIvor et al., 2009, p. 357). This was particularly important considering the lack of transitional support women otherwise experienced.

Women appreciated their parole officer as a knowledgeable resource in the post-release process, where, despite the typically portrayed tedious or inconvenient nature of their mandatory monitoring and control-orientated duties, parole officers often became a crucial source of advice, referrals and advocacy. As Hannah expressed: “Having someone to go to is good. ... Like anything I need or have issues with, I can just ask my parole officer and she’s pretty good”. Other women identified a similar helpfulness in their parole officers:

They expect a lot from ya ... like you’ve got to go report in, and you’ve got to do counselling ... and you see this person and you see that one and you’re looking for a job and a place to stay. But they kinda help you with all of that too. Like, they gave me a priority letter for Homes West ... and they’re good with just advice and that. ... So yeah parole is good in that way you know. – Louise

It’s made me run around a bit more. ... But maybe I’d be worse off [without parole supervision] in the sense that it helped me tap into Outcare and things like that. Coz I didn’t actually make contact with [Outcare] myself. My parole officer did. I’m glad she did. I don’t know if I would have rung them. – Cathy

Importantly though, one woman indicated that the helpfulness of parole officers was determined by the parole officer as an individual, with the provision of various ‘auxiliary’ supports within parole being perceived as an act of altruism on the behalf of the officer rather than as a function of their employment or job description: “I have to say the officer I had

initially, she was supportive, yeah, definitely. Yep. But in herself as a person more than in her role in her work” (Cathy).

Speaking of her experience of other parole officers, Cathy revealed that they were seemingly “quick to just brush them off”, indicating that, in line with Hampton (1993, p. 175), “it was only their paperwork that mattered”:

I’m only on an intensive [supervision] order because of the seriousness of my crime – or on paper it is. But most girls come in one or two times and they get told: ‘Oh you can come in fortnightly. Don’t worry about this. Don’t worry about that. Don’t do this. You don’t need counselling’. I even got told to, ‘Just have a couple of counselling sessions, make it look like you’re doing what you’re told and then we can just forget about it this time round’. And I mean I think I need it. It’s not just like, ‘Yeah forget about it’. – Cathy

Although such attitudes were identified by Cathy as a possible consequence of being “under resourced and over-worked”, such a minimalistic approach to parole services “is unfortunate, since most inmates, at the point of release, have an initial strong desire to succeed” (Petersilia, 2003, p. 14), emphasising the crucial role of guidance, support and rehabilitative processes upon release.

However, whereas these women highlighted the value of guidance and support over surveillance, other women interestingly emphasised parole as complementary to their need for structure as a crucial aspect to re-entering the outside community successfully. For example, Kelly identified a sense of submissiveness within herself that she felt had been cultivated in both her personal relationships, as well as by the institutionalising nature of imprisonment, and outlined the value of external direction upon release:

My whole life I’ve been told what to do ... so that’s kinda what I’m use to. If no one tells me what to do I’m just: ‘Ah?’ – You know. I can’t believe that I’d admit that but yeah it’s true. And they’re the people that are on my arse, you know. Like: ‘Why don’t you get your shit together Kelly? Do this. Do that.’ I’m like: ‘Oh ok then. No worries!’ [Laughs] Otherwise I just don’t know. – Kelly

Jodie similarly revealed an appreciation of parole, particularly in terms of the oversight set by urinalysis and the role this played in providing and maintaining boundaries which she recognised as crucial to her release success. As Morash (2009, p. 138-140) similarly found, such supervision can play a fundamental role in “setting limits on drug use and making it unpleasant or difficult for women to continue using drugs ... moving some women to feel that drugs create more stress than they relieve, creating periods of forced abstinence, or creating reasons not to use drugs, and thereby promoting abstinence”:

Urinalysis – that keeps ya good on track. ... For people not getting parole and getting released after their full time, without parole, I reckon that's just ridiculous to say the least. I'm glad I came out with parole because it would have been more of a temptation to go out and do something probably. And party and just find myself back on that track straight away. But because I'm on parole, like I've only been out for three weeks but I haven't even been tempted to go there. – Jodie

In line with the views of Taxman (2002, cited in Borzycki, 2005, p. 22), the findings here indicate that “both support and surveillance [can be] directed at increasing reintegrative success”, with most women identifying parole as fostering a sense of security after prison. On the other hand, Susan, who had been unconditionally released after serving a finite sentence, highlighted the hardships involved with being released without parole or any form of structured services, stressing, “There just has to be more out there for people released on finite sentences”:

When you're on parole, you know, they make sure you have somewhere to go ... and they always sort out counselling and this and that. And if you do need any extra help you can just ask 'em and they can send you in the right direction ... because that's the whole thing about being on an order or being on parole – is to make sure there is that stability. Whereas on a finite sentence, on a straight sentence, that's it. You do your jail and that's it. And you literally get kicked out. – Susan

Again, Susan's insight here documents the importance of the availability of guidance and support for women upon release from prison, particularly in relation to achieving a sense of 'stability'; a key theme throughout this research. Given that as, firstly, not all released prisoners are subject to parole supervision, and secondly, that not all parolees receive sufficient pre- and post-release support via parole services (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003), alternative avenues of support are essential. As such, the value of community-based social support services, such as those provided by Outcare, cannot be overlooked.

Help-seeking behaviours: Factors affecting the utilisation of services

Despite the availability of services such as, for example, those provided by Outcare and Ruah, along with documented departmental movements in the provision of corrections-based throughcare, there remains a “large mismatch between the need for programs and program availability” (Petersilia, 2003, p. 103). Nevertheless, factors affecting the utilisation of throughcare and other support services often go beyond their apparent availability or non-availability. Of crucial importance are the individual's willingness and readiness to seek help

(Taxman, Byrne, Holsinger & Anspach, 2003). One woman, who had multiple experiences of imprisonment, post-release failure, and reimprisonment, spoke optimistically of her current release experience, explaining that her newfound "determination [had] paid off":

This time I think I've grown up a lot more and I think I'm willing to get more help. I'll put my hand up where I never used to. I'm actually more determined to find places and keep going until they help. – Brenda

Another woman similarly stated:

I mean if you go out and look and don't be scared, you can achieve things. But you know, you just can't rely on getting things given to ya. You've just got to put yourself to use as well. – Louise

Of course a woman's resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness will be crucial to her experience of release. However, as research has shown, prisoners do not always possess these attributes, often described instead as having "poor everyday life skills" (Borzycki, 2005, p. 36). Further, as has been highlighted in previous discussions of institutionalisation (Chapter five), adaptation to the deprivations and frustrations of life inside prison can result in diminished levels of independence and personal responsibility, in addition to producing certain disorientation and bewilderment upon release. For example, one woman bluntly described how seeking stability with the assistance of support and community services was simply not an initial priority upon release, explaining that "for the first couple of weeks [she] just wanted to enjoy [her]self and have fun":

When I first got out I just wanted to do all the things that I hadn't been able to do. So I wasn't really stressed at first you know what I mean. I was just like: 'Oh you know I want to have sex and I want to have a drink and I want to party and I want to listen to music and I want to eat the foods that I haven't been able to'. Just all that kinda stuff you know. So there wasn't really any stress. I wasn't thinking: 'I want to get on track'. – Kelly

Having endured the 'pains of imprisonment', including, the deprivation of their liberty, autonomy and personal security, the denial of heterosexual relationships, and isolation from the material comforts of their daily lives (Sykes, 1958), a response such as Kelly's is not surprising. Sykes (1958, p. 64) suggested that while the "deprivations or frustrations of the modern prison may indeed be the acceptable or unavoidable implications of imprisonment", it is important to recognise that these are nevertheless "painful". Therefore an immediate response to release may simply be to relish in the natural liberties of life on the outside (see for example Goffman, 1961, p. 71), and in this way the excitement of 'freedom' may act as a distraction from post-release instability and attempts to 'stabilise the self'.

However, it is obvious that such elation and optimism is temporary, often giving way to feelings of desperation, hopelessness and powerlessness, in the face of unrelenting post-release challenges.

On the other hand, the transition from institutional living can produce another form of disorientation more specifically related to the psychological costs of institutionalisation. ‘Culture shock’, initially coined by anthropologist Kalvero Oberg (1960) to describe the psychological reactions of people travelling abroad and being exposed to new cultural environments, can be similarly applied to describe the trauma that prisoners can experience in the processes of both incarceration and subsequent release. While some releasees may experience excitement and elation, perhaps during the ‘honeymoon period’¹⁵, release is also often characterised by issues such as identity confusion, depression, frustration, anxiety and alienation, all symptoms of the culture shock that may impede community integration (DeVito, 2004). One woman directly highlighted the experience of ‘shock’ as a major impediment to post-release help-seeking. Speaking of her experience of Outcare’s services she said:

I know they’re there. I haven’t utilised them. I think I was in shock for a couple of weeks. I’m only just coming around. So I know they are there. But I just found out today that I can go there – and maybe [my caseworker] told me all these things when I went there initially – but you can go use their phones and the computers and all that. So yeah I really haven’t utilised them and I’m sure I could probably get a lot more out of them. But like I said I think I’ve just come out of shock. So I’m just getting there. – Cathy

Both Kelly’s portrayal of ‘elation’ for the reinstatement of the liberties and pleasures of civil status, and Cathy’s description of ‘shock’ upon withdrawal from the institutionalised lifestyle, emphasise the role of women’s mental processes and emotional states upon release from prison. It is clear from these narratives that released prisoners will need time to re-acclimatise to the nature and norms of the ‘free world’, and that this adjustment period may encroach on women’s desires for constructive change and associated help-seeking behaviour, thus emphasising the need for structured throughcare initiatives. However, although it is crucial to consider the ‘pains of imprisonment’ and the nature of institutionalisation, and to take into account their potential impact on help seeking-behaviour, another important finding

¹⁵ Oberg (1960) noted that culture shock occurs in four primary stages: The Honeymoon period, during which minor problems are overlooked and overruled by initial fascination and enchantment with the new culture; The Crisis period, known as the ‘actual culture shock period’, characterised by feelings of inadequacy etc; The Recovery period, during which people start to acquire the skills required to live within the new culture; and The Adjustment period, where the individual finally achieves at least some level of integration (cited in DeVito, 2004).

regarding the utilisation of support services was the simple but considerable lack of knowledge and direction. One woman concisely described the lack of preparation for release from prison and the hardships of 'not knowing':

Coming out of prison – it was a bit awkward. Because I didn't know where to go or who to talk to or what to do ... And it's my first time, so I've never been in this situation before in my life. So it was quite hard. Just not knowing. – Sarah

Brenda similarly highlighted the lack of structured throughcare within prison, along with the lack of knowledge regarding services upon release:

Oh in prison they don't tell ya this shit. Yeah it's crap ... they don't tell ya about much. ... You don't know about this! This place. This help [referring to Outcare]. You don't get told about it. So yeah all the information is lacking big time, inside. – Brenda

This is in line with Borzycki's (2005, p. 35) research which, in discussing stressful issues at the point of release, suggested that offenders "may simply be unaware of any immediate support options at their disposal, or may be untutored in the best means of accessing them". Though, Brenda went on to say:

Oh sorry, you get handed a book when you're released with all the crisis numbers and shit like that. But the first thing they're gonna do when they walk out is chuck that book. You know what I mean. They're not, they're really not – I mean in terms of rehabilitation – they really set up girls to fail. – Brenda

Susan reiterated:

They give you a little blue book when you leave prison but I don't know anyone who has actually read it. I haven't read it. They need to say: 'Listen this is for, you know, if you need the help it's here and these are the agencies that are available'. – Susan

This apparent disregard of what may have been valuable release information ('the little blue book') can possibly relate back to the impact of the 'honeymoon period' of release as highlighted above by Kelly. Perhaps, at the immediate point of release, when prisoners are bewildered or distracted by the reinstatement of the liberties of 'free world' living, women may not be disposed to, or receptive of, such valuable information, emphasising women's initial needs for re-acclimatisation as a prerequisite to self-determined post-release help-seeking. However, Brenda and Susan's critique also gives some insight into women's communication styles and the implications this has with regard to transitional and post-release service provision. According to relational theory, as outlined in Chapter three, women

typically find strength when they are able to build a strong sense of connection with others (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Miller, 1976). From this, it can be suggested that although the provision of the 'little blue book' may present an amicable attempt to furnish women with the knowledge to 'help themselves', such a disconnected and factual approach may not play to women's styles of communication and development. As Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003, p. 56) posited:

When criminal justice policy ignores the dominant theme of connections and relationships ... the ability to improve women's lives through correctional intervention is significantly diminished. ... If women in the system are to change, grow, and recover, it is critical that they be in programs and environments in which relationships and mutuality are core elements.

Contributing to this theme of 'connections and relationships' within correctional intervention, Brenda followed her critique of the current, and apparently 'disconnected' approach, with an emphasis on women's need for a supportive network throughout the release period:

They need a support network. They definitely need somewhere to go where they can sit you down and treat you like a human being ... they need to be told exactly what's out there. ... They have to be given a chance. – Brenda

In line with relational theory, Brenda's recommendation here upholds the significance of "mutual, empathic, and empowering relationships" and the importance of being "understood and valued" as "essential qualities ... that will foster growth in women" (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003, p. 55). Further, given that "disconnection and violation rather than growth-fostering relationships characterize the childhood experiences of most women in the correctional system", as stated by Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003, p. 55), providing "a setting that makes it possible for women to experience healthy relationships", for example, with staff, may be an essential element to creating change in their lives (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003, p. 56). Correspondingly, one woman described the significance of the casework relationship beyond its role as a resource of crucial practical assistance, with perceptions of emotional support; a valuable combination:

It's great when you can just have a coffee and just have a general chit-chat. And having someone to talk to who can do more than just listen – just to have that support there ... they've been absolutely fabulous. ... [My Outcare caseworker] has even called me just to see how I'm doing. ... Lovely support, yep ... it makes you feel like somebody cares. – Sarah

Another woman similarly highlighted the significance of the supportive relationship that she identified with her Outcare caseworker: “Without that, oh, I wouldn’t get nothing done. And I’d just sink into my depression state and just think: ‘No one gives a fuck so why should I?’” (Kelly).

Conclusion

In examining women’s experiences of release from prison and reception (or lack thereof) into the wider community, this chapter has documented the realities that women face in the multiple challenges and hardships of post-prison adjustment. Essentially, the narratives discussed throughout this chapter emphasise the need for structured throughcare and post-release support in assisting women to re-establish themselves within the wider community after prison. Yet, despite the Government’s documented awareness of, and commitment to, necessary throughcare initiatives, the women’s narratives within this research suggest that actual experiences of throughcare are inconsistent at best. With a common lack of pre-release planning and transitional support, some women looked to the promise of parole to bridge the gap between prison and resettlement within the ‘free world’. However, given parole’s unavoidable focus on surveillance over guidance and service provision, it is clear that alternative avenues of support are needed, particularly considering women’s typical lack of prosocial personal support networks.

Meanwhile, although some women may muster the autonomous determination and resourcefulness necessary in self-directed help-seeking, others simply do not. Additionally, given the nature of imprisonment and institutionalisation, which evidently compounds dependency and fosters post-release disorientation, often emulative of ‘culture shock’, it is crucial that women are not only made knowledgeable of the resources available to them, but are also supported in accessing these resources. This is especially important considering that many women upon release have desires for constructive change. “If we fail to take advantage of this mindset, we miss one of the few potential turning points to successfully intervene in offenders’ lives” (Petersilia, 2003, p. 14).

Chapter seven

‘Organising a life’: Attaining stability on the outside

I’m just trying to organise, a life ... that’s what I’m doing right now. – Brenda

“Exiting prison is a crucial time for women in the transition to the community, or ‘free world’” (O’Brien, 2001b, p.53). It is particularly a time during which the organisation of one’s life begins; that is, finding stable housing, reconnecting with children, family and friends, seeking employment and other endeavours, as well as remaining drug-free¹⁶. While some of these processes may begin in prison and others may be hampered by prison, all of these will become a major concern and a significant challenge upon release. With a focus on women’s need to attain stability after release from prison, this chapter examines the issue of securing housing; recognised, both in this and in previous research (for example, Baldry et al., 2002a; Borzycki, 2005; Carlen, 1990; Hinton, 2004; O’Brien, 2001a; 2001b; Stephen et al., 2005), as a most compelling post-release concern that women (and men) face as they attempt to re-establish themselves within the wider community after prison, or as one woman put it, ‘organise a life’ on the outside. Specifically, this chapter explores women’s experiences of the barriers to, and importance of, securing safe, stable and affordable housing, and its role as a precursor to achieving other post-release goals, in particular, mothers’ reunification with their children after imprisonment.

Securing a home: The ‘stepping stone’ to a new life on the outside

You need your stepping stone. If every woman got out to their own place, something stable, they’d have a chance. – Brenda

Having a base – a safe base, a home, whatever you want to call it – is crucial. Just having somewhere safe ... like any normal person would expect. That’s, that’s the most important thing. – Cathy

Housing is fundamental in modern human society. It not only provides physical shelter – a basic human need – but also holds emotional and symbolic meaning. ‘Home’ is an

¹⁶ The maintenance of sobriety and pursuit of employment and other vocational or educational endeavours are discussed in Chapter eight.

“anchor for living” (Alterman, 1993, cited in Moore, 2007, p. 145). It denotes safety, predictability and comfort, it represents a source of identity and belonging, and it is a locus for personal and social development (Dumbleton, 2005; Moore, 2007). In fact, a recent strand of research in Australia and elsewhere has linked housing circumstances, such as stability and quality, with ‘non-shelter outcomes’, including emotional wellbeing, family functioning, educational attainment, participation in paid employment, physical and mental health, and community life (Hulse & Stone, 2006; Stone & Hulse, 2007). As such, “how and where people are housed is integral to many aspects of individual wellbeing and economic and social life” (Stone & Hulse, 2007, p. 1).

For prisoners in particular, the search for safe, stable and affordable housing is a process that may signify the success or failure of post-prison adjustment. As Petersilia (2003, p. 121) stated, “Housing is the linchpin that holds the reintegration process together” (Bradlet et al., 2001, p. 7). Research with women specifically (for example Carlen, 1990; Eaton, 1993; O’Brien, 2001a; 2001b) upholds this ideal, highlighting women’s housing as a major policy implication. As O’Brien (2001b, p. 52) suggested:

Women in transition from prison require an affordable place to start from where they can exercise autonomy and identify resources for meeting basic needs. Having a home – a place to be – is a taken-for granted part of structuring our daily lives. For women returning to the free world, identifying a place to live provides the starting point from which they can build the relational supports they need to facilitate transition.

In line with such findings, discussions with the current sample of released women revealed the process of securing immediate and stable housing as the *number-one* concern following release from prison. Perhaps this is not a surprising finding since, at the time of the interviews, nine of the eleven women who participated in this research were then currently, or had recently, been housed in Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program crisis-care accommodation, with the remaining two depicting significant housing instability throughout their release period. Nevertheless, among all of these women, housing was expressed as the most immediate and on-going challenge, with problems commencing before release and extending well beyond release, and was identified as a current problem among all of the women despite release periods ranging from three days to twelve months. Furthermore, while housing was cited as the number-one post-release need, for those women who were mothers, their reunification with their children was their most compelling post-release goal. However, it was noted that such reunification could not take place without firstly securing stable housing. As such, the two issues were significantly interrelated.

The significance of 'home' for women exiting prison

As highlighted in Chapter five, women's pre-incarceration lifestyles were typically plagued by significant instability. This was often particularly with regard to housing (commonly coupled with substance use issues). Although precise questions regarding histories of homelessness were not directly asked within the interviews, nine of the eleven participants nevertheless identified and depicted at least some level of (iterative) homelessness¹⁷ at some period in their lives, especially immediately preceding their imprisonment. Women described experiences of tenuous housing and cycling through various unacceptable forms of accommodation, for example: staying at refuges to escape domestic abuse; living on a friend's lounge room floor for months on end; overstaying their welcome on a friend's couch; living in a "condemned" and "unliveable" house; sharing (unsuccessfully) with male strangers who had advertised in newspapers; living in overcrowded situations with family; and, for some, periods of street homelessness throughout, including two women who identified as 'street homeless' in their youth. For many, these situations were further complicated by the fact that they were mothers with dependent children. One woman, a sole-custodial mother of three, characteristically summed up her living arrangements preceding imprisonment as "here, there and everywhere".

