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**Societal reintegration experiences of women with judicial sentences
participating in a re-entry program in Norway– from wrongdoings to
wellbeing**

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Abstract

Keywords: Women offenders, Salutogenesis, Generalized Resistance Resources, Well-being, Coping

Women offenders are among the most marginalized groups in Norway. Their situations are characterized by a cluster of difficulties, including substance use, physical and sexual abuse, psychological problems, along with stigma and challenges related to being a sentenced offender. Despite this, some of these women are able to change their lives for the better and strives towards well-being and the ability to lead a meaningful life. However, very little research has been done on capturing the processes and factors that enables this positive change and movement towards enhanced well-being. This study uses the salutogenic framework to illuminate Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs) and positive life experiences among women offenders.

This is a qualitative study, with data collected in five in-depth interviews with women offenders who were making good progression with re-entry into the community, and one group interview with four program employees from an offenders' support project.

There are several aspects of these women's lives that contribute to a positive development towards wellbeing. These factors are related to personal strengths, social resources and support, appropriate services and treatment, opportunities for meaningful activities, and reflection. The study concludes that it is possible to identify GRRs in the context of the salutogenic model that seems to help the women move towards enhanced wellbeing. This approach provides insights that more traditional studies on recidivism and desistance is not able to give.

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1.0 Introduction

Female offenders are among the most marginalized groups in the Norwegian society. They are a minority in the prison population and suffer from a cluster of challenges related to substance use problems, histories of abuse and mental health issues (1).

In this study I will use the salutogenic framework to illuminate Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs) and positive life experiences among female offenders as revealed in the experiences of two groups: (1) re-entry program staff, and (2) women with judicial sentences.

1.1 Background and purpose

In 2003, 7,489 persons were released from Norwegian prisons, and after three years 25 percent were re-incarcerated (2). This means that a great number of people every year re-enter their communities after spending time in prison, involving challenges both for the individuals themselves, and for their families and surrounding communities. People who have experienced incarceration are among the most vulnerable groups in our society, facing big challenges in the attempt to re-integrate into society. (3) “... *An individual’s transition from prison back into a home and into a community is difficult, and avoiding crime can be the least of his or her problems.*” (3 p.89) Substance abuse and problems with finding employment may be serious obstacles in the way of a successful reintegration process (4).

Among the individuals released from Norwegian prisons in 2003, only 8 percent were women (2). Being a minority of the prison population, the needs of these women are often neglected, leading to additional challenges. (5)

There is evidence of clear gender differences in re-entry experiences that stresses the multiple needs of women exiting prison (1,5,6). Research shows however that work aimed at facilitating successful re-entry not only should be gender specific, but also culture specific (7). The majority of research being done on the subject is from the U.S. (5,7,8) and therefore lacks the cultural context needed for relevance in Norway. Thus, there is a need for more research on women experiencing re-entry in Norway.

A lot of research has been done on the processes that lead to deviance and crime, (9) and on how to prevent recidivism (3). Research has also been done on coping strategies in prison, however often focusing on the lack of efficient coping skills. (10,11) Less attention seems to have been given to those “doing well” upon release and how people “*maintain a life without crime for a long period*” (9 p.2). As O’Brien and Lee have put it:

“In spite of the multiple and complex problems associated with re-entry, there is a percentage of women who, against the odds, successfully address the array of issues that in many cases contributed to their criminal involvement, and slowly but surely regain their sense of identity and place in reconstructed lives.” (5 p.263)

According to O’Brien effective coping strategies, a sense of self-efficacy and accessible resources are all in play to facilitate successful re-entry and thriving despite poor and stressful circumstances (8).

With this study, my aim is to build further on this research and fill some of the gap in the literature presented here by studying female offenders in a Norwegian setting that seem to be coping. I will explore which factors and processes that are emphasized by women who have been incarcerated or on probation in their stories about how to cope. Also, the aim is to explore the appropriateness of a health promoting approach and salutogenic theory in studying and working with these women. Female offenders are in this study understood as women charged with an offence, leading to a prison- or probation sentence.