For prisoners who have experienced such instability prior to their imprisonment, with insecure and unsuitable housing, prison may, in a rather perverse way, represent a form of secure housing, as documented in the preceding analysis chapters. Given this poignant fact, Baldry et al. (2002b, p.1) ask:

If prison provides this, what of the housing needs and experiences of such prisoners upon release? ... Prisoners are housed one day and released the next. They have to try to find accommodation, employment and rebuild a social life. ... But the experience of prison (an institutionalising one) and earlier life experiences, often of poverty and disadvantage, drug or alcohol abuse, physical or sexual abuse and social alienation do not prepare many ex-prisoners to negotiate these social necessities successfully.

¹⁷ In her research for the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), Robinson (2003) coined the term 'iterative homelessness' to highlight the fact that most homeless people do not sleep rough on the streets, though they may do so at times. Instead, the term encourages "a conceptualisation of homelessness as repeated uprooting, as a process of repeated attempts to establish a home physically and emotionally" (p. 3). It best describes the experience of people who experience tenuous, unstable, and often unsafe, housing characterised by the repeated and ongoing loss of, or movement through many different forms of accommodation, such as hostels, licensed and unlicensed boarding houses, caravan parks, staying with friends, etc, often with continuous risk of 'street-homelessness'. Meanwhile, AHURI research conducted by Baldry and others (2004) found, as this research has, that prisoners had typically experienced transitory lifestyles, with patterns of frequent movement corresponding to the notion of 'iterative homelessness' as employed by Robinson (2003).

One woman's narrative prolifically encompasses these issues in her response to a question of her toughest challenge upon release:

My biggest issue is accommodation, big time. ... Once I get that sorted I think that'll take a fucken immense load off my shoulders ay. ... I mean jail's given me a sort of security, you know, like a stable place. I've never had anything that's my own. Except jail. But once I've got my own place ... I'll hang on to that with all my might you know ... coz it's my retreat. And that's all I need to get my life going. – Brenda

For these women, gaining secure accommodation following release was viewed as an essential part of being able to change their lives and integrate into the community, with many women recognising a connection between their housing instability on the outside and their subsequent imprisonment, as well as the future potential for recidivism. As Susan stated, "The biggest thing ... is that you need somewhere to live. If you've got nowhere to live you're back in jail". Brenda concurred:

Accommodation I think is the main downfall for a lot of people. It's been my main downfall. And when I don't have that, I'm on the street, and then I'm in trouble, then I'm inside. – Brenda

Such links between offending behaviour and housing instability or homelessness have long been drawn. The body of evidence available not only suggests that homelessness can result in people being more likely to be involved in some way with the criminal justice system, with levels of arrest and incarceration being shown to be much higher in homeless populations. It also consistently indicates a reciprocal component to the relationship, whereby incarceration can be seen to contribute to an increased risk of homelessness (Kirkwood & Richley, 2008; Metraux & Culhane, 2004; Willis, 2004). Australian research examining this relationship between housing and offending concluded that, for ex-prisoners, stable, socially supported housing was clearly associated with staying out of prison and increased social integration, whereas transience¹⁸ was associated with slipping back into problematic drug use and being re-arrested and re-incarcerated (Baldry et al., 2003; 2004). Yet, as highlighted in the review of the literature in Chapter two, despite the obvious importance of suitable housing as a vital factor in ex-prisoners' social integration, many prisoners find that the process of securing post-release accommodation is plagued with multiple barriers and challenges, and many may leave prison unprepared for a successful return to the community (Hinton, 2004; MCREU, 2003; Ogilvie, 2001; Willis, 2004).

¹⁸ Defined as "moving house two or more times within a three-month period" (Baldry et al., 2004, p. 1).

From prison to homelessness? Released women's immediate housing options

Given that many prisoners enter prison from a position of significant social disadvantage, a vulnerability to a return to such a position upon release is a real reality. Released prisoners are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless, with research indicating firstly, that many ex-prisoners face the same social and economic conditions that lead to homelessness among the general population, and secondly, that ex-prisoners returning to the community confront additional barriers to housing associated with their involvement with the criminal justice system (Rodriguez & Brown, 2003; Willis, 2004). With limited social supports, little or no savings and often no immediate prospects for a legitimate income, along with poor housing histories, no references, and the potential for stigmatisation and discrimination, many prisoners leaving custody may find themselves in housing crisis (MCREU, 2003; Willis, 2004). In fact, despite a united acknowledgement among prisoners and ex-prisoners that indicates the necessity of appropriate accommodation for an opportunity at successful reintegration, studies have found that “a large proportion of individuals leave prison without accommodation arranged, or without any clear idea where or how they are going to find accommodation” (Willis, 2004, p. 9). Abysmally, this was the case for two women within the current sample, who depicted a direct transition from prison to homelessness:

When I got out I was hoping to be staying with a mate who was getting out two days after me. So I was going out to the streets ... My nanna put me up for a night. She didn't really have a choice. Then I ended up getting into the YMCA. Then I think I did the streets for a night or so. Then Outcare got me into the Carlton. But yeah I was out on the streets. – Brenda

I had nowhere to go ... I lived in this little dump of a place for a couple of months. Um I lived on the street for a while. And just at friends' houses and stuff, until I found someone who had a room I could stay in. – Susan

Brenda and Susan's narratives here depict an obvious lack of pre-release planning and draws into question the quality of throughcare initiatives implemented in Western Australian women's prisons. Further, having been the only two women within the sample who, at the time of the interviews, had never been housed in Outcare's crisis-care accommodation¹⁹, their situations have the potential to demonstrate the plight of women who have limited access to personal support networks and essential social and/or welfare services. Situations

¹⁹ Brenda tried but failed to secure crisis-care housing with Outcare due to lack of availability. Meanwhile, Susan was unaware of Outcare's services. Such issues regarding the availability and knowledge of housing support are drawn out later in the chapter.

like these stress the importance of housing support and the availability of support services generally.

While some women knowingly faced unclear housing circumstances upon release, another woman related the hardships she endured as a result of mistakenly believing she was “safe” in terms of post-release housing. The only woman within the sample to describe a stable housing situation prior to her imprisonment, Cathy sought to maintain her tenancy during her imprisonment by convincing her adult daughter to look after her Homeswest house while she was in prison. However, upon her release, Cathy returned only to be “kicked out” of the house that had been hers for six years prior to her imprisonment:

My daughter came to look after the house while I was in and then we were going to move in together. That lasted about three months. It was just always fighting. ... She demanded that I leave ... but I didn't want to stay in that environment. It was getting aggressive. – Cathy

“Left out in the cold” and in the absence of any other options, Cathy turned to a friend whom she barely knew before finally securing Outcare accommodation on the referral of her parole officer:

I had a girlfriend help me out. I don't know her that well but we were friends for a couple of years ... she went to the same chemist as me and we were just friendly friends. But she said if I ever needed a hand or something because things were getting pretty rough [at home]. So yeah I rang her and she came and picked me up ... and she took me to her house for a few days. But she's got a lot of problems herself, a lot of mental issues and health issues. Yeah, it was somewhere you couldn't stay long. – Cathy

As with most women who cited staying with friends as a last resort option for post-release accommodation, this was, in any case, experienced as, or anticipated to be, only a very temporary arrangement (usually a matter of days, not weeks). The short nature, or in most cases a refusal, of such stays were attributed to, for example, negative or anti-social environments, overcrowding or other unsuitability, and not wanting to be a burden.

Meanwhile, like Cathy, Sarah similarly described returning from prison to an unhealthy and dysfunctional family environment for lack of any other alternative. Having not made contact with Outcare until five months after her release, staying with her mother was her only accommodation option upon her return, despite her describing their relationship as “oil and water”. Her short stay with her mother led to increasing conflict, which she expressed as potentially detrimental to her hopes of successful reintegration:

It just got very, very hard ... there was physical abuse, emotional abuse, and I just couldn't do it. I thought, ‘If I don't get out of here I'm just gonna go off

my head and I'm either going to get locked up or do something really silly'. So I went into Outcare and then yeah, this happened [referring to Outcare accommodation]. So yeah, that was lucky. – Sarah

The reliance on family for accommodation support after release from prison is well documented within the literature (highlighted in Chapter two). For many, family may represent the only source of accommodation upon release (Hinton, 2004; Roman & Travis, 2004). In fact, the value of such arrangements has been indicated by the finding that released prisoners who are able to live with parents or family (where they are not part of the criminological problem), are significantly less likely to return to prison than those living with friends, acquaintances or alone (Baldry et al., 2003, p. 13). However, as indicated by Sarah and Cathy above, for many, staying with family is either undesirable, impractical or not a viable option. For the women in the current sample, this was usually a result of strained, dysfunctional, or non-existent family relationships. Essentially, although research has shown the value of family support, the reality is that such support is not always available, with evidence that, among the many who do return to family, these arrangements are often short-lived solutions, where a break down in familial relationships and subsequent homelessness are common experiences (Hinton, 2004; Roman & Travis, 2004; Travis et al., 2001).

Even among women who described an availability of pro-social familial supports, relying on these was often met with disinclination. Cassandra was one of the few participants that described having, in her terms, a “really supportive family”, yet she had no intentions of staying with them after her release. Like most of the women, she expressed a need to secure some form of independence in terms of accommodation, stating: “Once I left ... I knew I didn't want to go live with my family. I just wanted to get out on my own”. Other women similarly expressed a desire to ‘get out on their own’, describing the acquisition of an independent home as an important foundation for constructive change and personal development, and a measure of personal success or triumph on the outside:

I've got my sister – she's got a two-bedroom unit and she's quite willing to put me up and all that. And she said she would help me find a place as well, so that was fine. But I sort of don't want to – coz like in the past I've just relied on other people to, you know, go stay, and you know, just taking a free ride. But this time I just want to go out there and do it. – Louise

I could've gone out to my mum's but then I would've just ended up going backwards probably. Because I've been at my mum's before and like not having ... my own roof – it's just; where do you go from there? – Jodie

These dialogues characterise the symbolic significance of acquiring a home, beyond the concrete need for shelter, indicating the importance not just of accessing housing, but also more specifically, of accessing housing that is “deemed appropriate and beneficial to reintegration by prisoners themselves” (Willis, 2004, p. 39). As Kozol (1988, cited in Dumbleton, 2005, p. 60) concluded, “shelter, if it is warm and safe, may keep a [person] from dying. Only a home allows a [person] to flourish and to breathe”. So, with either an inability or unwillingness to rely on personal supports as an option for post-release accommodation, in part, due to a need to discover independence in housing upon release, or otherwise, due to a simple lack of pro-social or supportive relationships, many women turned to Outcare in search of housing assistance. For these women, the availability of the SJOG Women’s Program crisis-care accommodation was obviously a welcomed relief.

Seeking crisis-care accommodation: Outcare and the SJOG Women’s Program

At the time of data collection, Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program had access to seven single and/or shared crisis-care accommodation properties across the Perth metropolitan area with each of the fully furnished properties²⁰ being offered on a priority basis and for a maximum of 12 weeks (Outcare, 2007). Of the nine women within the current sample who had been housed in the SJOG Women’s Program crisis-care accommodation, two secured their lease only after experiencing instability on their own after release. Meanwhile, the other seven were able to secure their Outcare lease while they were in prison, moving in immediately upon release. For these seven women, the strains involved with finding and securing housing while in prison were significantly reduced. In most cases, their Outcare case manager was able to assist by organising the lease arrangements, including Centrelink payments and savings accounts, as well as organising their pick-up and drop-off on the day of their release.

A life-line for women facing housing crisis

In the absence of other means to access longer-term housing, Outcare’s crisis-care accommodation typically provided a ‘life-line’ for women who were, or would have been, facing significant housing crisis after release from prison. Not only did Outcare’s services

²⁰ The properties are fully furnished and equipped with all white goods and appliances including fridges, washing machines, microwaves, televisions, etc. To assist in resettlement tenants are also provided with some household items including all linen, food packages and cleaning goods (Outcare, 2007). In terms of cost, participants reported rental payments of \$210 a fortnight, with payments organised through Centrelink’s NewStart Allowance.

provide women with a means of attaining some stability in their lives – a crucial ingredient to successful reintegration given the finding that transience is a predictor of return to prison (Baldry et al., 2003; 2004). It also provided safety by allowing women a place to stay that was independent of potentially negative environments and conflicted relationships, as well as preventing or alleviating potential homelessness. As such, women generally spoke of Outcare with genuine praise and when confronted with a question of “What if” (for example, “Where do you think you would be if Outcare wasn’t available?”), women responded with deplorable parallel-realities:

If it wasn’t for Outcare I would have had to go to a refuge. I would’ve gone – I wouldn’t have had a choice. Either be on the streets or be in a refuge. Yeah, after the fall-out with my mum ... I stayed on my friends couch for like a week. But because she’s got two kids and ... I felt like I was under her feet. ... So yeah, I was pretty much on the street. Yeah, if I didn’t have Outcare I would be on the street. – Sarah

I thank God I was able to get into here ... I know when my friend got out of jail she went and stayed with her mum for a while and then she found it really hard to get accommodation and now she’s paying like \$190 for a one bedroom unit. I wouldn’t have been able to have done that. – Cassandra

I cried to Outcare ... I was pretty hysterical. ... I honestly don’t know what I would have done [if Outcare wasn’t available] because I have no family. ... I mean, before I left jail I was crying. I was like: ‘Well I’ve got nowhere to go. Where am I gonna go? What’s the point of me getting out?’ – Kelly

I think I’d be on the street, definitely yeah. I don’t know where I would be today, but a month ago, if I had to go through this on my own, then yeah I’d have probably been on the street. – Cathy

The possibility of homelessness, iterative or otherwise, appeared to be a real likelihood for these women had they experienced failure in accessing support services like those provided by Outcare. Meanwhile, women who had been released on parole commonly deduced that they would likely “still be inside” had they not secured their Outcare lease, since being granted parole is dependent on acquiring an address approved by the parole board. With most women indicating that they would have had “nowhere to go”, one woman even suggested that, if she had not been able to secure crisis accommodation for her parole, she would have “preferred to have stayed in”, rather than resorting to other accommodation options, such as staying with family, that were viewed as potentially emotionally unhealthy and not conducive to post-release goals for constructive change.

As well as providing women with an opportunity for parole, and a safe, stable, and affordable place on the outside, women also expressed gratitude for the auxiliary support that came with being housed in Outcare's crisis-care accommodation. This included a range of tangible supports such as, for example, food vouchers, bus passes, and phone, computer and internet use (at Outcare's head office), as well as counselling and advocacy in various areas, including securing other housing, employment, and accessing government agencies. Most importantly though, was perceptions of emotional support from case workers who would usually visit their crisis-care housing tenants on a weekly basis. While one woman acknowledged that this aspect of Outcare's housing assistance may have actually deterred some women, with perceptions of intrusion of privacy and freedom, most women welcomed the opportunity as a whole:

A few girls in there think: 'Oh it's just like prison if you go to Outcare because they come and check on you'. But I think that's good. I really think that that's a good thing, like who cares if they come into your house and check on ya, it doesn't matter, I've got nothing to hide. And [the Outcare caseworker] has been really helpful. I think she's so supportive too, you know she tells ya how it is. So that didn't deter me ... it's good if they have someone coming out here coz it's just nice having that support. ... And why would you pass up an opportunity like this, you know, you've got a roof over your head and it's the cheapest rent I've seen so far. – Louise

Outcare are there for me emotionally and the support and the counselling and food assistance and the phone calls and the cookies. And you know, they're just friendly and they will go out of their way as long as they know you are actually legit. – Brenda

Getting in: Awareness, availability and eligibility

As the discussions above have shown, Outcare's SJOG Women's Program provided necessary aid to disadvantaged women. However, these women also highlighted that attaining such aid was not without difficulties. Firstly, although most women had found out about, and made contact with, Outcare while in prison, others were not initially aware of the services. For these women, poor access to, or inadequate information about, housing options or forms of support and assistance, as highlighted in Chapter six, presented an initial barrier, with some women indicating that they only came into awareness of the service by luck:

I only found out about Outcare really, of where they are and what they do, through a friend when I got out. If I didn't meet him and establish that friendship I wouldn't have found out and I wouldn't be here. I'd be on the streets again. – Sarah

Another woman, who had experienced some thirteen years cycling in and out of prison, similarly described her luck in finding out about Outcare's services in her latest experience of release:

I just never knew about these places till now. And it was just through word of mouth out on the street. ... So it's pretty cool – the support I've got this time is the best ever, I've ever had. If these weren't around I'd be fucked. – Brenda

Meanwhile, Susan, the only participant who was not a client of Outcare or the SJOG Women's program, revealed that she was unaware of Outcare's women's housing program even at the time of the interview, twelve months after her release – knowledge which may have been particularly valuable given her significant instability and bouts of homelessness following prison:

I knew about Outcare and I knew they had accommodation but I didn't realise that I was eligible. Like I thought that you had to organise it when you're in prison and I actually thought it was just for men. Yeah I didn't know much about it. – Susan

Even for women who had acquired knowledge of support services, such as those provided by Outcare, 'getting in' still had a lot to do with luck in availability. With regards to Outcare's housing, with only seven units of accommodation available, many women reported that they had only secured their crisis-care housing lease after others had been denied parole. Other women spoke of their frustrations in securing housing support and assistance more generally:

I contacted everyone to do with accommodation in jail because I wanted to try to set myself up for when I got out. I was really worrying about it and I talked to Ruah²¹ and they said: 'Don't stress yourself out. You don't need to worry about this. We'll worry about it.' And then I was getting out and I had nowhere to go! And I was like, 'These people told me they were going to help me and they haven't!' And it really added to the stress. I mean they tried but there's just not much out there ay. And it's hard when people are just like, 'Oh did you try this and oh did you try that'. Of course you're going to try it all. But it's just not all gonna – it doesn't all eventuate into something. – Kelly

I mean everyone wanted to help me do things but there wasn't a lot that anyone could do. – Cathy

²¹ Ruah Community Services is a not-for-profit community service organisation, which, like Outcare, provides accommodation services to women released from prison. Ruah's Transitional Accommodation & Support Service (TASS) is funded by The Department of Corrective Services to provide intensive supported accommodation to women for a six month period following release from prison. But, with only nine houses/units available at any given time, resources are similarly limited. For more info visit: http://www.ruah.com.au/page/womens_support

I rang every refuge, every hostel, everywhere I could think of and not one of them had a vacancy or I didn't fit their criteria or something. So yeah, I didn't have much luck. – Susan

As Susan's experience highlights, the issue of meeting housing relief criteria presents yet another barrier beyond availability. McGrath (2000) highlights that many housing assistance service providers (which are typically struggling to meet the needs of clients who fall within their criteria let alone those who do not) are gender-specific, age-specific, situation-specific (e.g. domestic violence shelters), or do not cater to women with children. This was an issue for Sarah who had initially been living with her two children while she had been staying at her mother's house following her release from prison. In the end she found that she had to choose between having her children and living in an unhealthy and conflicted environment with her mother, or leaving her children and her mother behind:

I was at my mum's with my kids and I spoke to Outcare but because I had the kids at the time I couldn't get a place. So I had no choice because I wanted to stay with my kids, so I had to stay with my mum. I had nowhere else to go. I couldn't put my kids through refuges or anything like that. I've done it before and I swore to myself that I'd never do it again. And then I had the big fall-out with my mum ... And of course I had nowhere to go. So I went back to Outcare, and said 'Look is that offer still available, please'. And so that's when I made the decision to get out. – Sarah

Susan also mused:

There seems to be a few places around that deal with either men or women. They don't deal with men *and* women ... like I've been with my man for years. ... And he can get help on his own and I seem to be able to get a little bit of aide on my own. But together – like we couldn't get into any accommodation together. We couldn't get into any hostels or refuges or anywhere coz they're either men's or women's. So there needs to be – it would be good if there was something there for couples who go through hard times as well you know. – Susan

A short-term solution

Although Outcare's housing assistance was greatly appreciated overall, undeniably providing women with much needed salvation, it was nevertheless recognised as only a temporary remedy to an enduring problem, since Outcare's lease periods are (justifiably) limited to only three months. As women highlighted:

I mean places like Outcare are a great help but it's only a short-term solution. If after three months you've still got nowhere to go then, you know – I'm lucky, I've got my mum – it's only a one bedroom unit but ... this will do

until I find a house. But a lot of the other women, they don't have somewhere else to go so I can imagine that would be pretty hard. It usually means that they're back on the street. They're back into what they have been, and they'll probably end up back in jail. – Hannah

I think, for me, it's all about having somewhere – it's all right having something temporary. But what happens after that? Just throw them out there and let them go. I mean most of them are going to end up back in jail or worse. – Cathy

I was having anxiety attacks because I was worrying about housing, like I've gotta get out of here and I've gotta find a place. Your mind just goes crazy. – Louise

The need to find more permanent housing was a pressing priority for all of the women, who typically drew clear associations between failure in securing longer-term housing and returning to prison. In line with previous research though, women described the process of securing housing following their Outcare lease as extremely frustrating and beset with complications. In fact, of the nine women within the current sample who had been housed in Outcare's crisis-care accommodation, one woman was staying on her mother's fold-out couch following the conclusion of her Outcare lease, while the other eight were nearing the end of their lease and still had not been able to secure post-Outcare housing, despite on-going attempts to do so. Cassandra was the only participant that had secured other accommodation, and this was house-sitting for a friend – a move that hardly indicates any substantial level of stability or security.