The research site for this study is a local re-entry program initiated by correctional services and a private centre for job training. According to the program description, the aim of the re-entry program is to safeguard women’s interests and contribute to improve quality of life before, under and after sentences. There is evidence showing the importance for comprehensive services for women released from prison. These programmes should build linkages with other services, be gender specific and facilitate a sense of stability and predictability through long-term support (7,12). The local programme in this study aims to meet all of these criteria. It is therefore reasonable to

believe that a long-term participation in the programme, without facing any new charges, is an indicator of coping.

Findings from this study will contribute to deeper insight into the experiences of female offenders and also to a better understanding of the salutogenic model, the theoretical framework of this study. The study will also provide knowledge for program workers and developers, which could enable them to improve their work to better meet the needs of and take advantage of the strengths of their clients.

1.2 Overall objective

To study the role of general resistance resources (GRRs) and positive life experiences in contributing to wellbeing among female offenders participating in a local re-entry program.

1.3 Research questions

How do female offenders and program staffs define wellbeing?

To what factors do female offenders and program staffs attribute their recent positive life changes?

What are the specific GRRs/GRDs held/used by the women in the study?

To what degree is the theory of salutogenesis an appropriate framework when studying and working with female offenders?

2.0 Literature Review

2.2 Health Promotion

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health promotion as *“the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health.”* in the Ottawa Charter from 1986 (13, p.1). During the 1970s, people recognized the limitations of a health policy confined to the clinical and medical services, and saw the link between poor health and poverty. There was a raising awareness of the responsibility of both the

individual and the government in relation to health (14). The Ottawa Charter extended the concept of health promotion to include all forms of social and political changes that was aimed at promoting the health of people (15). The charter proposed five key areas of action in health promotion; healthy public policies, developing personal skills, supportive environments, community action, and reorientation of health services (13). Health promotion thus *“represents a mediating strategy between people and their environments, combining personal choice with social responsibility for health to create a healthier future.”* (16, p.114)

In health promotion, health is often defined both as a resource, *“which gives people the strength to function and resilience to face the challenges one are exposed to through life”* (15, p.25) but also as a positive conception close to the concept of well-being (15). Both of these ways of defining health is in contrast with the more traditional biomedical, or negative, understanding of health as the *“absence of disease”* (15). The definition of health as well-being is clearly stated in the World Health Organization’s Ottawa Charter where health is defined as *“complete physical, mental and social well-being”* (13, p.1). Without a doubt, this definition has been criticized for representing a utopia that is too comprehensive and unattainable (15–17). The important contribution of this definition is however that health is now seen as a positive construct in itself, it has several dimensions (physical, mental and social) and can therefore be experienced despite of disease and illness (15).

Because of the contested views on what health really is, it is often appropriate to concentrate on the concept of well-being when discussing or studying the positive aspects of health. According to OECD well-being requires *“meeting various human needs (...) as well as the ability to pursue one’s goals, to thrive and feel satisfied with their life.”* (18, p.18) Nutbeam defines it as

“A subjective assessment of health which is less concerned with biological function than with feelings such as self esteem, and a sense of belonging through social integration. (...) Like the term positive health, well-being has much to do with achieving human potential physically, emotionally and socially.” (16, p.126)

It is this last definition of wellbeing by Nutbeam I will use as a base for my understanding of the concept in this study.

In the Ottawa Charter, WHO states that: *“Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love.”* (13, p.3) By this, the WHO recognizes health as a social investment and the need to *“address the overall ecological issue of our ways of living.”* (13, p.4) This ecological model of health promotion recognizes the complex interplay of environmental, organizational and personal factors determining health (19,20). According to Reidpath (21), the focus on these more distal determinants for health makes us *“invited to look beyond the individual and think about how we structure our societies and whether that is good for our health.”* (21, p.21)

2.2.1 Social health inequities

Determinants for health are often mentioned in the same context as health inequities. This is mostly because risk factors on different levels tend to cluster together and disproportionately affect certain groups of people (e.g. women offenders) leading to inequities in health (22).