Jessica, who had been looking for a place with a friend, found that it was “very hard and very expensive” and postulated that she may not be able to find anything before the termination of her lease:

Outcare does help but there's not much they can do. If I don't find a place I can't stay here coz I've had an extension on here already ... They give you one of these places to stay for three months or something, but you know three months is not long enough if you can't find another place by then. Coz then they'll kick ya out in three months time and you still don't have anywhere to go. You're stuck in the same situation. I mean, I haven't had any luck yet so I'll probably have to stay at one of George's places. – Jessica

Referring to Dr George O'Neil, director of the Perth Naltrexone Clinic, which also provides short-term housing to its clients, Jessica's comments provide insight into the bleak prospects of prisoners who, having cycled in and out of prison, have never successfully established a 'home' and concede to 'jumping from service to service' on the outside.

Arguably, this presents a behaviour pattern that is not particularly beneficial to either client or provider, with the extended continuance of a 'dependent role' beyond the prison walls, where the development of self-sufficiency should be the goal.

Nevertheless, although the likelihood of movement between various housing assistance service providers was a spoken reality for one woman, other women expressed concern at not being able to secure any form of accommodation at all, predicting that they would face homelessness again at the end of their Outcare lease. With such limited options, one woman even spoke of 'pulling parole':

It has crossed my mind to pull my parole – If nothing else comes up and I needed somewhere to live. I would never dream of doing that if I was rational – if I was logically, rationally thinking. And I would never do it, but it's the fact that that has crossed my mind. I have seen people do it and thought: 'What? I can't understand that'. But I can now. – Cathy

This 'understanding' was similarly expressed by other women:

It's hard for a chick because there's nothing worse than being a female and walking around the streets at three in the morning because you've got nowhere to go. You know, stuff like that, it's not nice. And then you sit there and you think: 'Fuck I wish I was just back in jail'. It's so much easier in jail than out here. I've thought that a few times, I just wanted to go back to jail. – Susan

If you don't have a home, well then, you know, a lot of people think they might as well be in jail. A lot of people there are there because they've got a roof and they've got meals! That's just crazy! It's really crazy. And it's sad. – Kelly

It is in narratives like these that the issue of institutionalisation resurfaces as a compelling issue. As discussed in Chapter five, for women who experience instability and chaos on the outside, prison may come to represent a 'pseudo home' – a place where, unlike the outside, they may enjoy the unconditional provision of shelter, food, and security. For these women, problems may arise when the 'burden of freedom' so significantly outweighs the 'costs of confinement', quantifying, as Goffman (1961, p. 62) suggested, the "desirability of life on the inside". As Blake, former prisoner and author of *The Joint* (1971, cited in Duncan, 1996, p. 24) wrote of his experience on the outside:

You know what's in my mind? The joint. ... I think always of the peace that I had there – this working to survive and surviving to work seems increasingly like an arrangement I would not have chosen, were it up to me. Those gates, man, they're inviting.

Generally, it is clear that the capacity to establish long-term housing is an essential first step in community integration for women (and men) returning from prison. While short-term crisis-care housing, like that offered by Outcare, may provide women with an immediate form of security on the outside, it is only a ‘stepping stone’, and it is therefore crucial that women have somewhere to move forward to. Without this, the prison gates may indeed become ‘inviting’ in the eyes of women with limited options. Whether or not recidivism and re-incarceration follows, this is not a frame of mind that is conducive to constructive change and personal development.

Living in ‘limbo’: Problems securing long-term housing

If I had a Homeswest house and I wasn't in this little Outcare house, I could leave jail behind me and come straight and go forward. But at the moment I'm just in limbo. That's how it feels. – Jodie

Overall, the discussions throughout this chapter have demonstrated that in order for women to have an opportunity to ‘make it on the outside and stay out’, success in establishing long-term housing is essential. For every woman, the establishment of such housing stability was perceived as a most salient post-release goal – the achievement of which would represent a starting point for a new chapter in their lives; evidence of forward movement along a constructive path away from prison. Particularly, for those who were mothers, such housing was also viewed as a foundation for their reunification with their children. Yet despite its significance, none of the women within the current sample had (at the time of the interviews) accrued any success in establishing longer-term housing stability, either in the private or public housing markets – remaining instead in a state of ‘limbo’; without security and without their children.

Accessing private and public housing

In December 2008, Troy Buswell, Minister for Housing, convened a Social Housing Taskforce to provide a high-level review into the current housing system in Western Australia and to provide innovative strategies to improve the State's affordable housing system (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a; 2009b). Central to the Taskforce's understandings was the concept of a ‘housing continuum’, as illustrated in Figure 2 (sourced from Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 6). Beginning with crisis accommodation for those considered homeless (such as that provided by Outcare), the housing continuum model portrays a system

traversing the complete range of interrelating housing tenures and forms of housing assistance. Though, rather than portraying linear movement from crisis accommodation through to social or public housing and private rental to home ownership, the model highlights how households may move between various housing tenures depending on their life circumstances and housing need at a particular point in time (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 5).

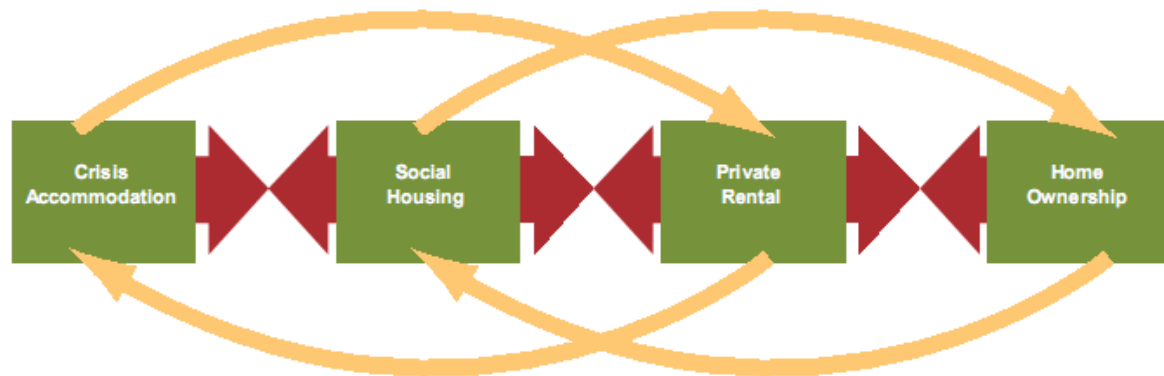


Figure 2. The housing continuum.

While movement through to affordable home ownership is obviously the favoured outcome, the Social Housing Taskforce declared that, “Currently, Western Australia does not have an affordable housing continuum” (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 41). With the median price for a house in Perth 90% higher than it was in 2003 (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 8), there has been a lack of affordable housing options to facilitate seamless housing transitions at each stage of the housing continuum. As such, Social Housing Taskforce reports (2009a; 2009b) have indicated a current crisis in affordable housing and homelessness, stating that “the State’s affordable housing system is under strain. The supply of social and affordable housing in the public, community and private sectors has simply not kept pace with demand” (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009b, p. 1). So, in an environment where housing is becoming harder and harder to access for low to moderate income earners generally, those returning from prison face particular difficulties.

Issues relating to the private housing market

As highlighted in the Social Housing Taskforce’s Final Report, private rental prices have more than doubled in Perth over the last five years (2009a, p. 8), becoming unaffordable for many households in Western Australia. For returning prisoners, who typically have extremely limited finances, along with a potential lack of personal references, their ability to

compete for and secure housing in the private housing market is often significantly disadvantaged (Hinton, 2004; Travis et al., 2001). When asked about the possibility of accessing the private housing market, one woman responded:

Well that's not realistic is it? Because of how much it costs. Yeah I mean it's just not realistic. Even if I had a job there is no way I could afford \$300 a week for rent. So it's not realistic. – Cathy

Beyond financial incapacities, women foresaw additional barriers in accessing the private rental market relating to their incarceration specifically, as well as to behaviours that had led to their incarceration. This included difficulties in the process of searching for housing, hardships involved with accumulated debts, as well as issues of discrimination:

I got on the net and looked for houses and that ... but it's hard to get around. Because I went to jail for driving with no licence. So I can't drive now. So it's hard to get around to view all these houses when I don't even have a licence. So yeah, I feel like everything is just too hard at the moment. – Kelly

It's a hard thing to do when you're on a pension and you've just come out of jail. ... Especially when you haven't given a shit [pre-incarceration] and you've just raked up heaps of bills and you know you've got to come out and face all that. Like I've got an electricity bill I've got to try pay off ... I'll have to get that out of the way before I can even get a house. Otherwise it'll be horrible to get a house with no electricity. And that's only one bill, let alone other girls that have probably raked up heaps of debt. – Jodie

Coming from prison and that ... I suppose, you know the real estate, when they say: 'What was your last recent address?' and it's like: 'Oh!' You don't want to tell them you've been in jail you know. And I'm thinking coz I was with Homeswest for nine years in Kalgoorlie – I mean I could always ring them and ask them [for a reference] but that was a while ago. I moved out of there in 2003 and came down to Rockingham and I had a house [private rental] in Rockingham but that's when the problems sort of started ... and then I lost the house though not paying the rent. So I stuffed that up and I'm not sure if I'm on ... that bad tenant list. So that's another thing. – Louise

Overall, it seems that for women who have a limited income, no references and a criminal record, private rental may be perceived and/or experienced as highly inaccessible (Hinton, 2004; McGrath, 2000; Travis et al., 2001; Willis, 2004). As a result, many women had turned to the public housing sector for assistance.

Issues relating to Homeswest housing

In the 'Message from the Minister', preamble to the Social Housing Taskforce's report entitled *Housing 2020: Future directions for affordable housing*, Buswell stated:

The public housing system that has historically served Australia so well is increasingly unfit for the challenges ahead. It is not financially viable, it hasn't kept pace with demand and it hasn't been able to deal with the growing issues of declining affordability and housing stress. (2009b)

Data released by the Western Australian Department of Housing and Works (DHW) reveal that the waiting list for public housing has increased dramatically over the last few years, shown below in Figure 3. As outlined in the Social Housing Taskforce Final Report, the total number of applications on the public housing waiting list in December 2004 was 12,779. By the end of May 2009 this number had reached 21,384 (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 13). More recent statistics released in the Housing Authority 2009-10 Annual Report indicate an even more dramatic increase in waiting list numbers over the past year to 24,136 in 2010 (DHW, 2010, p. 141). Meanwhile, the priority waiting list, reserved for applicants who have an urgent housing need, has seen similarly dramatic increases, rising from just 382 applications at the end of June 2006 to 3,161 by the end of May 2009 (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 15).

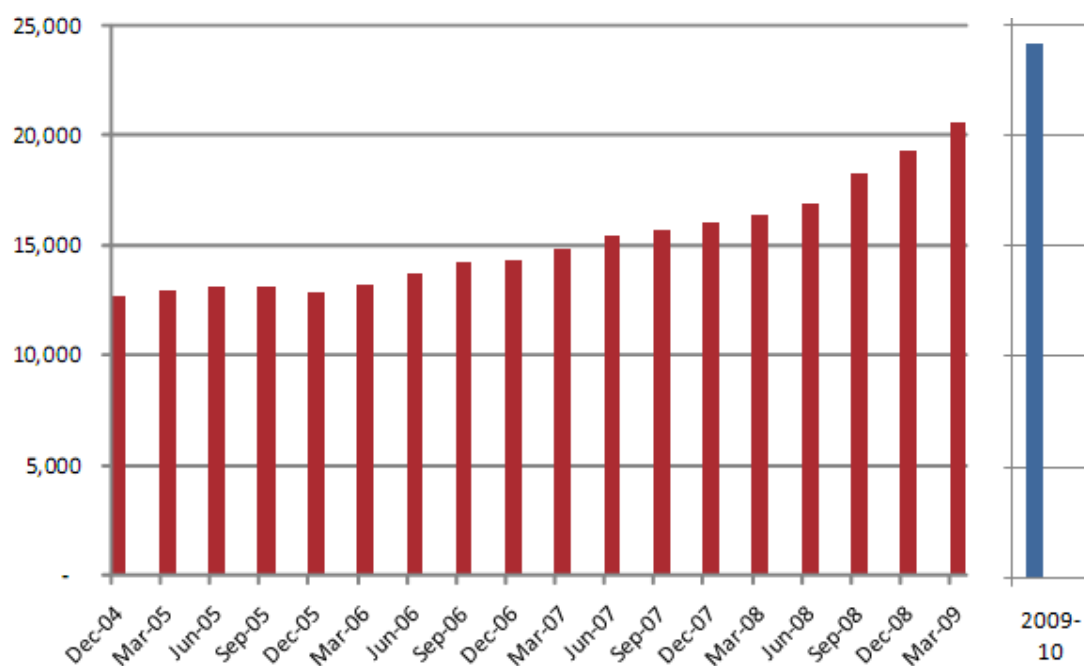


Figure 3. The Western Australian public housing waiting list (DHW)²².

²² The red graph indicates the growth of applications on the public housing waiting list between 2004 and 2009, sourced from the DHW Social Housing Taskforce Final Report: "More than a roof and four walls" (2009, p. 14). The blue 'add-on' graph indicates the latest figure (24,136) from the DHW Housing Authority 2009-10 Annual Report.

Prisoner reentry and reintegration

Despite this increasing demand, total social housing stock levels have remained relatively stagnant over the last decade (1998-2008), hovering between 37,000 and 39,000 housing units (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 10). With a falling market presence and congestion with long-stay tenants, the floundering supply-demand capability of public housing in Western Australia has been reflected in the lengthening of waiting times. According to Department statistics, by May 2009, the median waiting time for public housing had risen to 61 weeks for all applicants and was 29 weeks for priority applicants (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, p. 15). Disturbingly though, Ian Carter, Social Housing Taskforce Chair and CEO of Anglicare WA, stated in an independent paper that, despite Department claims, “the experience of Anglicare WA and other community agencies would suggest a figure of 12-18 months wait for priority tenants and 4-5 years for general wait-list tenants!” (Carter, 2008, p. 2).

The reality of such long waiting times for public housing was similarly reflected by women in this research:

Before I left, they rang up to see what the waiting time was and it’s still three to six years or some shit. I was like my kids will be all grown up by then! – Jodie

Yet, even with indications of an awareness of lengthy waiting times in accessing public housing tenancies, many women nevertheless had their hopes invested in securing Homeswest housing following their Outcare crisis accommodation tenancy, with little other options. As Jodie explained:

I’ve been on Homeswest [waiting list] for fourteen years. And they keep on just taking me off for stupid reasons. But I mean I’ve been single for fourteen years and I’ve got three kids. They’re the facts. Like I should be entitled to a Homeswest house. I’m going in there tomorrow with [my Outcare caseworker], into Homeswest ... They’re just going to have to give me something. Otherwise I don’t know. If they don’t, I’ll be on the pavements somewhere. – Jodie

Meanwhile, Cathy related hardships in trying to establish a new Homeswest tenancy after losing her pre-incarceration Homeswest home to her daughter:

I actually begged my daughter to come live in my house while I was in prison so that I wouldn’t lose it. ... And now she refuses to give it back. And I just don’t understand how Homeswest can let that happen when there is suppose to be some sort of system where they can let family take over. – Cathy

Speaking of her options for post Outcare housing, Cathy continued:

I don't want to put her on the street. But I think maybe Homeswest can put me somewhere else. ... I've got a meeting with Homeswest ... so we'll see what happens there. Other than that I don't know. ... If I can't get into a Homeswest – I really don't know. I haven't thought that far ... I mean there are options. There are options like going back to live with my ex and two boys. Platonic. But I would not – I'm so scared of that man, I just couldn't do it. – Cathy

As stated within the Social Housing Taskforce Final Report, the primary issue with crisis accommodation is the “limited opportunity for households to transition into other accommodation once the initial ‘crisis’ has passed” (2009a, p. 42). The above narratives give a clear indication of this issue, suggesting that, with many women unable to locate a fallback or alternative to Homeswest housing, many will face continued housing hardship following the conclusion of their crisis accommodation lease. For Cathy and Jodie, potential inaccessibility in public housing (a probability given current shortages and lengthy waiting lists) would signify the possibilities of facing homelessness or resorting to inappropriate or potentially threatening means of accommodation due to lack of alternatives. As Jodie said of the potential ramifications for women returning from prison:

Most of them even have got other halves that aren't good for them, and they're all ready to walk away from all of that, get the kids back, but how can they when they got no house? You know they have all the counselling for um, violent, abusive relationships, drugs, everything, but they've got nothing to move forward from. Nothing in place. And it's good to be rehabilitated but there's nothing there for us to walk out to, really. – Jodie

The importance of appropriate and affordable ‘exit points’ (that is, opportunities to obtain housing post crisis accommodation) is evident. As discussed by Fopp (2002) the absence of suitable exit points undermines the transitional focus and effectiveness of supported housing programs (like the SJOG Women's Program), making it difficult to achieve a move towards independent living. Further, as Jodie suggests above, such housing deficiency also undermines women's motivations for constructive change and personal development following release. Re-emphasising the significance of post crisis accommodation housing accessibility Jodie said:

When you can't get in, like you've got no housing, what the hell are you meant to do? ... I mean Homeswest housing should be there at least for girls that want to come out and do the right thing, just give them a chance to have a house ... and start living normal. – Jodie

Recognising these issues, the Government has expressed a concerted effort to strengthen social housing, improve the supply of affordable housing options in the wider

market, and support the transition of people through the housing system (see DHW, 2010, p. 53). Concurrently, the Social Housing Taskforce proposed a primary goal of providing 20,000 new affordable housing dwellings by 2020 (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009b). Despite these aspirations though, the Housing Authority 2009-10 Annual Report predicted that, fuelled by strong economic growth, Western Australia will experience a greater demand for housing and a renewed pressure on house prices in 2010-11 (DHW, 2010, p. 53). Given this, it is likely that access to affordable housing will remain a considerable issue in the foreseeable future.

Housing stability as a prerequisite to reunification with children

Nine of the eleven women within the current sample were mothers with four of those having had full custody of at least one child prior to their imprisonment. Each of these four mothers had strong desires to resume their role as primary or sole carer of their children as soon as possible following their release. Of the remaining five mothers, whose children were not in their primary care preceding their imprisonment, four intended to establish full or joint custody of their children after release, while one was content with 'contact' only. Overall, six of the eight women seeking custody identified as single mothers. Of the two who did not identify as single, one was in the process of reuniting with her estranged partner and father of her children, and the other had a husband who was currently in prison. Regardless of their circumstances though, all nine of the women cited their reunification with their children as a major goal following release; a goal which was exasperatingly dependent on securing stable, long-term housing.