The tendency that people from different groups will have different probabilities in dying prematurely is what the health promotion literature conceptualize as ‘health inequity’ (14,23). Inequity differs from inequality in that while inequality simply means lack of uniformity or difference (14), inequity has a moral and ethical dimension (23). As Whitehead puts it: *“It [inequity] refers to differences which are unnecessary and avoidable but, in addition, are also considered unfair and unjust.”* (23, p.219) While inequality in health is related to the simple fact that people are different, health inequity is due to systematic social injustice that can be avoided (24).

2.2.2 Health promotion and the correctional system

According to Mittelmark, the current emphasis in health promotion practice on tackling inequities and addressing social inclusion makes prisons important settings for promoting health (24). Within the last 25 years, the idea of a prison setting for health promotion has taken root and spread (14). A central part of this development is when the World Health Organization (WHO) started the Health in Prisons Project (HIPP) in 1995. HIPP is a European network working for better health in prisons and the establishment of prisons as a setting for health promotion practice (25). It is mentioned as the only real consensus on what health-promoting prisons do, but criticized for having an individualistic and reactive disease-oriented risk reduction/prevention approach (26). This is in clear

contrast with the description of the settings approach in health promotion as oriented towards changing the whole environment, as mentioned in the introduction. Broad health promoting activities in prisons could impact, not only the prison population, but also the deprived families and communities of prisoners, and prison staff (14). Prisons are therefore not only appropriate settings for promoting the health of offenders, but could also contribute to promoting the general public health (25).

Though important, promoting health in institutions like prisons could be viewed as a contradiction. As de Viggiani writes: “*as agencies of disempowerment and deprivation, prisons epitomise the antithesis of a healthy setting*” (27, p.115). This implies that there is a culture and organizational characteristic in prisons that in itself is health damaging, and it is therefore reasonable to believe that to change the health status in these places, there are more needed than just better health care facilities. This is also acknowledged by Gatherer et al. who describe prisons as difficult to change because of traditions, circumstances, and public and political views (25). Prisoner health is to a great extent influenced by structural determinants related to the regime and structured environment of the prison (27). The depriving effect of the prison institution, with its regime and traditions, compounded with overcrowding has shown to reduce self esteem and self-efficacy, reduce motivation, and cause high levels of stress and an increased likelihood of risk (27). To create supportive environments and build healthy public policies are some activities that could promote health by changing these structural determinants of health (13,28).

2.3 Successful reintegration

“(…) Successful reintegration is conditionally defined as: the former inmate’s acceptance of adult role responsibilities according to her capabilities (…), the individual’s perceptions of acceptance by the community despite what is often a stigmatized status, and the woman’s sense of self-esteem or self-efficacy.” (29, p.23)

“Prisoner re-entry” is defined as “*the process of leaving prison and returning to free society*” (3 p.89). But research on prisoner re-entry does not necessarily include research on successful re-entry or reintegration, meaning “*the individual’s reconnection with the institutions of society*” (3, p.91). Research on prisoner re-entry tends to use recidivism as

the “measure of effectiveness” (3 p.105), neglecting the process of reintegration (3,30). For example, Phillips and Lindsay studied how individuals cope with re-entry with a sample only including previously incarcerated individuals who were back in prison. This allowed them to study coping deficits and how failing to use coping strategies in practice hindered successful re-entry. It did not, however, allow them to illuminate which coping strategies were used by those who did not return to prison (11). Coping strategies could be understood as the situation specific strategies and tools the participants have planned to use/actually used when facing stress. (31) Haggård et al stresses the complexity of the way out of criminal behaviour (32) and recently scholars have called for research on the causes of reintegration, and not only on the causes of recidivism (3,30,32,33). *“Although scholarship on women and reentry clarifies many factors impacting criminal outcome, an important question is whether and how such factors impact the process and outcome of reintegration.”* (30 p.211) Reintegration is thus related to the definition of well-being presented earlier where social integration was a central process to enhance an individual well-being.

2.3.1 Re-entry challenges

“Moving from prison, an institution of total control, to the often chaotic environment of modern life is a powerful transition poorly understood by the research community (...)” (3 p.107). When returning to society after spending time in prison an individual faces many challenges. These challenges could include unemployment, poor housing, substance abuse or mental health problems (6). In a study comparing the re-entry experiences of men and women, women had *“much higher rates of physical or sexual abuse, more serious drug problems, and increased anxiety or depression in the year after release, with increased use of mental health services.”* (6, p.1732-1733). To this list, Richie (2001) adds that women also face challenges with educational and employment services, housing, and reunification with family and children (7). A study on the Norwegian prison population shows that women inmates generally suffer from more severe drug abuse problems and are more marginalized than men (1,34). *“The situation of prison inmates is problematic as it is characterized by a clustering of problems. This clustering of problems is connected with the inmates’ childhood problems: the more childhood problems, the more problems as adults”* (34, p.5)

Some do, however, show positive changes in life after being released, for example by enrolling in educational programs, earning a legal income and reducing substance abuse problems (6). But as the challenges for women seems to differ, and in some cases be more severe from that of men, gender specific research is needed.

2.3.2 Causes of successful reintegration

In the literature, the concept of “*desistance*” is often used as an expression of “*the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending.*” (35 p.26) Research does however indicate that to desist from crime after being released from prison not necessarily equals successful reintegration. A study on high-risk male violent offenders who did not return to prison showed that their lives involved restraints and was characterized by isolation in order to avoid difficult situations (32). Although this could be defined as success if measured by recidivism or desistance, the question remains whether these men actually were reintegrated into society or whether they - in a way - moved from one prison to another. To solely rely on recidivism or desistance as a measure of success may therefore be insufficient. “*Measures of success should be based on positive accomplishments, not simply on the absence of negative findings.*” (29, p.18)

There are some studies done that have explored the factors leading to successful re-entry processes and social integration of formerly incarcerated women (8,30,36–38). At the individual level, determination for change, internal transformation and the ability to overcome obstacles are some of the crucial characteristics for successful reintegration (8,35,37,38). Additional individual factors shown to be important are spiritual belief (37) and being prepared for release (36). One of the most influential scholars on the subject, Shadd Maruna, argues that “*ex-offenders need a coherent and credible self-story to explain (...) how their checkered pasts could have led to their new, reformed identities.*” (35, p.7)

Social factors often relates to social support by family and friends (30,37), but also to the dissolving of negative relationships with people involved with crime and drug abuse (38). Support from parole officers and program workers also seem to have an impact, as well as the establishment of new positive relationships (8,30,37). Martinez (2009) found

that the perceptions of social support could in itself facilitate transformation and encourage positive behaviour (39).

It has also been observed that material factors like availability of housing and employment possibilities (8,37,38), as well as access to post-prison services (30) are important. National policies and laws are of course crucial as it determines which behaviours that are punished with a prison sentence (36). Zurhold (36) emphasises this and calls for “(...) *alternatives to imprisonment for minor and nonviolent offenses committed by women (...) to reduce both a destabilization of reintegration processes and the female prison population in general.*” (36 p.62) A full discussion on criminal law is beyond the scope of this proposal, but an understanding of its impact on the re-entry process is still important.

There are contested findings on whether participating in a drug abuse program in prison is related to successful re-entry (33,36), and length of sentences, number of times in prison and time period since release have not been shown to be related to success (36).

It does seem that O'Brien (8) is supported in her claim that “*the process of successful integration depends on both the woman's developing a sense of self-efficacy and her strategic use of family, correctional, and community resources.*” (8 p.294) In O'Brien's study the women did exactly this. Despite their many challenges they identified their internal strengths and possessed the ability to strategically use the resources around them (8). It is therefore important to enhance women's efforts to obtain needed resources and ensure that needed resources are available and accessible in the community (38).

2.3.3 Offender support programs

“Programs offered to women tend to be transplants of programs developed for male offenders, with little or no adaptation to the special needs and circumstances of women especially (...).” (40, p.390)

“The utility of routinely assisting women in identifying emotional and material needs, identifying available networks through which to meet these needs, and providing alternative individuals and groups when there are gaps.” (38 p.19)