Enforced separation and desires for reunification

For many women, the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958) are compounded with the enforced separation from their children and loss of the maternal role, which, as discussed in Chapter two, can lead to emotional distress including feelings of helplessness, frustration, guilt, depression and anxiety (Arditti & Few, 2008; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Enos, 1998). Within the current sample, evidence of such emotional distress was apparent among all of the mothers and particularly among the four who were the primary carers of their children prior to imprisonment. For Cathy, the hardships of separation left her in what was, as she described, "not a good headspace" and her discussions were often tainted with a sense of grief for the loss of her role as a full time mother. Describing her pre-incarceration life as

“pretty normal” – getting the kids ready for school, running errands and cooking dinner – she outlined the closeness of her bond with her youngest child in particular:

Up until I got charged ... my five year old – who was five at the time ... he was with me from the day he was born to the night I got raided. And then I had to call his dad. He'd never spent a night away from me up until that point.
– Cathy

Following her release Cathy described how the loss of her Homeswest home and her inability to secure any other form of longer-term housing meant that she now had “very little contact” with her children. Her hopes for the future were simple:

I just want to be in my own home. With my own kids, and just be back to normal, or as normal as can be. ... Yeah. To just have some relative sort of normal life. Some sort of life that you had before, without the illegal part of it.
– Cathy

For Cathy, the “toughest” experience in her return from prison was the suspension she experienced in achieving these goals – what she termed, “getting back to some sort of ‘normalcy’.” She continued, “Not being able to get to do that or start on that or make any progress towards that, that has been the hardest thing”.

Cathy’s post-release goals of attaining housing stability and resuming motherhood were akin to those of all of the mothers within the sample. But, like Cathy, the hardship that women experienced relating to housing put delays on their reunification with their children and was a source of ongoing pain after imprisonment. Adding to housing troubles was the fact that many women needed to find housing that was suitable and appropriate for a single-parent family, typically with limited financial capacity. As Roman and Travis (2004) highlighted, prisoners returning to the community may find the process of securing safe housing alone to be difficult. Women who are mothers however, must face the significantly larger hurdle of finding a home not only for themselves, but also for their children.

This was the case for Rhiannon, whose three children and one grandchild continued to stay with a close friend who lived out of town – her only option for the temporary care of her children given her lack of available family support. Having been their primary care-giver prior to her imprisonment, Rhiannon found the enforced separation from her children extremely difficult. The geographical distances meant that during her imprisonment, and following her release, visits with her daughters were minimal. So, for her, finding accommodation that was suitable for a family of five, with a limited income, was the determining factor in when she would be able to see her children again:

Trying to find the right accommodation, that's the biggest challenge ... the right area to suit all my daughters and my granddaughter ... at the moment they're still [living with a friend out of town], so it's hard. I don't really get to see them, especially my two younger ones. It's upsetting ... but they will all be moving back with me when I have stable accommodation ... So, to try to find something big enough, you know, that's the challenge. – Rhiannon

Of the need to find child-appropriate accommodation, Cathy similarly said:

I don't want to shut myself in a room somewhere in some little place. ... The aim is to have a place to myself because I want to be on my own so that I can have my kids too. ... I just want to be somewhere close to them so that they don't have to change school and they can just basically live between the two houses. That would be alright. – Cathy

For Susan, who had also been the primary care-giver for her children, her failure to secure stable housing meant that her children remained with her parents, even twelve months after her release. Heavily pregnant with her third child at the time of the interview, Susan explained her priorities:

I didn't have somewhere to live so I couldn't get my kids back and they're number one you know. ... So obviously I need to get some stable accommodation set up so I can have this baby in a safe, stable home. Get my kids back. Yep, that's my main priority – my family. I want my family back together. – Susan

Having been unable to secure long-term housing, many women, like Susan, were aware that their children were better-off in their families' care, purposefully delaying reunification with their children's best interests at heart. For these women, with little options for other housing, their gratification in reuniting with their children was often dependent on their ability to access public housing – something which, as discussed above, could take years:

I'm waiting on a two bedroom unit through Homeswest, my priority. Once I get that and I've got stable accommodation I can have her stay with me. But until I get stable – I wanna be able to provide for her. She's staying with my family at the moment and she's got a good life and I can't provide for her like they can ... So yeah, at the moment I'm just trying to sort my life out. – Cassandra

They want to live with me but ... I don't want to move them out of a stable house to be moved back in with me when I don't even know if I can keep a roof over their head. So until that happens I can't really, you know. ... I just wish I had a house. If I had a Homeswest house I could settle into somewhere. Then I could get my boys back and start building a home for them. – Jodie

Essentially, while reunification with children is clearly an important goal for released mothers, it remains a “somewhat unrealistic” one (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p. 44), given the difficulties of establishing motherhood at the margins of social and economic life, particularly with regard to housing and financial inadequacies (Arditti & Few, 2008; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). For those mothers confronting a legal battle for custody after release, it is even more difficult (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). One woman, who had become quite emotional when talking about her enforced separation from her children despite not having had custody of them prior to her imprisonment, described her frustration in her inability to acquire much desired stability post-release, and its hindrance on her post-release goal for regaining custody of her three children:

They reckon that I should show stability and it's pretty hard to show stability when you've been in jail. And before I went to jail I didn't have my own place – I was staying at my girlfriend's and I slept on the lounge-room floor. And before that I lost my house coz I couldn't pay my rent. And then I was just moving in with freaks – people that I don't know out of the Quokka. ... and I don't have any family. So I don't have any stability and that's all I want. – Kelly

Meanwhile, Louise, the only mother who had not intended to seek custody of her child following release, outlined how housing was still pertinent to her desires to ‘be there for her son’, who was in the care of her mother who lived out of town:

I put him in my mum's care back in 2002 coz I knew I was just going downhill. ... I'm happy for him to stay there, and he's happy there ... And I don't want to sort of up root him you know. But if I get a place he can come and stay weekends and stuff like that which would be good. ... I just want to support him – I want to be there for [him]. – Louise

The women's experiences demonstrate that securing suitable, stable housing highly determines family unity where children are involved. A failure to secure such housing, as many women had experienced, not only puts these women at risk of homelessness or other unhealthy environments, it also threatens to disrupt mother-child bonds, extending separation experienced as a consequence of imprisonment, well beyond release. As highlighted in Chapter two and discussed in further detail in Chapter eight, such disruption can have potentially serious emotional ramifications for both the mother and child, negatively impacting upon self-esteem and impeding a woman's capacity to address issues related to their offending behaviour, and thus, the process of rehabilitation (Armytage, 2000; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; VIC DOJ, 2005). As one mother said of the implications abound in the absence of housing and extensions in mother-child separation:

If you haven't got a house and you haven't got your kids, what have you got to focus on? You're just going to go back to what you're used to. ... The majority of the girls that I was in there with, like if they had a house to go to they would be good mothers. They wouldn't be in the shit. They wouldn't be doing criminal stuff, you know. Their priorities would be their kids, if given the chance. – Jodie

Overall, the value of women's connectedness with their children, along with its dependence on acquiring suitable and affordable housing, is apparent. As the discussions throughout this chapter have shown, failure in these areas commonly precedes women's imprisonment and, upon release, complicates the reintegration process. The importance of the relationship between the significance of mother-child connections, the importance of suitable, affordable housing, and the potential of offending and/or recidivism was succinctly captured by Jodie, in her descriptions of her experience of motherhood, housing, and offending:

I've even sold drugs to make sure that I can pay the rent and do everything that we had to do. ... that's what kept me and my three kids together. So, it's no excuse but if I had a Homeswest house I wouldn't have to worry about raking up rent or shit like that. I'd just live like a normal person would live. And go to school and concentrate on stuff that I want to be concentrating on. But sometimes you're left with just having to live for the moment. – Jodie

Conclusion

Women's leading goals following release from prison were simple; 1), secure appropriate, independent, long-term, stable housing, and 2), reunite with their children following the acquisition of such housing. Yet, although these may represent relatively straightforward goals, they often remain elusive to women returning from prison who are typically confronted with a cascade of difficulties in their attempts at community reintegration. With massive increases in private housing costs in recent years, together with shortages in social and public housing stock, many returning prisoners (as well as low income earners generally) are finding it difficult to attain and maintain housing stability.

This chapter has indicated that, as a result of such tight housing markets, along with economic inadequacies, many women's lifestyles, both prior to and following imprisonment, are characterised by homelessness, unstable and unsuitable housing and, for those who are fortunate enough to have an availability of personal support, being accommodated temporarily with family or friends – patterns of instability that are indicative of 'iterative homelessness' as employed by Robinson (2003). As suggested by Metraux and Culhane

(2004), this crossing over from incarceration to homelessness, and vice versa, insofar as they both represent stigmatising conditions, can be seen to generate more long-term patterns of social exclusion, exacerbating problems of community reintegration further still.

Overall, the significance of housing or 'home', "in all its concrete and metaphorical possibilities" (O'Brien, 2001b, p. 25), is strikingly clear for women returning from prison. Universally identified as a first and foremost fundamental aspect of community reintegration, support in this area is crucial. As, Ian Carter, Western Australian Department of Housing and Works Social Housing Taskforce Chair, acknowledged:

A house is much more than a roof and four walls. When people are facing significant crisis and/or making major life transitions like leaving out-of-home care, or periods of incarceration, they need strong levels of support to maintain their housing stability and move onto housing sustainability. (Social Housing Taskforce, 2009a, foreword)

Although opportunities such as those provided by Outcare's crisis accommodation programs provided relief for women returning from prison, and returning to significant housing crisis, they are – as they are designed to be – only temporary. What women need is somewhere to move forward to, and forward from – a 'secure base' that would provide a foundation for other experiences of reintegrative success, particularly mothers' reunification with children. "Without this opportunity to establish a secure base, their own place in society, women are ... denied the opportunity to redirect their lives" (Eaton, 1993, p. 118).

Chapter eight

Moving forward after prison: Breaking habits and sustaining change

I wanna make a go. I want a life. And I want to be clean. – Brenda

This chapter examines women's narratives of change as they endeavour to move forward after prison and attempt to break the habits that led them there. While Chapter seven examined the necessity of establishing housing as a concrete physical requirement and a necessary foundation for the redirection of women's lives following prison, this chapter examines the social and emotional context of women's post-release environments. In particular, this chapter explores women's post-release relationships, both with others and with themselves. These discussions look at how women structure their social environments after release – with family, children and peers, as well as internal relationships including overcoming issues of substance use and/or addiction and the pursuit of employment and other vocational or educational endeavours, and how these issues affect personal identity and internal transformation.

Analysing women's narratives of change: Crime, substance use, and women's network relationships

For many prisoners, prison release and reentry into the community represents a unique 'turning point', being a time of choosing between criminal and non-criminal involvement. For many, release may come to represent an opportunity for a new beginning, where, as documented in Chapter five, imprisonment may be experienced as a catalyst of constructive change. Yet, although the institutional environment of the prison may provide an opportunity for the initiation of change, as White (2009, p. 151) emphasises, it is within the natural, non-institutional environment to which individuals return, where they must maintain it. Correspondingly, though many women within this research spoke of their desires to 'turn their lives around' after prison, they also recognised the significance of the environments they were returning to and the implications that these would hold for success versus recidivism. As women reflected on the paths that had led them to prison, the failures that they had witnessed and/or experienced within prison, and their abilities to change following release,

they spoke critically of their release environments, often demonstrating an acute awareness of the probability of recidivism and re-incarceration given a return to their pre-incarceration lifestyles:

You see girls that go out, they'll get released and within a month they'll be back in ... It's because they leave and straight away they go back into the same lifestyle. – Cassandra

I think breaking habits is the hardest, most important thing. ... most of the people I know, that's their problem. ... they get out, they do the same things, and they go back in. – Jessica

The first time I got out, like after a month of being in there it was like: 'Yes, I'm out!' I didn't think I'd go back. But I just took it for granted ... I had gone straight back to the same environment that I came from, like the drugs. ... and I ended up back in Bandyup. ... And I've seen girls that were in there when I was first in there and you see them come in and go back out and come in again. This is where you're gonna end up if you keep going back to the same lifestyle. And I don't want that. – Louise

Whether women spoke of 'environments', 'lifestyles', 'habits', or the like, they generally referred to the significance of two primary, interrelating facets in their lives that were identified as having a profound impact on their reintegration efforts; the first being their histories of problematic substance use and/or addiction, and the second being the nature of their network relationships on the outside. It was these two factors that had marred women's pre-incarceration lifestyles, contributed to their offending behaviour, and would challenge their reintegration efforts following their release back into the community, as the following discussions highlight.

Lifestyle factor one: Experiences of substance use and addiction

The literature, as outlined in Chapter two, has consistently shown that most women leaving prison have histories of substance abuse, and the women who participated in this research were no exception. Problematic use or addiction was identified as a prominent aspect in all the participants' lives. Five women identified as heroin addicts or recovering heroin addicts, four as problematic users of amphetamine-type substances, and two as having issues with alcoholism, with poly-drug use also commonly reported throughout the sample. The majority of these women revealed the onset of use in their early teenage years, typically between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, whereas a minority (three women) revealed problems with addiction occurring later in life. Women who spoke of their addiction in terms

of duration revealed periods of problematic use or addiction ranging between two to fifteen years. Two women described histories of use spanning more than thirty years.

Throughout their addiction histories, only the five women who identified heroin as their drug of choice described any formal rehabilitation or recovery attempts prior to their incarceration. Three of these women were currently on a methadone program – one revealed twelve years of continuous methadone treatment for heroin addiction but admitted to ‘binge-using’ amphetamine-type substances, another reported sporadic methadone treatment often in concert with continued heroin use, and the third woman reported periods of sustained recovery and stability followed by relapse. Of the other two heroin users, one was on a Naltrexone program and the other had completed an intensive inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation program via drug court, with both women describing multiple failed attempts at rehab in the past. Meanwhile, of the six women who did not identify heroin as their drug of choice, incarceration was reported as their only point of intervention.

Among all of these women, their issues with substance use were not only recognised as ‘problematic’, but also as strongly associated with their offending backgrounds (in line with, for example, Christian et al., 2009 and Leverentz, 2006). In fact, as similarly noted by Christian et al. (2009, p. 26), for many women “incarceration was a manifestation of problems with substance abuse”. Almost half of the women within the sample were imprisoned for drug-related charges, while most others indicated the contributory nature of their substance use in their offending, as one woman stated, “Drugs led me to go and do my crimes”, and another said of her offence: “Basically I was off my head”. As well as identifying the role of substance abuse in their own offending and incarceration, women also often spoke ‘matter-of-factly’ of the prevalence of substance use issues among women in prison more generally, consistent with statistical research that indicates the overrepresentation of substance use problems among women who offend (see for example ABS, 2007; WA DCS, 2006).

With substance use identified as such a salient factor in their pathways into prison, women’s accounts of their post-release experiences often highlighted the need to avoid becoming drawn back into substance use upon release. Their efforts to this end were informed by two institutionally induced occurrences, as highlighted in Chapter five’s discussions regarding the positive retentions of imprisonment. Firstly, despite an acknowledgment among some women regarding the availability of drugs inside prison, all of the women reported that they had been able to abstain from the drug use that had plagued their pre-incarceration lifestyles throughout the course of their imprisonment. Secondly, with

imprisonment experienced as the serious ramifications of their substance use, many women described the way in which they entered into personal re-evaluations of their use within prison and subsequently proclaimed their commitment to change following release²³. Importantly though, having made the decision to attempt to maintain their sobriety on the outside, women's accounts of their transitions into the wider community were often characterised by some degree of anxiety regarding the confrontation of 'real-world' temptations:

I was a bit nervous about coming out. You know, the drugs are out here ... I was a bit weary that I was going to be tempted. – Jodie.

[I was] a bit nervous. I'd never been in a position where I had to get off drugs and then come back out to the world. – Hannah.

Like Jodie and Hannah, all women recognised the challenges and temptations that abound in the wider community. These matters engender the significance of the second lifestyle factor identified as having a profound impact on women's reintegration efforts: their network relationships or social environments. Women in this research typically cited their relationships as the key to success in resisting a return to substance use, making and sustaining lifestyle changes, and staying out of prison. As Cloud and Granfield (2004, p. 200) said of personal transformation, "[it] is a social product that is greatly influenced by the situational social context in which an individual is located". The discussions below examine the highly interrelated and influential role of women's network relationships regarding substance use, offending behaviour and women's abilities to change following release.

Lifestyle factor two: The nature and influence of women's network relationships

In examining the significance of women's social environments, Chapter six, under the heading '*Doing it alone*', introduced the concept of social capital – the asset of social relations through which individuals may access crucial resources that can assist in their functioning within their community (Brown & Ross, 2010; Mills & Codd, 2008; Wolff & Draine, 2004). The discussions there, and throughout this thesis, stress the important role that

²³ Although the majority of women appeared to genuinely affirm a commitment to overcoming addiction, with the majority proclaiming their abstinence, it should be noted that a minority of women did not do so as convincingly. In fact one woman within the sample, with a longstanding heroin addiction, even disclosed: "I really hurt it [the drugs] when I first got out". Nevertheless, like all of the women in this research, this woman still expressed her desire to change, acknowledging, "There will be slip-ups but I'll get there". As McGrath (2000, p. 4) said of women leaving prison, most with histories of substance abuse: "Some are ready for abstinence but many aren't". What is crucial here is an understanding that "fighting addiction is a long and difficult process" and as outlined by Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992, p. 1104) who described the trans-theoretical model of behaviour change, "relapse is the rule rather than the exception with addictions".

women's relationships play in the provision of support, in line with Cullen's (1994) social support theory. However, as Reisig et al. (2002, p. 180), citing Portes (1998), pointed out, "sociability cuts both ways". ... the mechanisms that promote the public good can also result in less desirable consequences". The fundamental issue here is that the social ties of drug-abusing female offenders may not always be prosocial. As recognised by relational theorists (Bloom & Covington, 1998; Covington, 2002; 2007) and demonstrated by various studies of female offenders (for example Bui & Morash, 2010; Cloud & Granfield, 2004; Leverentz, 2006; Stevens, 2006), women's relationships are often at the core of their offending. In particular, some 'supporters', including family members, significant others or friends, may provide destructive rather than constructive support by enabling, facilitating, or encouraging women's drug use and/or criminal behaviour. In this way, some women's relationships may instead constitute 'negative social capital' (as described by Bui & Morash, 2010; Reisig et al., 2002).

In line with this notion of negative social capital, and also with Covington's (2002; 2007) discussions of relational theory, women in this research portrayed their crime and drug use as encompassing a relational aspect. Throughout the course of the interviews, three women revealed that their crimes had been committed with an intimate partner. Meanwhile, women portrayed their substance use as associated with relationships in various ways. For instance, some women described the way that substance use was a means of 'self-medicating' or 'numbing the pain' of negative or unhealthy relationships, particularly where domestic abuse was involved, as Sarah explained:

Prior to the crimes I was drinking quite heavily. ... It was more or less alcohol abuse to block out the domestic violence. Just the day-to-day crap that you just can't deal with. Yeah, the domestic violence, the arguments, everything. ... I just drank. – Sarah

Similarly, for others, drug use was a means of coping with, for example, loss or trauma experienced within the context of relationships, as Susan explained:

I've been with my man for years – since I was thirteen ... we've been on drugs since we were fourteen. ... But about twelve months before everything went wrong I was buying a house, I had a mortgage, I had my kids, and my partner and I were both doing pretty well. But then I lost a baby and everything from there just went downhill. We got stuck back into the drugs and he ended up in jail first and I was not long after him. – Susan

Most often though, drug use was simply a means, or a product of connecting with others, with many women's relationships, both social and/or intimate, typically formed on a

foundation of drug-using. For example, Cassandra, a recovering heroin addict who had been imprisoned for drug related offences, traced her addiction to an early relationship with the father of her child:

I was with him since I was sixteen and I was with him for five years and he introduced me to heroin and stuff and he's a lot older than me. He was thirty-two and I was sixteen. – Cassandra

Louise similarly revealed the influence of an intimate relationship in her 'mature-aged' entry into drug use and crime, prior to which she described having "a good life", with stability in both housing and full-time work:

I sort of had everything. And then I just hooked up with the wrong person and I guess I wanted to see what their life was like. ... He was into drugs and I liked him. ... And then it was just downhill, going downhill, just when I met him. ... the drugs, and trying to chase after him all the time ... five years, just fucken wasted time, you know, he was an arsehole, the way he treated me and all that. And I just accepted it. He knew all my weak spots and stuff like that. And coz he used to do crime, like steal and all that, and I never did that stuff, and then I went out and done it! – Louise

Both Cassandra and Louise's narratives of their entry into drug use and/or crime reveal the influence of somewhat exploitative relationships – Cassandra by a much older man at sixteen, and Louise by a man who she suggests 'took advantage of her weaknesses'. Interestingly though, both women had abandoned these relationships prior to their current offence and subsequent imprisonment which reveals the potential 'gateway' nature of such relationships – fostering addictions and compelling attachments to unconventional networks, which as Reisig et al., (2002, p. 181) suggested, further immerses women into criminal lifestyles. This was so for Louise who admitted, "I was just following the wrong people". Having left her abusive partner, she described the way she became immersed into a culture of drugs and crime where, with its unconventional norms and values, criminal behaviour became a source of pride, approval and belonging:

It was sort of like an addiction as well – going into shops and stealing. Saying: 'Oh look what I done'. And the attention I was getting, even though it was all for the wrong reasons. ... So you know, I think I had to work on my addiction for stealing. It was better than getting a shot, you know, like: 'I'm stealing this for you', and they're like: 'Oh wow!' – Louise

It is apparent here that some women's progressions into both crime and substance use are representative of their desires for connection – "an attempt to feel connected, energized, loved, or loving when that is not the whole truth of their experience" (Surrey, 1991, cited in

Covington, 2007, p. 13). Alternatively, for others, substance use is instead a means of disconnection – a place of solace, where the traumas of loss and abuse are numbed or forgotten. Whether a means of connection or disconnection, the direct and indirect influences of relationships in women’s offending histories are clear. As the above narratives suggest, for many women, it is ‘negative social capital’ that characterises their pre-incarceration relationships. Within the context of these relationships, women are introduced, supplied and supported in their use and offending through which they appear to find some sense of comfort. For those who seek recovery from addiction and desistance from crime upon release from prison, such unhealthy attachments, with substances, people, or both, should be avoided.

‘Negative social capital’, relationship avoidance and social isolation

Given that women’s network relationships are often a driving force in their pathways into drug-using and offending behaviour, it has been suggested that “shifts are necessary to promote success” upon release (Bui & Morash, 2010, p. 1). In fact, many women within this research recognised that changes in their social circles would be necessary to sustain change on the outside. One woman, speaking of the importance of addressing addictions and making lifestyle changes, gave a clear example, suggesting that, “if they [women] leave prison and go back out, back to the same partner who’s using or doing crime, they’re just going to end up back in jail” (Cassandra).

Subsequently, and in line with the findings of, for example, Brown and Ross (2010), Bui and Morash (2010), Cloud and Granfield (2004), Leverentz (2006), and Nelson et al., (1999), many women made a conscious decision to dissolve intimate relationships and friendships with drug-using and/or criminally active people in order to maximize their chances of successfully maintaining a noncriminal lifestyle. The three women within the sample who admitted to committing their crimes with an intimate partner revealed that they had ended these relationships prior to, or during, their imprisonment due to the negative outcomes of those relationships (i.e. facing and/or serving a term of imprisonment). This is also in line with Chapter five’s discussion *‘Prison as an escape’*, which highlighted the way in which imprisonment presented women with the opportunity and impetus to break free from such unhealthy personal relationships. Similarly, upon release, women commonly described how they avoided reconnecting with friends who they acknowledged as having a negative influence and who, as Jessica termed, would potentially “drag [them] down”. As Kelly said:

Since I've been to jail I don't call many people my friend anymore. ... I try to keep to myself now. ... coz it doesn't get you anywhere really. Just staying around and having a few drinks with a mate – that doesn't get you anywhere. I just use to do that shit everyday ... they're not very sensible. – Kelly

Likewise, Susan, who maintained her relationship with her husband, discussed how they would seek recovery together in the absence of their drug-using friends whom they chose to abandon upon release:

We've given up on most the people that we know because like I said, we've been on drugs since we were fourteen. So there's not a lot – we don't know very many people who aren't drug users, junkies. ... So yeah. I've given up on them. They're not friends. They're just people we know who use drugs. – Susan

Cassandra, who had been through rehabilitation mandated by drug court and had subsequently continued voluntary sessions with Narcotics Anonymous, also described a conscious shift in her network relationships:

I don't have any of the same friends. ... I've made some really good friends just through doing rehab and I've only stayed in contact with the ones that are clean. Like I'll have some people ring me sometimes and you know they're drunk, or they're using, and I'll just tell 'em to come to a meeting. Like I don't plan to catch up with 'em but I'll just support them and tell 'em to come to a meeting and I'll catch up with 'em there. – Cassandra

Clearly, for many women, the act of distancing themselves from associations that had facilitated crime and drug-use in the past was viewed as a crucial step towards transitioning away from offending lifestyles and sustaining positive change on the outside. In achieving such 'distance' women also identified the value of procuring suitable, safe and stable housing upon release from prison, reemphasising its vital role in prisoner reintegration, as discussed in Chapter seven. Commonly referred to as a 'geographic cure' within the drug rehabilitation field (Cloud & Granfield, 2004, p. 193), one woman indicated that without such physical relocation, failure upon release would be imminent:

Finding a good place to live is important. Like if you go out to an area where a lot of people are situated, then of course everything is just going to go back to normal and it's not going to work. – Jessica

Jessica uses the term 'normal' here to refer to a reversion into substance use, indicating the extent of her submersion in the lifestyle of addiction and thus the commitment that recovery would require. As noted by White (2009, p. 150):

Many persons with severe and prolonged AOD [Alcohol and other drugs] problems migrate toward heavy AOD using cultures as these problems intensify. ... The transition from addiction to recovery is often a journey from one culture to another. ... Those with the most enmeshed styles of involvement in a culture of addiction may require an equally enmeshed style of involvement in a culture of recovery to successfully avoid relapse and readdiction.

For women with such ‘enmeshed styles of involvement in a culture of addiction’, relocation may be crucial in disrupting these attachments and facilitating a ‘culture of recovery’. This was the case for Louise, who emphasised her need to avoid returning to her former home town, where she had experienced failure upon release from prison previously, admitting: “I stayed there because I knew people there and I got free drugs”. Speaking of the significance of returning from prison to “a new place”, she said:

Coming to a new place was good. Coz I didn’t want to go back to [former home town] ... I did that last year and I ended up back in Bandyup. ... But you know you go look for drugs anywhere if you want it. So it’s not the place that you live, it’s more – I’d run into more people down there than I would up here so that helps. And I’m not looking. But around here I don’t have those influences you know, like I keep to myself, which is good. I like having my own space, my own time. – Louise

Cassandra also outlined the role that housing played in easing the process of avoiding negative associations and environments upon release from prison. Describing the reality of her decision to forfeit friendships with drug-using peers as a means of promoting recovery, she said: “It was hard but I’m living here now and I don’t know anyone in the area so it’s really good ... I’ve just had to let go of everyone. Just start again.” Consistent with other women in the sample, Cassandra’s statement here highlights the importance of removing oneself from former drug-using networks, as well as the value of housing and physical relocation in achieving this purpose. Alternatively though, Cassandra’s narrative alludes to both the dark and light effect in such removal and relocation. While on the one hand the concept of ‘letting go’ and ‘starting again’ denotes a clean slate from which to move forward, on the other, it signifies the personal hardship epitomised in the dissolution of friendships along with the potential of social isolation. Another woman, who similarly spoke of ‘starting fresh’, distinctly conveyed the hardship that this would entail:

Not having many friends has been the most difficult thing because I’m not hanging around the drug addicts that I use to. Not that I want to either. But yeah, just starting fresh, completely fresh. – Jodie

Obviously, removal from the negative influences and environments that typically prevail in the lives of women returning from prison is an important first step in overcoming the issues that led them to prison. The action of such removal is also an important indicator of women's intentions to change and the cognitive shifts necessary for desistance from crime and/or substance use. Obviously though, as Jodie highlights, the dissolution of friendships is not always, if ever, an easy task. Although some women acknowledged that friendships with drug-users did not constitute 'real' friendships, and thus the ease of the abandonment of such friendships, others reflected on the value of bonds that were formed even on a foundation of drug-use and crime, as Louise said:

I think in some way, you know, I enjoyed their company and I liked hanging around them. ... I think about the good times I had with this girl ... and I mean that was good, we had some good times. ... So another test will come when I bump into [her] Coz you can sort of influence each other in a way – you might not mean to but it can happen. So you can't keep in contact really, I just don't think it works. So that's a bit sad. But I don't want to stuff up. I don't want to run into temptation again. ... So I just tend to stick to myself and I know that it's better that way. – Louise

Overall, the narratives presented here portray the extreme isolation and loneliness that women returning from prison face as they consciously remove themselves from destructive relationships in an attempt to transition away from offending lifestyles. For many women this self-imposed social isolation is only exacerbated by other experiences of isolation. As highlighted in Chapter six, women released from prison typically come from impoverished social networks with a distinct lack of supportive relationships. Even among those who do have prosocial networks, these may become strained as a result of women's drug-use, offending, incarceration, and associated behaviours, making re-engagement a difficult process (Brown & Ross, 2010; Willis, 2004). Moreover, as described in Chapter five, women may also experience alienation resulting from either real or perceived stigmatisation regarding their imprisonment. So, with a general lack of prosocial networks, along with the necessary abandonment of available antisocial networks, women returning from prison may find themselves very alone – an experience that is also in stark contrast to that of the prison environment, where profound attachments are often forged on a foundation of “proximity and ubiquity” (Blake, 1971, cited in Duncan, 1988, p. 1211).

Since, as prescribed by relational theory, “connection, not separation, is the guiding principle of growth for women” (Covington, 2003, p. 5), such a state of social isolation can have a devastating impact on women's reintegration efforts. The relational model of women's

growth and development posits that, when women are disconnected from others, they experience disempowerment, hopelessness, confusion and diminished zest, vitality and self-worth (Bloom & Covington, 1998; Covington, 2002). These symptoms of disconnection manifest in depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide, disordered eating, substance abuse and other potentially destructive coping mechanisms (Bell-Gadsby, Clark, & Hunt, 2006; Covington, 2007). In fact, one Western Australian study of women returning from prison found that, for want of any other option, women often return to former criminal networks or abusive relationships and generally place themselves at high risk of resuming offending behaviour patterns as a result of such acute isolation (Goulding, 2004, p. 55). One woman poignantly summarised these issues, declaring:

They wonder why the girls or women do what they do to themselves – slash themselves up, kill themselves, whatever. Going back to the old life. Going back to domestic abuse. That’s their choices. Or they feel that’s their choices. Because they’ve got nothing. They’ve got no support. – Cathy

Clearly, women upon release, particularly those alone and isolated, are extremely vulnerable to reverting to the same coping strategies and destructive behaviours that led to their imprisonment in the first place (Covington, 2007; Goulding, 2004; McGrath, 2000; Willis, 2004). Though women’s efforts to avoid ‘temptation’ by severing ties with former associations conducive to drug use and crime provide some indication of their genuine desires for constructive change, it is apparent that this alone is not sufficient to sustain such change. Given the importance of connections in women’s lives, support, particularly emotional support, is paramount (Brown & Ross, 2010; Dutreix, 2000; Hinton, 2004). As Cathy suggests above, without such support, feelings of hopelessness may emerge with potentially detrimental outcomes. The next section of this chapter discusses this vital need for support, and assesses potential sources of growth-fostering and change-shaping connections for women returning from prison.

Supporting internal transformation: Healthy connections and positive identity shifts

For women attempting to make positive lifestyles changes following imprisonment, disengagement from the negative aspects of their social backgrounds is obviously, and necessarily, an important progression. An important caveat however, in line with relational theory, is that such *disengagement* from *antisocial* roles, associations and environments cannot be effective without a corresponding *engagement* with alternatively *prosocial* roles,

associations and environments. Cloud and Granfield's (2004) research into the cessation of addiction supports this contention, suggesting that one's removal from the social cues associated with use is only one of three vital indicators of success. Also of importance is firstly, a reliance upon relationships with family and friends (social support or 'positive social capital'), and secondly, an engagement in alternative activities (an assumption of prosocial roles and identities) (Cloud & Granfield, 2004, p. 189). White (2009, p. 150) too emphasises the necessity of "disengagement from one world *and* entrance into the other [emphasis added]", suggesting that facilitating a 'culture of recovery' requires more than simply avoiding the negative aspects of one's social environment. In line with Cloud and Granfield (2004), White (2009) states that risk of relapse among those with alcohol and other drug problems "rises in relationship to the density of heavy [users] in one's ... social network and declines in tandem with social network support for abstinence" (p. 150), and also suggests that community reintegration is enhanced by "access to prosocial, prorecovery activities in these environments" (p. 151).

Essentially, the literature suggests that women's recovery from addictive problems requires not only an abandonment of negative attachments to both substances and people, but rather, transference from these attachments, which Covington (2002, p. 6) suggests "constricts a woman's life", to sources of growth-fostering connections – that is, an immersion in personal relationships and social activities that are positive, rewarding and satisfying (Cloud & Granfield, 2004; Covington, 2002). Within such growth-fostering connections, with for example supportive family units and peer groups, mother-child bonds, and labour force attachment, women can receive necessary social support and identify with prosocial roles that support their efforts at change, encourage their adoption of conventional lifestyles, and facilitate community reintegration, as will be discussed below.

Building 'positive social capital': Family, friends and peer support groups

Cullen's (1994) social support theory and Miller's (1976) relational theory mutually emphasise the importance of healthy connections and the support that they provide – what has typically been labelled 'social capital'. This is a concept that is also a common finding in research with women generally, and with prisoners and drug-users particularly. As Martinez (2009, p. 59) summarised, "support in interpersonal relationships is widely accepted to serve as a resistance and protective factor in reducing a wide range of psychological and life stressors" (Martinez, 2009, p. 59). Moreover, among those who have experienced problems with incarceration and addiction, social support has typically been described as "one of the

primary mechanisms of change” (White, 2009, p. 150). Accordingly, for women returning to the wider community following incarceration, support has been indicated as a strong predictor of success, being linked to personal transformation, enhanced community integration, and reduced recidivism (see for example Bui & Morash, 2010; Granfield & Cloud, 2001; Leverentz, 2006; Martinez, 2009; O’Brien, 2001b; Reisig et al., 2002).

Regarding prisoners’ access to social capital, families are of particular significance and thus have a critical role to play in the reintegration of offenders into the community, as highlighted in the review of the literature in Chapter two, and in the analysis discussed in Chapter six. Nelson et al. (1999, p. 10) concluded that “people with strong supportive families are more likely to succeed than those with weak or no family support ... [and] that self-defined family support was the strongest predictor of individual success”. Consistent with this, Cassandra, one of only five women to report any amount of support from a prosocial family-of-origin, described the support she received from her parents as the ‘difference’ between successful and unsuccessful reentry into society:

[My parents] are very supportive. ... They’ve always been there ... my mum’s always been supportive. Like ... they helped me with [my daughter] ... And just not turning their back on me, you know. And I think it makes all the difference. Like [my friend], she went to prison around the same time I did. But she came out of prison and went back to, you know, all that stuff. ... She just had no support. It’s like; we came from the same place but took two very different paths. – Cassandra

For those returning prisoners who, like Cassandra, are lucky enough to have the support of prosocial families, they are a crucial source of practical support. In some cases this may include the provision of, for example, shelter, food, financial assistance, child-care assistance, as well as access to information, knowledge, and extrafamilial connections that can produce other desirable outcomes such as employment (Bui & Morash, 2010; Reisig et al., 2002). Importantly though, beyond the provision of practical support, families also offer emotional support and a source of informal social control. As documented by Martinez (2009), Martinez and Christian (2009), and Nelson et al. (1999), former prisoners may be guided toward an engagement in positive lifestyles by desires for, and perceptions of, family acceptance and approval, concurrent with the “implicit notion that family members would not support former prisoners who continued on the same pre-incarceration path” (Martinez, 2009, p. 63). As one woman indicated of her otherwise supportive mother: “She reckons she would turn her back on me in an instant if I went back to the way I was” (Jodie). Intimation of the

power of such ‘supportive disapproval’ was apparent as Louise spoke of her renewed focus on family:

[My mum] was quite angry at first and she said if I did it again, that would be it. And it was just all the lies I told her, coz I was doing drugs and being in the environment that I was. I was just letting my family down, letting my sister down. But they’ve always been there for me and this time they’re just like: ‘Pull your act together’. I’ve been clean for a year now, just over a year, 14 months. So I’m happy with that. ... And also, coming out, I just want the trust with my family back. ... I’ve missed out on so much ... birthdays and seeing my niece and nephews ... just all stuff that I want back in my life now. I want family. Family is important. – Louise

Although Louise had described relational turmoil as a consequence of her incarceration and related behaviour, importantly this turmoil was not sufficient to extinguish her relationships with both her mother and sister – relationships which became a significant force in her emotional growth, self-healing, and sobriety efforts following prison. In this way, Louise’s narrative, as with Cassandra’s previously, demonstrates how the maintenance of a prisoner’s connections to family can “interrupt negative sequences” (Flavin, 2004, p. 211), motivate and encourage non-criminal behaviour, and support constructive change. Granfield and Cloud’s (2001) research with alcohol- and drug-dependent persons similarly stressed the importance of such existing prosocial relations, suggesting that the “sympathetic investment on the part of others [is] critical to the[ir] personal transformations” (Granfield & Cloud, 2001, p. 1559). Yet, as Chapter six highlighted, although the value of family connections, and the social capital that they may bear, is clear, research, including the current, consistently indicates that women returning from prison are typically members of deficient networks.

Chapter six’s analysis revealed the prominence of familial social capital deficits among the women in the current sample, where, in line with the literature, the majority of women reported familial relations marked by poor cohesion, strain, conflict, and even histories of violence, abuse and victimisation. Moreover, as the above analysis contends, many women’s primary avenues for social support or capital in the past have been among peers and intimate partners that often provide antisocial influences and ‘negative social capital’ – networks from which women commonly acknowledged the need to steer clear of following release. So, for women returning from prison with desires for constructive change, building social capital that will support desired change and surmount their significant vulnerabilities to isolation and alienation can be a precarious enterprise. As Brown and Ross (2010, p. 42) posited:

In the absence of friends and family, and with a history of imprisonment that many women wish not to have made public, release from prison leaves a number of women in a quandary: how does one establish new connections from a position of social isolation?

In such circumstances, the necessity of social support available outside of an individual's traditional personal networks is apparent. In this manner, some women found benefit in parole supervision and other release orders, where, as discussed in Chapter six, requirements and referrals put women in touch with mandatory or voluntary counselling and drug rehabilitation programs and other general or targeted support services. For Cassandra, her drug court mandated rehabilitation following prison offered access to a comprehensive support network outside of her familial relations, which she indicated had played a critical role in her successful reentry into the wider community:

I was really lucky because I had a lot of support ... because I went through rehab, I was able to work on a lot of issues that I was having in rehab. They had good counsellors and that in there and then once I left rehab I did counselling and I had a counsellor through the drug court and I had [the caseworker] with Outcare and then I've also got NA and I've got a sponsor. So I've got this big huge support network and I've got a really supportive family too. So I was lucky. ... I had lots of support in place before I left rehab. If I'd left rehab and didn't really have much of a support network it would have been really hard. – Cassandra

For Cassandra, her involvement in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) was highlighted as being of particular value – a notion that is in line with research advocating the change-shaping role of community programs and peer support groups for women returning from prison. For example, research has indicated that “group support from other women who are offenders and drug users, or who have other shared troubles, is linked to abstinence from drugs” (Morash, 2009, p. 135) and, more affluent experiences in terms of social capital (Reisig et al., 2002, p. 180). As Cassandra continued:

My friends now are people who I've met in NA and they're the people who I socialise with at the moment. ... Like last night it was just a women's meeting and it was really nice and we all went out for coffee afterwards and like the whole meeting, there was heaps of girls from rehab there, and everyone was sharing about how they've lost their kids and just being able to relate to other people who have been through the same thing and they are just trying their best to live their life now and rebuild their life and, it's just validating their struggle. – Cassandra

For women in the process of recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration, community programs and peer support groups, like NA, can provide access to an unmatched source of

social and emotional support. Within such environments, among peers with mutual experiences of hardship and a united commitment to recovery, women can experience acceptance, improved self-perceptions, and an opportunity for friendship (Morash, 2009), as well as practical knowledge in overcoming potential obstacles after release (Bui & Morash, 2010; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). So, for many women, particularly those who would otherwise be facing severe isolation as a consequence of their efforts to avoid negative associations, peer support groups can provide a growth-fostering relational context that can offer members a safe and caring community environment, true to women's styles of growth and development as outlined by relational theory (Covington, 2002, p. 14). For Cassandra, even with a supportive family unit, the support, acceptance, and validation she gave and received within her peer support group was invaluable. Without such support she mused, "I'd probably feel really isolated and alone and I'd feel like no one really understands. I'd feel different", and even admitted, "I'd probably slip back into 'it', yeah, more than likely" (Cassandra) – 'It' being her former way of life, marred by addiction and supported by antisocial associations. Without alternative sources of support and connection, such regression is understandable.

Engaging in conventional activities and assuming prosocial roles and identities

As the above analysis demonstrates, the nature, structure, and influence of women's network relationships and available social supports are of great significance in their rehabilitation and reintegration processes following prison. However, although network relationships and resources are necessary, they only represent one aspect of the change process. Aligned with the findings of Cloud and Granfield (2004) and White (2009), noted above, as well as various theorists in the transformation of deviant identities (for example Christian et al., 2009; Giordano et al., 2002; Rungay, 2004), an engagement in conventional activities and an assumption of prosocial roles and identities, are an equally important and interrelating consideration. As Bui and Morash (2010, p. 4) suggest, "Since people have agency, their self-perceptions, cognitions, and related motivations work in *combination* [italics added] with available resources [i.e. network relationships] to influence their decisions and actions".

Giving rise again to the relevance of Goffman's (1963) conceptualisation of stigma, for women with histories of long-term disadvantage, addiction, offending, and incarceration, these aspects of their identity may evolve as defining characteristics in the 'representation of the self', both personally and socially. With the label of 'ex-' / 'addict', 'offender', 'prisoner',

or ‘deviant’, comes, as O’Brien (2001b, p. 28) suggested, “the baggage of distrust and lack of credibility that may foster an attitude of hopelessness in the ex-inmate that she can be efficacious in her life”. Consequently, the development of “an identification that goes beyond who they are in the criminal justice system, is vital to [women] re-entering society. Recovery is about the expansion and growth of the self” (Covington, 2007, p. 16).

Research documenting the positive identity and cognitive shifts that might help female inmates overcome ‘spoiled’ identities and move away from criminal lifestyles, commonly focuses on the role of exposure to, and engagement with, alternative, desired and socially approved roles or pursuits, similarly termed ‘hooks for change’ by Giordano et al. (2002) and ‘scripts’ by Runggay (2004). According to such theorists, these ‘hooks’ or ‘scripts’, can assist in desistance from crime by firstly, providing the actor with a “cognitive blueprint for proceeding as a changed individual”, secondly, “enabl[ing] the actor to craft a satisfying replacement self and one that is seen as incompatible with continued criminal behavior”, and finally, “provid[ing] a gateway to conforming others who can reinforce the actor’s initial forays into more prosocial territory ... consistent with the traditional sociological emphasis on the influential role of the social network” (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1055-7). Essentially, it is suggested that immersion in certain common prosocial roles (for example ‘mother’, ‘employee’ or ‘student’), and the normative activities and behaviours associated with those roles, may represent an avenue for engaging in a process and performance that can extract women from their known ‘deviant’ lifestyles and give them new personal meaning. The following subsections address women’s immersion into roles associated with motherhood, work, education, treatment, and community life following release from prison, and discusses the value that such roles hold in developing and reinforcing a prosocial identity and a new or renewed stake in conventional life.

Motherhood: Re-evaluating pre-existing identities

As prescribed by relational theory (Miller, 1976) and demonstrated throughout this chapter, women’s connections with others are central to their core identity, functioning and growth. This is especially true for mothers and their children. For those returning from prison in particular, the role of ‘mother’ holds a significant influence in the reintegration process. Research, highlighted in Chapter two, demonstrates that strong mother-child bonds can significantly reduce the risk of re-offending and have a positive impact on a woman’s adjustment to life outside of prison (Armytage, 2000; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; VIC DOJ, 2005). As Giordano et al. (2002, p. 1043) affirmed, in

line with Rungay's (2004) concept of transformational 'scripts', motherhood "creates possibilities for a reorientation of the self", provided, of course, that it is a self that is "actively embraced".

For each of the nine mothers within the current sample, their roles as 'mother', whether custodian or not, represented a critical component and a central focus in their lives following release, regardless of the nature of their mothering role prior to prison. As discussed in Chapter five, for some women, this post-release maternal focus evolved in response to the 'shame' women experienced as incarcerated mothers. The manner by which these women spoke of incarceration, enforced separation and related self re-evaluation is substantiation of the influence that the role of motherhood holds for women in transition into the wider community, particularly, as a source of hope and change (in line with Boudin, 1998; Covington, 2007; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; O'Brien, 2001b; Shamai & Kochal, 2008). As one mother explained:

My biggest motivation is probably my daughter. She's growing up now and... you know, she wants Mummy and I can only really see her on the weekends at the moment. So, you know, I have to do well because I wanna be able to be there for her. – Cassandra

Louise similarly spoke of her son's influence in her motivations for constructive change given her history of stealing and drug addiction:

I just don't want to put my son through that again ... all the bullshit ... and all the lies. I just don't want to go back to lying and being dishonest. It feels dirty, it looks dirty. ... And it is tiring and it's just not a life. I look heaps better now, I've put on a bit of weight, who cares? – that used to freak me out, but I don't care because at least my son can look at me and go: 'Yep you're starting to look like mum again'. – Louise

With maternal realisations often provoked by imprisonment, these women's renewed commitment to mothering their children offers an important source of emotional support and motivation for change, and simultaneously, a critical mechanism of informal social control. Further, such immersion into the role of motherhood also provides women in transition from prison with necessary routine, structure and focus. Susan, whose children remained in the temporary care of her parents, pending her hopeful acquirement of appropriate housing, described the structure that motherhood provided her post-release lifestyle:

I go up there like every second day and spend the afternoon, after school, with them. And I cook dinner and I bath them and read their books and help with their homework. – Susan

Again, in line with Runggay's (2004) assertions, such narratives uphold the notion that assuming or reassuming the role of 'mother' holds the potential to structure a woman's desistance by providing a 'socially recognised behavioural routine', by which women can act out and forge pro-social identities following prison (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Runggay, 2004). Beyond the acquisition of a socially approved identity, immersion into the prescribed day-to-day activities involved in the care of children also satisfies women's needs for connection, consistent with relational theory (Miller, 1976), and allows women "to feel that they have a purpose and role in their families", which, as Martinez (2009, p. 68) stated, "is healing and helpful for the former prisoner ... if for no other reason than for their own well-being".

Overall, it is evident that women's connectedness with their children serves an important role during their involvement with the criminal justice system and their transition back to the community. Given the prevalence of otherwise unsupportive, antisocial, or deficient relationships among women returning from prison, for some women, their bond with their children may be the only support they have. As Rhiannon, a single mother without a supportive family-of-origin, explained: "They're my rocks, my daughters. Coz their dad is no longer here, he hasn't been for nearly thirteen years... they're all I've got. They mean the world to me". Clearly, for women, who have such a strong bond with their children, it is crucial to maintain such bonds. Extended disruption, as discussed in Chapter seven, may have unfortunate results. As one mother simply said, "[If you] haven't got your kids, what have you got to focus on? You're just going to go back to what you're used to" (Jodie). However, resumption of the maternal role was, as discussed in Chapter seven, dependent on women's ability to secure stable housing – a fundamental indicator of being able to provide for their children.

Employment: Forging new identities

Criminological literature frequently and consistently pinpoints employment as a key element in the successful reintegration of released prisoners into the wider community. As outlined in Chapter two, employment provides more than the financial means necessary for survival on the outside. It also serves other multiple functions in line with the concepts of personal transformation. These include the provision of structure, routine and the constructive use of time, improvements in self-esteem and self-worth particularly relating to the establishment of a sense of purpose and belonging and the development of new skills, as well as opportunities to expand one's social network to prosocial others (Graffam et al., 2004; Granfield & Cloud, 2001; Visher et al., 2005). Given these multiple functions, employment

may hold significant transformative potential, linking individuals to legitimate identities and forging attachments to conventional lifestyles (see, for example, Granfield & Cloud, 2001).

However, the documented transformative potential of employment, gendered reservations typically exist regarding its relevance and significance in the post-release experiences of women returning from prison (Giordano et al., 2002). This is particularly so given that a majority of returning women may be occupied in their roles as mothers, and often, as primary care-givers to their children (WA DCS, 2006). Among the women in the current sample, only two had secured employment at the time of the interviews, with both working full-time (one was a mother and one was not). A third woman (also a mother) was currently enrolled at TAFE. Among the remaining women, ‘desires’ for employment, study, or both, were common, with all of the women revealing either current action or future aspirations. Yet, although some women were actively ‘looking’ and were involved with employment agencies and support services, for many, their motivations for employment appeared to be superseded by other post-release concerns. As one woman simplistically stated of the ‘order’ with which she sought to proceed in the organisation of her life following prison: “I get a house and then I get my kids and then I’ll get work or study. That’s my goal” (Sarah). Other women concurred:

If I had a house then my life would be back on track. Then I could get my kids under the same roof. Put them into schooling. Know that they’re stable. Then I can concentrate on me going to school. ... But it’s just getting everything else in my life in order first. – Jodie

It would be great to have a job. But I just find that it’s a vicious circle, well I shouldn’t say ‘vicious’, but it’s a cycle. If you don’t have a home base, it’s really hard to do all those other things. I think it’s important to find somewhere that you can call home, or that feels like home ... somewhere [stable]. ... Mind you, you need a job to get that home. But I think that it would be extremely hard. – Cathy

Cathy’s quote here highlights the classic ‘catch 22’ nature of the housing/employment situation, where, on the one hand, financial capability is necessary to secure stable housing, yet on the other, stability is required to secure and maintain a job. Meanwhile, taken together, these women’s accounts demonstrate the way in which women, specifically mothers, may prioritise their reintegrative efforts in a manner that leaves employment at the back of the ‘to do list’, reemphasising both the role of stable housing as a precursor to the realisation of other post-release goals (discussed in Chapter seven), as well as the centrality of women’s roles as mothers (discussed above). Also influencing employment motivations were women’s

somewhat united perceptions regarding the obstacles and hardships they would potentially face in their attempts to secure employment as a consequence of the ‘ex-prisoner’ status.

Nevertheless, although employment was on the reintegration ‘back burner’ for some women, for others, issues of employment were heavily represented in their narratives of change. This was particularly so for three women who largely attributed their problematic substance use, involvement in crime, and subsequent incarceration as the product of ‘idle time’, and, two of these women were mothers. Hannah, who had been a stay-at-home mum prior to her pre-incarceration troubles, stated, “I knew I sort of wanted to work and that but I never really knew what I wanted to do. And I think that’s what dragged me down the most”. Describing her descent into the world of drugs, dealing, and crime, she said:

It all sort of started when I was with the father of my kids and I was just at home with the kids all day and he was at work and I didn’t have a licence so I sort of felt stuck in the house. One of my old mates moved in across the road from us and that’s where it sort of just went mad. I mean, we were drinking all the time. And then it just went from drinking to ‘oh just a little bit of speed’. And it just got out of control. ... I mean we were selling drugs and there was people in our house non-stop. Every night expecting crime. – Hannah

Hannah’s example here yet again demonstrates the influential role that peers may have in a woman’s pathway into drug-use and offending, especially where idleness is a contributing factor. Having described a sense of being ‘dragged down’ by such idleness, Hannah entered into, what she termed, the “business” of selling drugs, and consequently found herself heavily immersed into a lifestyle of use and crime and estranged from her partner and their children. For Hannah, whose identity and role of ‘mother’ were apparently not sufficient to deter her defection into crime, this ‘business’ offered a means of financial independence, an avenue for social interaction, and a venture to which she could direct her idle time and fallow efforts.

Yet despite this pre-incarceration dalliance, Hannah described a much more optimistic state of affairs post-incarceration, revealing that she had disassociated herself from past criminal associations, immersed herself into a new group of prosocial friends, and even reunited with her estranged partner and began the process of ‘getting her family back together’. Of her success following release, Hannah accredited, with particular priority, her newfound vocational direction as a cook, having secured full-time work in a restaurant resulting from a placement that she participated in during her incarceration at Boronia. Speaking of its importance in her ‘successful’ reintegration she said: “I’ve found something

I'm happy doing and that's the main thing. I think that's the most important thing – having something to do with your time”.

For Hannah, this new opportunity to direct her efforts toward an alternatively conventional and prosocial venture played a significant organising role in her life following prison. Not only did her employment act to constructively occupy her time while also presenting an opportunity to make new friends, thereby assisting in her removal from former antisocial roles and associations, her success in her new prosocial identity as a ‘full-time employee’, ‘cook’, and an upcoming ‘apprentice’, also acted as a significant marker, both to herself and to others, of her ability to transform and ‘turn her life around’ following prison. As various studies have highlighted (for example Hanrahan et al., 2005; Hinton, 2004; Nelson et al., 1999; O’Brien, 2001a) confidence and self-efficacy in one’s ability to change and succeed after release are major factors influencing the reintegration process, inspiring the motivation required to overcome the challenges of reentry.

Kelly, another mother, who, unlike Hannah, at nearly three months post-release was still unable to secure employment, similarly discussed her views regarding its transformative potential in her post-release narratives. Like Hannah, she pinpointed the interrelating impact of ‘idle time’ and peer influence as the significant cause of her pre-incarceration drug-involvement and related troubles, stating: “My problem is my friends – they’ve got too much. So if you go there and hang around then you’re gonna have something. That and ... I just didn’t really have anything else to do with my time”. Explaining her subsequent personal position on the need for, and importance of, an availability of custodial training and employment courses, and post-release employment support, Kelly emphasised the role that employment can play not only as a necessary constructive use of time, but also as a crucial means of self-improvement, lending to arguments of improved emotional and psychological health, self-worth and esteem:

[You need to be] actually doing something instead of just, you know, being available to [your] mates. You know, during the day. I’d rather be doing something constructive than just: ‘Oh what are you doing?’ / ‘Oh fuck all.’ / ‘Oh you know do you wanna do this?’ / ‘Oh yeah, might as well’ – and get myself in the shit again. You ... definitely need ... something full-time. ... And it’s something that’s going to make you feel better as well. – Kelly

Jessica, the only other woman (apart from Hannah) within the sample who was employed at the time of the interviews, concurred with Kelly’s opinions regarding employment support, suggesting: “Someone to help them get a job would probably be the number one thing. You just need something to do. If you don’t have anything to do you’ll get

yourself in trouble”. For Jessica, single, without children, and with a long history of incarceration, her success in securing employment this time round, was described as paramount to her perceived chances of, on this occasion, ‘making it on the outside’. Describing her long history of incarceration, release and failure on the outside, she said:

I’ve only ever been out of jail for like three months and stuff since 1997. Coz you get out of jail and then you just get into the same little rut that you were in before and you end up back in jail. ... Because I didn’t have a job. ... You get out, you’ve got no job and nothing to do and you just get into that rut. – Jessica

Although the complexities of women’s troubles cannot realistically be reduced to one ‘root cause’, such as unemployment, these women’s narratives nevertheless demonstrate the significant need for returning prisoners to be engaged in alternative prosocial activities. For some women, whether mothers or not, employment fills this function, occupying a significant role in “rebuilding self-esteem”, forming “attachment to a conventional lifestyle”, instilling “a sense of belonging in the community”, organising “daily behaviour and patterns of interaction”, and becoming, for many, “an important source of informal social control” (Visher et al., 2005, p. 295-6). This is particularly important for those who have experienced the institutionalising impact of imprisonment. As Jessica suggested, “You have a routine in jail. Then all of a sudden you’re outside and you don’t know what to do”. It is clear that in these circumstances, employment may have a key role to play in an ex-prisoner’s reintegration and personal transformation.

Other vocational or educational endeavours: Embracing the ‘ex-’ deviant identity

Employment as described above may help reduce the tarnish of an identity ‘spoiled’ through criminal conviction by presenting an opportunity to embrace a new prosocial role. However, research (for example Brown 1991a; 1991b; Christian et al., 2009; Giordano et al., 2002; Hughes, 2009; Proctor, 2009) has also documented the way in which ex-prisoners may alternatively embrace their deviant histories by creating what Brown (1991a; 2001b) calls an ‘ex-deviant counselling identity’. According to Brown (1991a, p. 219) “relinquishing the behaviours and lifestyles associated with a particular deviant career does not always imply total abandonment of a deviant identity”. Instead, Brown (1991a, p. 219) suggests an alternative conceptualization whereby “professionalizing rather than abandoning a deviant identity facilitates exiting deviance”. Individuals prescribing to this specific identity transformation process capitalize on their life experiences, including imprisonment, by

pursuing professional counselling careers upon their return to the community, and thus becoming, as Brown (1991a; 2001b) termed, a 'professional ex'. In line with this conceptualization, two women within the current sample described their aspirations to pursue careers in fields related to criminal justice, addiction, and mental health.

For Cassandra, it was her participation in addiction treatment and therapy that spurred her motivations toward an identity as a helper or counsellor. Her post-release involvement with NA was not only an invaluable source of social and emotional support upon release, it also became a major constituent in the formation of her post-release identity as what she proudly termed, a 'recovering addict'. As Giordano et al. (2002, p. 1035) similarly deduced in their exploration of 'hooks for change': "Treatment programs provide the actor with a well-developed linguistic and cognitive guide to the change process [and] also provide for more in the way of a replacement self that may be seen as superior to, or at least more socially acceptable than, the identities previously held". By embracing the identity of 'recovering addict', Cassandra was able to transform her stigmatised identities of, for instance, 'substance abuser', 'addict, and 'criminal', into something that she could instead draw strength from. Speaking of her success as an abstainer and the 'change-shaping' dynamics of her NA support group, Cassandra explained:

They get hope from people like me, when they see I've got just over a year clean and there's other women who have got five years clean, ten years clean, and we're all there just to help each other. So yeah that's really helpful. ... It just gives women hope, you know, that they can change. – Cassandra

For Cassandra, her motivation and ability to sustain personal change was facilitated by her perception of herself as a role model for change. According to Brown (1991a; 1991b), taking on this role, and in doing so, 'giving back to others', assists one to understand and affect the process of recovery, enhances a sense of usefulness and self-esteem, and reaffirms a fundamental desire to help others. In line with this, Cassandra, who was also currently enrolled at TAFE, reflected her desire to pursue a career in youth work, preventing youth, like herself, from becoming engaged in criminality and ending up in prison:

I'm studying at TAFE at the moment. I'm doing the Now Program. But I want to get into youth work. ... I know about being a teenager. I got involved with drugs when I was sixteen, mostly speed and heroin. My parents tried the tough love approach and sent me to rehab and everything. But I was just a little bitch and too hard-headed – no one could tell me anything. I wanna be able to help kids like me ... to support them in changing their way of life and educating themselves. So they don't end up where I did. – Cassandra

Like Cassandra, Jodie similarly expressed desires to pursue a career as a ‘professional ex’, embracing her history as an ex-prisoner, ex-addict and ex-victim:

I want to go back to school. ... Social work. I started a course when I was in there [prison]. Now I wanna do a course at TAFE, see where it takes me. I’ve always wanted to work at SARC [Sexual Assault Resource Centre] and help other people that have been through that, instead of taking the path that I went down, and help them avoid that. I’ve always wanted to do that and it became even clearer to me when I was nearing release. – Jodie

Given the empirical correlations between women’s victimization and subsequent criminality (Belknap, 2007; Proctor, 2009), it is, as highlighted by Proctor (2009, p. 15), “not surprising” that some women seek to “create an ex-deviant counselling identity that deals with the ways female criminality stems from previous victimization”. For Jodie, who had become heavily involved in drug use and dealing, it was her experience of imprisonment, as an opportunity for constructive change (discussed in Chapter five) and her subsequent participation in custodial education, that aroused a dormant interest in becoming a social worker for victimized women. As discussed in Chapter five, the role that education can play in the development of new identities and new self-perspectives that can assist in an ex-prisoner’s transformation, has been well documented (Hughes, 2009). For Jodie, her participation in custodial education provided her with the necessary confidence and self-belief in her ability on her chosen path to becoming a ‘professional ex’. Making a classic case for Brown’s (1991a; 1991b) conceptualization, Jodie explained the value of the experiences and vestiges of her (‘ex’-) deviant identity:

I take everything as an experience, even if it’s jail. And it sounds funny but especially for what I want to do. I take it all as a learning curve. ... Even if it’s a bad experience, I still learn from it. – Jodie

Taken together, these women’s narratives indicate the importance of developing positive self-perceptions, despite negative experiences of stigma associated with imprisonment and precursory behaviour. For some women, like Jodie and Cassandra, new positive outlooks may come in a form that embraces their deviant histories by allowing them the opportunity to become role models for change and advocates for prevention among those with similar experiences. For others, realignments in self-perspectives stem from the ability to renounce antisocial histories with the pursuit of paid employment and education, or immersion into a re-defined identity and role in motherhood. Whether women transformed their personal identities by re-evaluating pre-existing identities, forging new identities, or embracing the ‘ex-’ deviant identity, the common denominator is women’s need to assume an

alternative, desired and socially approved personal identity via means of prosocial pursuits following release from prison. These pursuits will not only act as substitutes and replacements for addiction or criminal behaviour, but also, represent avenues to new meanings and epistemologies through which an individual can compose a satisfying, conventional replacement self that is incompatible with continued deviance (Cloud & Granfield, 2004, Giordano et al., 2002), thus reinforcing immersion into conventional community life.

Conclusion

For women returning from prison, many with histories of crime entangled with drug and alcohol issues, their motivations, opportunities, and progress toward change and internal transformation go beyond simple individual will and determination. As the discussions in this chapter contend, the quality of the individual's post-release environments is also a critical determinant to their success. To summarise, this chapter's analysis of women's 'change' narratives reveals three key processes and aspects of the post-release social environment that women typically engage to support their recovery from addiction and desistance from crime. In line with previous literature these are: 1) disengagement from the negative aspects of their social backgrounds, particularly 'negative social capital' that facilitated crime and substance use in the past, 2) building 'positive social capital' with the development of healthy connections to family, friends or peer support groups, and 3) the pursuit of conventional activities that support the assumption of new prosocial roles and identities, particularly immersion into motherhood, employment or other vocational or educational endeavours.

Ideally, the action that women take in these three key areas of their post-release social environments work together to foster an immersion into meaningful social relations and a productive social life "that allow[s] them to live with the world as opposed to against and above it" (Cloud & Granfield, 2004, p. 200). To this end, the benefits of encouraging and supporting women's healthy connections in prosocial relationships and conventional social institutions cannot be overestimated. For women who are able to develop meaningful investments in these areas, particularly where these are viewed by the individual as rewarding and satisfying, these become a critical avenue from which they can draw hope and strength as they navigate release and attempt to break the habits that led them to prison. As Pinderhughes (1983, cited in O'Brien, 2001b, p. 27) asserted, "When the environment in which people live

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is nutritive, they flourish. There is a goodness-of-fit which facilitates growth, development, and realization of potential”.

Chapter nine

Discussions and conclusions: Supporting women after release

This research has sought to develop an intimate understanding of women's post-prison concerns and service needs, within the Western Australian setting. Drawing upon the narratives of eleven women in various stages of their transition into the Perth metropolitan community from the confines of prison, two outstanding and interrelated themes are evident. Firstly, following release there is a distinct need for women to develop a personal sense of *stability* within the community, including in particular, the establishment of safe, affordable and appropriate housing, financial security, the maintenance of sobriety, relational connection or reconnection, and immersion into prosocial pursuits. Secondly, in achieving such stability and, more importantly, maintaining it, there is a clear need for *support* for women, both in personal and non-personal terms. In discussing these key themes of stability and support, this chapter draws upon their meanings; reflecting upon the analysis of women's prison release narratives (Chapter's five, six, seven and eight), the contextual and theoretical understandings behind women's experiences of, and in, the criminal justice system (Chapter's two and three), and finally, the implications that these findings have regarding policy and practice.

Reflections: Making it on the outside and staying out

Prisoner reentry research commonly finds that returning prisoners are often confronted by a range of social, economic, physical and psychological problems that may become substantial impediments to leading crime-free lives (AIC, 2005; Ogilvie, 2001). Most commonly, these problems include unemployment and a lack of financial independence, problematic substance use and dependency, poverty and housing issues, as well as social isolation with poor supportive networks and difficulty with re-establishing relationships (Hanrahan et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 1999; Ross, 2005; Stephen et al., 2005). This research firmly upholds such findings, documenting the unstable and chaotic nature of women's pre and post incarceration lifestyles, typically marred by often severe social problems and deprivations that may contribute to their offending and/or re-offending behaviour.

However, in line with Nelson et al. (1999, executive summary), although the release period is clearly laden with problems and challenges, “it also offers an opportunity to capitalize on most people’s strong desire to turn their lives around”. As Chapter five revealed, either by means of deterrence, or in its service as a ‘rude awakening’, prison initiated and facilitated women’s desires for change. Women’s release narratives in this sense were often marked by discussions of internal transformations and new understandings provoked by the experience of imprisonment. Yet, although the point of release may represent a time when women are most ready and committed to change, it is also a time when women are precariously vulnerable and susceptible to their experiences of the outside world. Confronted with extreme hardship, women’s hopes and desires for constructive change and productive futures may wane. Even those who initially hold high expectations for change, and feel confident in their ability of post-release success, may later become frustrated and discouraged when their efforts are met with disappointment and difficulty. As McGrath (2000, p. 4) declared, “a woman whose life is in constant crisis ... finds it very hard, if not impossible, to be motivated”.

The need for a measure of stability in overcoming crisis following release is obvious. In particular, women in this research identified the acquisition of safe, stable and affordable housing as primary to the development of such stability. Generally accepted as a basic human need, and a crucial marker of social inclusion, stable and suitable housing is undoubtedly essential to the success of women making major life transitions, such as community reintegration following imprisonment or abstinence and recovery from long-term addiction. In providing a safe foundation from which to restructure their lives, suitable housing allows these women to look beyond ‘survival mode’ and become more future-oriented (Willis, 2004). In this way, the acquisition of suitable housing was also importantly perceived by women in this research as the major prerequisite to the realisation of other release goals. Most significantly, these were mothers’ reunification with their children, relapse prevention, and the need to avoid negative environments and associations, as well as obtaining employment, and building, rebuilding and sustaining positive relationships. Yet, as Chapter seven highlighted, most women’s experiences of housing, both prior to and following imprisonment, are characterised by transience or varying degrees of homelessness or unsuitable housing, and for those fortunate enough, being temporarily accommodated in crisis-care accommodation or with family or friends.

Adding to women’s socio-economic challenges within the post-release setting are issues associated with institutionalisation. As Chapter five highlighted, although

imprisonment may hold some transformative potential for some women, it can also be highly destructive (see, for example, Goffman, 1961). Imprisonment imposes upon its prisoners a physical and emotional isolation from their communities that can produce extreme disruption and social dislocation. Further, the authoritarian and controlling nature of the prison environment imposes passivity, fostering apathy and dependence, while its demoralising effects undermine women's self image and identity. In this way, imprisonment can act to compound conditions of economic and social distress and undermine rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

Given women's histories of entrenched disadvantage, along with the potential for imprisonment to compound these problems, this research has asserted that sustained change will need to be built upon more than the prisoner's simple desire or individual will and good intentions. Attention also needs to be paid to environmental factors (see, for example, Bui & Morash, 2010; Cloud & Granfield, 2004; Giordano et al., 2002), given that, in line with Cullen's (1994) social support theory, disempowering, unsafe, unstable, unsupportive, and resource-deficient settings may foster criminality and impede constructive change and personal transformation. As O'Brien (2001b, p. 126) similarly reflected on the importance of both internal and external events, "Although the process of transition ... may begin with the motivational strength of the woman herself, it is generated within an environment that actively promotes or discourages the process by virtue of the resources she can access along the way" (O'Brien, 2001b, p. 126).

With regard to women's need for positive, resource-sufficient environments, this research has firmly attested the criticality of 'social capital'; that is, the actual or potential resources linked to an individual's network relationships, including information, emotional support, and tangible material and financial assistance. Given the significance of relational connections in the lives of women specifically, as prescribed by Miller's (1976) relational theory of female development, the role of social capital in the success of a women's community reintegration is further emphasised. Yet, as Owen (2009, p. 120) highlighted, although "one of the most crucial elements required for women's successful reentry is social capital women offenders as a group experience the highest levels of capital deficits". In keeping with this notion, a majority of women in this research described their personal social support networks as either lacking, highly dysfunctional, or as what has been termed, 'negative social capital', whereby, as discussed in Chapter eight, women's social networks facilitate crime and substance use, rather than support their desistance and recovery.

Overall, in line with the ecological perspective, it is apparent that women possess both personal and social assets and deficits that impel or impede their reintegration. Within the sample there were two women in particular who appeared to be doing ‘most well’ – Cassandra and Hannah. In these women’s narratives, there was certain parity in factors that appeared to contribute to their success:

- For both women this was their first experience of imprisonment and both spoke of the experience as one of learning, realisation and growth, and particularly, as ‘a wake-up call’.
- Both were mothers and upon release had renewed priorities for the care and wellbeing of their children, and were supported in their reunification with their children.
- Both had a good personal support network in their immediate family-of-origin. Hannah also had reunited with the father of her children. Further, both were able to outsource support from community providers, where personal supports were not sufficient (in particular, the acquisition of Outcare’s crisis-care accommodation).
- Both had recognised the role that their associations with antisocial peers had in their drug-using and offending history and both made active commitments in avoiding these associations upon release.
- Both felt confident in their abilities regarding their sobriety and overcoming problems of addiction on the outside, primarily as a result of their ability to form a well rounded support structure.
- Finally, both were immersed in new pursuits (such as a new career, study, or commitment to peer support groups) that aided in the development of prosocial identities and presented opportunities for making new prosocial friends that would reinforce those identities.

Since no follow-up interviews were conducted – a limitation of this research that, among others, will be discussed in more detail later – there is no real way of knowing if Cassandra or Hannah continued their reintegrative success into the future. However, important inferences can still be made from their lived experiences of release, in their detailing of an array of personal and social resources that are likely to facilitate a woman’s possibilities for post-release ‘success’. To summarise, women, like Cassandra and Hannah, who had strong prosocial personal support networks, particularly family support; had the resourcefulness and ingenuity to make full use of available outside services, such as those provided by Outcare; were internally motivated; were committed to overcoming problems with substance use and addiction and other areas of self-improvement; and identified positive aspects of their post-prison lives, particularly new found dedications, goals, and aspirations such as improved relationships with family or significant others, or a focus on motherhood,

sobriety or vocation, were the women whose narratives conveyed the most positive outlooks regarding their futures.

On the other hand, women who lacked supportive networks, were less proactive in their pursuit of social support services, had more superficial levels of intrinsic motivation, remained susceptible to the pull of substance use and the influences of antisocial peers, and were focussed on the negative aspects of their post-prison lives, such as, for example, housing instability, financial issues, and separation from children, were women whose narratives portrayed deep turmoil and poor outlooks regarding their futures. It was typically these women who were also more likely to have been recidivists, portraying higher levels of institutionalisation and dependency, and more damaged identities, which Goffman (1961) suggested, may increase the likelihood of further recidivism. Though these women still expressed desires for change, their accounts often revealed that they did not feel supported in such change.

In line with Cloud and Granfield's research (2004), along with the analysis discussed in Chapter eight, these women's examples suggest that recovery and/or desistance typically involves "a process of becoming immersed in personal relationships and social activities that are rewarding and satisfying" (Cloud & Granfield, 2004, p. 200). Beyond such environmental factors however, it is clear that a woman's personal characteristics, including her motivation, her confidence, and her resilience, also play an important role in the change process. As Wolff and Draine (2004, p. 466) declared, "Having social capital is not the same as using it. Social capital is mobilized when the individual chooses (is willing) to activate its potential".

For both Cassandra and Hannah, the totality of their personal and social resources, in particular, their origins from prosocial families, along with their ability to maintain healthy relationships and form a well rounded support structure following release, provide clear advantages. As Giordano et al., (2002, p. 1021) suggested, "Individuals with such resources should be less likely than others to veer off the traditional path of conformity to begin with, but if they do, it should also be much easier for them, compared to their less-advantaged counterparts, to make a course correction". Importantly however, this research has confirmed that most women in prison do not have a strong personal network of prosocial and supportive relationships. In these situations, where a woman's efforts at post-prison adjustment cannot be supported by their personal relationships, social welfare services, supplied within the broader community, need to be available.

Implications: The need for ‘state capital’ in supporting women’s post-release efforts

Women in general need support – Sarah

In supporting women’s community reintegration following prison, the need for ‘state-sponsored’ or ‘community-delivered’ support services – what has been referred to as ‘state capital’ (see Holtfreter, Reisig, & Morash, 2004) – is a theme that has been strongly and constantly reflected throughout this thesis. With incarceration typically preceded by the chaos and instability of social deprivation and problems with addiction, along with deficits in personal social capital – problems which can be exacerbated by the disruption of imprisonment – all of the women in this research identified ‘support’ as the most crucial element to ‘making it on the outside’. Not only is the provision of post-release support justifiably necessary from a simple commonsense perspective, it is also a notion reflected strongly in prisoner reentry literature generally, as well as in various sociological and criminological theories, such as those discussed in this research, including social support theory (Cullen, 1994), social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Reisig et al., 2002), and the relational theory of female development (Miller, 1976).

Given that, as these theories mutually argue, an individual’s social environment is a key mediating factor in their pathway into crime, and also out of it, it seems obvious that a progressive approach to crime control should include efforts directed at ensuring prisoners are released into healthier, more stable environments, emphasising the importance of building the social capital of individuals and of the communities to which they return. As Cullen et al. (1999, p. 204) similarly suggested, “When ... communities are incapable of enmeshing people in supportive relations, crime will result. Part of any sensible response to crime must be to include public and private efforts to help others and build more supportive social arrangements”. As this research has shown, the availability of ‘public’ support in particular is especially important for women in transition from prison, with many otherwise facing a significant lack of personal social resources and potentially debilitating social isolation in their attempts to avoid a return to old criminal networks, and in the common deficit of any alternatively prosocial ones.

It is obvious that a failure to intervene in these cases will result in continued capital deficits that will thwart women’s reintegration following release. As such, this research upholds Reisig and others’ (2002, p. 182) argument that, “formal organizations, such as governmental social service agencies, need to be created to fill the void left by deteriorating

traditional social support structures". As their later research found, among poor women offenders specifically, providing such 'state-sponsored support' to address short-term needs, such as housing, reduces the odds of recidivism by 83% (Holtfreter et al., 2004, p. 201). Thus, attention to socio-economic conditions, housing, employment opportunities, and social welfare services, has an important role to play in shaping the post-release environment to support women's successful reintegration. After all, post-release 'success' for women in this research was centred on a multitude of life experiences including finding a home and a job, overcoming addiction, and achieving the self-sufficiency necessary to regain custody and take care of their children. Without some form of assistance in these areas, women's struggles with self-change and attempts to readapt (or adapt) to independent living following prison, may be invalidated, and the deterrent, transformative or rehabilitative value of the prison experience may be lost.

These important principles are, of course, reflected in the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services' documented commitment to the development and implementation of various custodial opportunities and throughcare and aftercare initiatives that seek to provide a continuum of care that can connect prisoners to their communities following release. As highlighted in Chapter six, such initiatives include the 2008/09 introduction of custodial-based 'transitional managers' in all Western Australian prisons, as well as the development of the throughcare-orientated Re-entry Link Program in 2004 (ATSISJC, 2005). There is also clear indication of the Department's support of non-government agencies in the provision of prisoner and ex-prisoner support, with Outcare – Western Australia's only specialist non-government provider of crime prevention services and programs – acknowledging the Department of Corrective Services as their key financial contributor, with \$3,398,747 allocated in 2011 (Outcare, 2011).

With women in this research primarily recruited from within Outcare's SJOG Women's Program, the value of such community-based social support services was continuously reflected throughout the interviews. Outcare's SJOG Women's Program allowed expanded opportunity to many of the women, as they faced the challenges involved with reengaging in community life. Described as "really helpful", "really fantastic", "just brilliant", "bloody good", and even "life-saving", Outcare was heralded by these women as a crucial resource of both practical assistance and emotional support. In particular, the women's program, funded by the Sisters of St John of God, was critical to many women's acquisition of immediate housing, in the availability of its short-term crisis-care accommodation. Unfortunately, with only seven units of accommodation available,

acquisition of this crucial resource has a lot to do with luck and timing, and, with a maximum lease period of three months, it presents only a temporary solution. Nevertheless, Chapter seven revealed, without this assistance, many of these women would have faced potential homelessness upon release – a seemingly unacceptable reality.

Obviously Outcare was a crucial resource for these women, and for some, their only significant source of post-release support. The availability of such a service lends credit to “the significant contribution of the community sector’s role in the wellbeing of our State”, as declared by Premier Colin Barnett in the prelude of Outcare’s *2011 Annual Report*. Importantly however, despite the Australian and Western Australian Government’s apparent embracement of throughcare policies, this research often described women’s inconsistent and sometimes lacking experiences of custodial, transitional, or post-release support (see, in particular, Chapter six). Though most women had received such support via Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program, for some women, this contact was disappointingly and insufficiently the result of luck, word-of-mouth, coincidence, or a chance meeting, rather than a concerted government effort at throughcare initiatives. In fact, women who had multiple experiences of imprisonment, revealed that prior to their current contact with Outcare, they had never known of the service’s existence despite its need. Further, one woman, Susan, the only participant recruited outside of the SJOG Women’s Program via snowballing method, had received no transitional or post-release support of any kind, experiencing significant hardship following release.

It seems more is needed to link individuals to crucial not-for-profit organisations such as Outcare, and clearly, the need for more structured release efforts within the correctional process remains. As Chapter six highlighted, such structured release efforts need to go beyond the ‘disconnected’ delivery of information regarding potentially available social resources at the point of release. Such an approach overlooks women’s needs for relational connection in their styles of communication and development (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Miller, 1976), and also ignores the emotional complexity of the release period, whereby elation, anxiety or bewilderment experienced with the reinstatement of ‘free world’ living may complicate women’s self-determined post-release help-seeking behaviour. What women in this research valued was the relational aspect to the case management approach; to be treated, as one woman described, as a ‘human being’, and to experience ‘caring’. In this sense, many women revered their relationships with their Outcare caseworkers as a resource of crucial practical assistance, but also as a form of emotional support; a valuable combination. Such ‘mutual, empathic and empowering relationships’ may make all the

difference to women who might otherwise be alone; acting to validate their struggles and give them the belief and energy to sustain a new direction in a life without crime. Without this supportive relationship, it may be as one woman simply expressed: “[If] no one [cares] ... why should I?” (Kelly). As Miller (1976, p. 90) similarly suggested of the importance of ‘others’: “Alone, her being and her doing do not have their full meaning; she becomes dry, empty, devoid of good feeling” – a frame of mind that is obviously not conducive to creating change in their lives.

Recommendations: Supporting the successful reintegration of female ex-prisoners

Ultimately what this research stresses, is firstly, the availability of a range of comprehensive supports for women returning to the wider community following prison, and secondly, the provision of services which act to connect women to such available supports as a process of the criminal justice system, to ensure that women do not ‘slip through the cracks’ – as at least one woman in this research did. The Western Australian Department of Corrective Services’ Re-entry Link Program amicably promises these objectives, yet it seems a gap still remains between policy and practice, with problems persisting at the grass roots level. In the absence of other transitional support, some women looked to parole to ‘bridge the gap’ between prison and resettlement within the ‘free world’. However, as discussed in Chapter six, due to the parole system’s unavoidable focus on surveillance over guidance and service provision, along with the fact that not all released prisoners are subject to parole supervision, alternative avenues of support are essential.

Regarding recommendations for such support, the data garnered from women within this research, reflects much of what is already known. Firstly, in line with throughcare principles, support for women that will necessarily assist their reestablishment within the wider community following prison, needs to begin in prison (Covington, 2007). As Chapter five deduced, prison provides an unparalleled opportunity for women to leave the chaos of their pre-prison lives behind them and focus on self-development. With women recognising the importance of addressing problems with substance use and other underlying disadvantage, including, unemployment, poor education, physical and mental health issues, victimisation and other trauma, it is essential that custodial opportunities targeting these areas are available to all women. This is especially important given that many prisoners clearly desire to improve their lives. Also, with a majority of prisoners serving short prison sentences resulting

from what are essentially “social and systemic problems” (Baldry et al., 2006, p. 30), prison regimes must tend towards re-insertion and reintegration into society, encouraging the prisoner’s acquisition of new skills and tools that would improve their life circumstances, and emphasising the prisoner’s continuing part of the community rather than their exclusion from it. As Covington (2007) suggested, release preparation and planning must begin as soon as women begin serving their sentences, and appropriate transitional services need to be available to assist women’s progression from the alienated and dependent custodial status to an ideally connected and independent status within the community.

Secondly, given the multiple disadvantages that women experience, and the complex challenges that they face upon release, it is essential that transitional and aftercare support programs and services for women are female-focussed, integrated, and comprehensive. As Baldry and others (2006, p. 30) found, simply addressing one problem in isolation of others is “unhelpful”, and as suggested by Willis (2004, p. 46), “will probably fail to make a long-term impact on recidivism”. With ‘poverty status’ identified as a “powerful predictor of recidivism” (Holtfreter et al., 2004, p. 198), it is also important that those women experiencing the highest capital deficits are identified and social resources are directed to address both the individual and environmental causes of economic marginalization among these women.

Furthermore, recognising that criminal justice agencies alone will not be able to meet the wide-ranging resettlement needs of returning prisoners, effective multiagency collaboration and partnership is necessary (Penfold et al., 2009). In particular, given the current climate of increasing private housing costs, it is essential that social and public housing authorities and other providers work effectively together with criminal justice agencies to support returning prisoners in a continuum from dependant, institutional care, through emergency and transitional accommodation, to self-sustained housing and independent living (Penfold et al., 2009; Willis, 2004). After all, as women in this research universally expressed, the acquisition of an independent, safe and secure home represents the foundation from which returning prisoners can access possibilities for positive experiences of constructive change, personal development and reintegrative success.

Finally, given the role of healthy connections in a woman’s emotional growth, self-healing, and success at constructive change, it is important that support initiatives for women, both in prison and after release, recognise and attend to their distinct relational needs. With family connectedness identified as a significant contributor to post-release success (Nelson et al., 1999), it is important that programs and services do not overlook this crucial resource.

For those women who do have prosocial and supportive families, efforts should be directed at preserving these relationships by minimising damage and deterioration that can come from imprisonment (Martinez, 2009; Mills & Codd, 2008; Wolff & Draine, 2004). Interventions should also identify and incorporate supportive family members (and other supportive individuals) and build upon the unique strengths of these relationships, through, for example, interpersonal skills building and social opportunities (Martinez, 2009; Wolff & Draine, 2004). Such initiatives are especially important considering formal programs cannot entirely parallel the dynamics of family support (Martinez, 2009), which beyond material aid, can offer company and affection, and a source of informal social control as highlighted in Chapter eight.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that preserving family and other personal network connections is not unconditionally appropriate (Wolff & Draine, 2004). As discussed in Chapter eight, in cases where such networks constitute ‘negative social capital’, disengagement rather than preservation is essential to success in constructive change and internal transformation. Further, some prisoners simply do not have any family support to draw upon. Among these individuals, building social capital that will support desired change and surmount their significant vulnerabilities to isolation and alienation is essential. As Covington (2007, p. 16) declared, “Having a sense of connection with others ... is essential for continuous, long-term recovery”.

Thus, for prisoners who do not have the support of prosocial families and other personal networks (and even for those who do), efforts should be directed at encouraging their voluntary connection to appropriate peer support groups, with women in this research emphasising their change-shaping potential as an unmatched source of understanding, acceptance, advice, and motivation within a relational context. Furthermore, female-specific programs and services should also emphasise effective case management, where, as indicated above, and similarly articulated by Walters and others (2007), the casework relationship can act to ‘tip the balance’ toward behaviour change, particularly within a supportive rather than corrective approach, based on the strengths or empowerment model as highlighted in Chapter three. As van Wormer and Boes (1998, p. 5) said of the strengths perspective in social work, “Sometimes [this] ... one supportive relationship ... can offer a turning point in a life of crime”.

Limitations, reservations and future directions

In interpreting the findings of this research certain reservations must be considered. Firstly, in discussing opportunities for, and impediments to, post-release ‘success’, this research has relied upon data compiled from one-off interviews. The lack of follow-up means that although this research discusses success, it cannot confirm such success in the long-term, nor can it determine any lasting impact of service provision despite its focus on Outcare’s SJOG Women’s Program. Also, with a rather small sample size, consisting of eleven participants primarily recruited from within one very small, specific program, the generalisability of the information garnered is obviously limited. Though, as highlighted in Chapter four, it is by virtue of this small sample size that that has allowed for an intimate and in depth understanding of these women’s experiences of prison release, it should be recognised that the sample may not be wholly representative of the wider female prison population. In particular, the sample is primarily restricted to help-seekers, and more specifically, to those who have successfully sought support from within the SJOG Women’s Program (with Susan being the one exception). As such, these participants are typically characterised by deficits in personal support networks given their help-seeking status, and by often extreme need and instability, particularly regarding housing, with crisis accommodation being one of the primary services of the program, and one of the primary motivations for women in this research connecting with Outcare.

Unlike the women in the current sample, there will be those returning prisoners among the wider population who do have personal support and stability, requiring minimal, if any, intervention. But there will also be those women who have none of these personal resources, and who, like Susan, will fail to connect with crucial services like Outcare. In this sense, the sample studied here might be viewed as ‘the lucky ones’ – having acquired necessary support in the face of otherwise extreme hardship. There are also those among the sample who may be viewed as somewhat unique in their capacity to locate such support. Further, in their voluntary application for such services, it can be seen that these women were also likely to have reached a point in their lives where they had made a conscious decision to make positive changes. Unfortunately, this is not the case for all female offenders leaving prison, with others remaining complacent in their lifestyles of drug use and crime. With each of these factors, certain bias can be established within the sample selection. Nonetheless, with many themes identified in the interviews being consistent with the available literature and current statistics, it is apparent that there is something of value to be

learned from these women's narratives. As these discussions have shown, not only do they offer a unique and richly textured perspective concerning this often 'unseen' population, these narratives also provide indications for the improvement of gender-responsive strategies that may facilitate more successful integration of female prisoners into the wider community, particularly among those experiencing disadvantage.

Despite these contributions however, the underrepresented Indigenous perspective within this research remains a noteworthy issue, as highlighted in Chapter four. With Indigenous women representing over 43% of the total female prison population in Western Australia (WA DCS, 2011, p. 33), the current research sample is, again, not representative, with only one participant identifying as Indigenous (9.1%). Speculative causes regarding the failure to engage a proportionate level of Indigenous women in this research include possible disinterest among Indigenous clients when approached by case managers or case workers regarding participation²⁴, as well as potential selection bias among case managers or case workers, who were most often the point of first contact in the recruitment process. However, Indigenous utilisation rates of voluntary support programs and services, such as the SJOG Women's Program, also represent an important contributing factor. According to Outcare's 2008 Annual Report (the same year that participant recruitment for this research began), only 31 clients were supported into the SJOG Women's Program crisis-care housing (Outcare, 2008). Of these, only eight were Indigenous (25.8%), depicting an underrepresentation of Indigenous women in the utilisation of these services. The contention that Indigenous people are generally underrepresented as clients of voluntary services is supported by other statistical data (HREOC, 1997), as well as anecdotal evidence suggesting that many Indigenous women (and men) are reluctant to use mainstream support services as they feel they do not meet their needs or understand their particular problems (ATSISJC, 2005; HREOC, 1997).

Ultimately, given the pervasive overrepresentation of Indigenous women in the prison system, along with their apparent underrepresentation in voluntary services that seek to promote prisoner reintegration, it is crucial that future research seeks to understand their specific cultural needs within prison and upon release. Though these issues have historically attracted little attention, given the smallness of the female Indigenous prison population in raw numbers, there has been increasingly available data indicating the depth and complexity of the problems underlying Indigenous women's contact with corrections. As highlighted in

²⁴ This however was never verified, and further, was not experienced personally, where, as noted in Chapter four, all of the women that I made personal contact with regarding participation (whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous), proceeded as participants.

Chapter two, Indigenous women face an unacceptably high risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, typically experiencing higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage within the community, as well as higher rates of recidivism among those in prison. These circumstances emphasise the need for future research to investigate the causes and conditions which place Indigenous women at risk of repeated imprisonment, in order to develop and support programs and services that may more appropriately address Indigenous women's needs in correctional systems.

Concluding remarks

In summary, as described by the women who participated in this research, the prison experience is often a contradictory one. On the one hand it can be destructive, demoralising and counterproductive to a woman's post-release success. Yet on the other, it also has significant deterrent, transformative and rehabilitative potential. If these positive aspects of the prison experience are to be capitalised on, women need to be supported in their community reintegration following release. In particular, a woman's success on the outside will balance on her ability to establish a measure of stability in her life; socially, economically, and individually. For women with histories of social problems, disadvantage and typically deficient personal support networks, it is essential that comprehensive and female-focussed throughcare programs and services ('state capital') are available to address critical short-term release needs, and provide opportunities for long-term self-sufficiency and sustainability.

If a woman is to be given the best chance to reintegrate within the wider community as a responsible, law-abiding and self-supporting citizen, she needs to be able to experience more than the struggle to 'keep her head above water', as one woman had described it. Women need to experience at least some form of gratification in legitimate occupational, social, and personal pursuits – to become immersed in healthy connections to prosocial relationships and conventional social institutions that are positive, rewarding and satisfying. Without the perception of such benefits, or the sentiment of 'having something to lose', it is unlikely that self-change will persist (Cloud & Granfield, 2004; Covington, 2002; Glaser, 1969), with initial motivations giving way to perceptions of futility, in the same vein as one woman, quoted by Garcia and others (1998, p. 266, cited in Covington, 2007, p. 10), who said: "Why fight if I have nothing?".

Post-release efforts, in this sense, need to support women's engagement in activities and relationships that can open up their horizons and offer them a future without crime. After all, behavioural change is "an incremental process that needs to be nurtured and supported over time" (McGrath, 2000, p. 3). Ultimately, since the State has the power to incarcerate – that is, to disrupt a person's life and isolate them in an institution that can corrupt personal autonomy and produce social dislocation, among other devastating effects – it should then also be responsible for their reintegration following release, replacing the alienation fostered within the prison walls, with a greater sense of relationship in community connection. As the old adage goes, 'with great power comes great responsibility'. By addressing the problems of release and assisting prisoners to re-establish themselves within wider society, the availability of state-sponsored programs and services has the potential to improve the life circumstances of the individual offender, and also assist in reducing recidivism and other social problems. In the end though, it is as Veysey, Martinez, and Christian (2009, p. 5) declared: "Only offenders can accomplish the changes necessary to become productive members of society. ... The most these organisations can do is create the environments and conditions in which change is most likely to occur". But, to not ensure these resources, potentially locks the many disadvantaged prisoners in the cycle of incarceration, re-offending, and re-incarceration.

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Appendix A

Research Participants Demographic and Background Information

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Marital status	Children	Highest level of education
Cassandra	27	Caucasian	Single	1	Year 10 - graduated
Rhiannon	37	Caucasian	Single	3	Year 10 - not graduated
Sarah	29	Caucasian	Single	2	Year 10 - not graduated
Jessica	49	Indigenous	Single	0	Year 10 - graduated
Brenda	29	Caucasian	Single	0	Year 9 - not graduated
Hannah	27	Caucasian	Partner	2	Year 11 - graduated
Susan	29	Caucasian	Defacto	2 and one on the way	Year 10 - graduated
Kelly	30	Caucasian	Partner	3	Year 12 - graduated, proceeded to TAFE
Cathy	46	Caucasian	Single	5 (3 adult)	Year 8 - not graduated
Jodie	33	Caucasian	Single	3	Year 11 - graduated
Louise	39	Caucasian	Partner, some estrangement	1	Year 11 - graduated

Continued...	Current employment / study	Current housing circumstances
Cassandra	Yes - Enrolled at TAFE 'Now Program'	Outcare (end of lease), moving into a friend's house that she will be house-sitting
Rhiannon	No - Not looking, on home detention	Outcare (start of lease)
Sarah	No - Looking	Outcare - Looking for stable, affordable housing
Jessica	Yes - Full-time	Outcare - Looking for stable, affordable housing
Brenda	No - Looking	Short-term stay at a hotel, no current prospect for longer-term accommodation
Hannah	Yes - Full-time	Just moved out of Outcare and in with her mum in a one-bedroom unit
Susan	No - Not looking, currently pregnant	Private shared rental
Kelly	No - Looking	Outcare - Looking for stable, affordable housing
Cathy	No - Looking	Outcare - Looking for stable, affordable housing
Jodie	No - Home duties, future study prospects	Outcare - Looking for stable, affordable housing
Louise	No - Looking	Outcare - Looking for stable, affordable housing

Continued...	Time served (months)	Release period	Previous contact with the CJS	Type of release
Cassandra	3.5	5.5 months	No	Rehab via Drug Court
Rhiannon	4	3 days	No	Home detention
Sarah	6	8 months	No	Unconditional
Jessica	30	3 months	Yes – multiple terms, spanning over 12 years	Unconditional
Brenda	3	2 weeks	Yes – multiple terms, spanning over 12 years	12 month ISO
Hannah	19.5	3 months	No	Parole
Susan	26	12 months	Yes – one other term in 2001 + juvenile detention	Unconditional
Kelly	3.5	2 months	No – juvenile detention only	Unconditional
Cathy	18	4 months	No	Parole
Jodie	7.5	3 weeks	No	Parole
Louise	3	2.5 months	Yes – three terms in total, first in 2007	Parole

Continued...	Offence (most recent)	Substance use and addiction issues	Family-of-origin
Cassandra	Drug-related	Heroin addiction / dependency, poly drug use	Prosocial and supportive
Rhiannon	Arson	Alcoholism	Disengaged or dysfunctional
Sarah	Burglary	Alcoholism	Disengaged or dysfunctional
Jessica	Drug-related	Heroin addiction / dependency	Disengaged or dysfunctional
Brenda	Assault	Heroin addiction / dependency	Disengaged or dysfunctional
Hannah	Aggravated armed robbery	Addiction / problematic use of amphetamine-type substances	Prosocial and supportive
Susan	Drug-related	Heroin addiction / dependency	Prosocial but strained
Kelly	Driving without a licence	Problematic / social use of amphetamine-type substances	Disengaged or dysfunctional
Cathy	Drug-related	Heroin addiction / dependency, poly drug use	Disengaged or dysfunctional
Jodie	Drug-related	Addiction / problematic use of amphetamine-type substances	Prosocial and supportive
Louise	Burglary	Addiction / problematic use of amphetamine-type substances	Prosocial but strained

Appendix B

Demographic and Background Data Questionnaire

Pseudonym _____ Age _____

Ethnic/cultural background

Caucasian Aboriginal Other _____

Education _____

Employment

Did you have a job prior to your imprisonment?

No Full-time Part-time
Casual Home duties Other _____

Do you have a job now?

No Full-time Part-time
Casual Home duties Other _____

If not, are you interested in getting a job / have you been looking?

Yes No

Accommodation / housing

Current living arrangements

How many times have you moved since you've been out?

Marital status

Are you currently in a relationship?

No Married Defacto Other _____

Has this relationship continued on from before you went to prison?

Yes No

Were you in a relationship before your imprisonment that has since ceased?

Yes No

Children

Do you have any children? How many children do you have?

How old are they?

Did they live with you prior to your imprisonment (dependant)?

Yes No

If so, who looked after them while you were in prison?

Do they live with you now?

Yes No

If not, who do they live with?

Do you plan to regain custody?

Yes No

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Criminal history / incarceration details:

Length of sentence _____

Length of time served _____

When were you released? _____

Prior to this sentence, have you previously been imprisoned?

Yes No Juvenile detention

Have you had any other contact with the CJS? _____

Type of release

Unconditional Parole Other _____

Release requirements (if any)? _____

Appendix C

Interview schedule: Women's prison release experiences

Research Question 1: What factors/circumstances prompt women to enter into relationships with support groups such as Outcare's SJOG Women's Program?

What was your experience of leaving prison?

(Possible cues):

- How prepared were you?
- Can you tell me about the day you left prison? What was it like?
- Emotional experiences / feelings / stigma / self-efficacy / confidence to do well
- What was the most difficult aspect of returning from prison (adjustment – becoming independent, reintegration)?

Why did you decide to join the program?

- Previous experiences and/or hardships? First time in prison?
- Initially when you made contact with Outcare, what was the reason?
- How long have you been involved with Outcare?
- How did you find out about Outcare?

What would have happened if Outcare wasn't an option? (Significance of support v none)

Are you involved with any other support services? How important have they been to you?
Where do you think you'd be without this support?

What was your life like before prison?

- Housing, transport, employment, general lifestyle.
- Supportive networks growing up? (Abusive / negative v supportive relationships)
- What led to CJS involvement?

How has prison impacted / disrupted your life? Negative or positive?

So what are your plans now that you are out?

Research Question 2: What kinds of post-release problems do women face following release from prison and what kinds and combinations of services/support do they view as necessary or of any particular value in addressing these problems?

Release needs:

- What do you think are the most important needs of women following release from prison?
(Possible cues):
Challenges relating to:
 - paid **employment** / finances
 - other **social networks**, supporting relationships, negative/abusive relationships
 - **housing** – have you tried to find stable housing? What are the impediments?
 - **accessing relevant services** (Government agencies and staff such as the Department of Housing and Works, Centrelink)
 - **substance use** – Why did it become a problem? Did it contribute to your criminal activity? Did you ever seek help for it? Tell me about what happened.
 - **medical / mental health**
 - **children** (parenting / custody) – emotionally affected by separation?
 - **transport**

- What do you feel has been your biggest challenge since you have been released from prison? OR PHRASE IN THIRD PERSON: What do you feel can be one of the biggest challenges to other women leaving prison?

Personal supports:

- What support systems, if any, do you have to help you deal with this period of transition?
 - Do you currently have contact with your family / friends / partner? What about before / during prison?
 - What role has your family / friends / partner played in your life since you have been released from prison?
 - Do you still have the same friends that you had before your imprisonment? Have you found it difficult / is it a priority of your's to stay away from old friends who are still involved in drugs/crime? (moving away from 'using environments and relationships)
 - How valuable is your relationship with the caseworker? What about your caseworker... Was having her there for you important? How did she help: practically and emotionally? (importance of being female)

Service needs:

- What type of support do you think women need to make it on the outside and stay out?
- In regards to providing services for women, what do you think their most important needs are? What services need to be available?
- What other kinds of challenges do you think women need help with?

Research Question 3: What is the relevance, importance and value of the SJOG Women's Program to the women? (What are their views, experiences and expectations regarding the support they receive or do not receive? Overall, do the women perceive the program as meeting their needs upon release from prison?)

Program issues:

- How has the program helped you? What types of things has the program helped you with? Have there been any improvements in your personal circumstances as a result of joining the SJOG Women's Program?
 - Did the program help you with:
 - Current accommodation?
 - Financially?
 - Current or future employment or education?
 - Connecting you with services?
 - Substance use?
 - Medical and/or mental health issues?
 - Developing positive social networks / improving partnership relationships?
 - Parenting / child custody?
- What were your general expectations of the program?
- Did the program meet your expectations / needs?
- What are the positive / negative aspects of the program (regarding approach and delivery)?
- Do you have any suggestions for changes or additional support services that you feel would be helpful to yourself or women in general?

Conclusions:

- Interview summary:
 1. What services need to be available to women after prison, and
 2. How important the availability of such services is to those women.
- Is there anything else you'd like to share regarding prison release or whatever else?
- How was the interview?
- Why did you decide to participate?