Studies of successful reintegration emphasize the need for comprehensive programs that meet women's specific needs and that provide linkages to other services (7,8,30,37). Programs providing consistency and conscious-raising may help develop a woman's ability to take advantage of opportunities for change, as well as provide the resources needed in order to make the change possible (8,33,38). This is also evident in research conducted on Norwegian inmates. A larger study on the prison population in Norway concludes with a call for more comprehensive initiatives that facilitates experiences of control and coping among the inmates. The prisons' efforts should, according to this study, be seen in connection with both the formal and informal arenas outside of prison (34). Amundsen's study on female inmates in Norway concludes that the extensiveness and complexity of their issues calls for a more comprehensive empowerment-directed approach with a close follow-up both under and after imprisonment. She stresses that the goal should be to *"strengthen the women's belief that they can affect their own lives"* (1, p.36). According to her, prison inmates should *"not only be given the opportunity to participate, but also a full opportunity to define and plan short-term and long-term goals for their lives after prison."* (41, p.201) Women generally commit less severe offences and therefore serve milder sentences. Still, they tend to suffer from more severe challenges (1). The short sentence women usually get limits the possibilities of treatment programs in prison. Successful transitions in the lives of women offenders are therefore dependent on services also outside of the prison walls.

2.3.4 Further research

Although the field is highly dominated by research on men, the literature on previously incarcerated women is growing. As already mentioned, this is also a research field dominated by work conducted in the U.S. (36). The re-entry process is to a great degree dependent on political, structural and social factors, research in other cultural settings than in the U.S. is therefore needed.

In the search of literature, no research was found on prison or re-entry processes explicitly applying a salutogenic framework. Many studies however, take a positive approach consistent with the idea of salutogenesis. Still, there are reasons to believe that more research done in this field within the theoretical framework of salutogenesis would

be a contribution both to the research on previously incarcerated women, in addition to the field of salutogenesis itself.

2.4 Salutogenesis – the positive approach

The study of successful coping with serious stress, including successful rehabilitation following incarceration, may be guided by Antonovsky's salutogenic model.

2.4.1 the theory of Salutogenesis

In 1979 Aaron Antonovsky introduced the Salutogenic model in his book "Health, Stress and Coping." (Antonovsky, 1979 cited in 42, p.xi) This model represents an orientation focusing on "the origins of health" rather than the traditional pathogenic orientation focusing on the origins of illness. At the base of the Salutogenic model is the view that humans are always exposed to harms or stressors, as these are inevitable parts of life (42, p.130). The main question of interest to Antonovsky was therefore how so many people survive and do well despite experiencing high loads of stress. He attempted to solve this question by attributing the effects of stressors to the adequacy of an individual's tension management (42). Stressors are defined as: "*demands to which there are no readily available or automatic adaptive responses*" (Antonovsky, 1979 cited in 42, p.28) and creates a state of tension in the individual. The causes and processes of tension management were then mainly explained by Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs) and Sense of Coherence (SOC).

2.4.2 Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs)

GRRs could be understood as the individual, social or environmental factors that facilitates coping and provides the experiences needed to increase an individual's sense of coherence (43). Antonovsky defines GRRs as the "*property of a person, a collective or a situation which, as evidence or logic has indicated, facilitated successful coping with the inherent stressors of human existence.*" (43, p.15) These resources can hence be both intra-personal (e.g. optimism) and embedded in the social and physical environment (e.g. social support, good employment, safe environment). They are stable resources that the individual carry with them into situations. GRRs mediate the effects of stress and provide experiences of consistency, balance and ability to shape the outcome of different situations. When these experiences are being repeated, it builds up the SOC (42).

Generalized resistance deficiencies (GRDs), on the other hand, are negative resources (or lack of positive) that weaken a person's SOC.

2.4.3 Sense of Coherence (SOC)

Sense of coherence is an individual's ability to perceive the important areas of his/her life as *comprehensive*, *manageable* and *meaningful*, and thus increase the individual's chances of coping with difficult life challenges and move towards health and well-being (42). *Comprehensive* meaning that the stimuli one is confronted with makes cognitive sense instead of being chaotic and disordered; *manageable* in the sense that one has the resources needed to meet the demands posed by the stimuli; and *meaningful* in a way that life makes emotionally sense and that "*at least some of the problems and demands posed by living are worth investing in (...)*" (42, p.18). The degree of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in ones life thus adds up to an individual's sense of coherence.

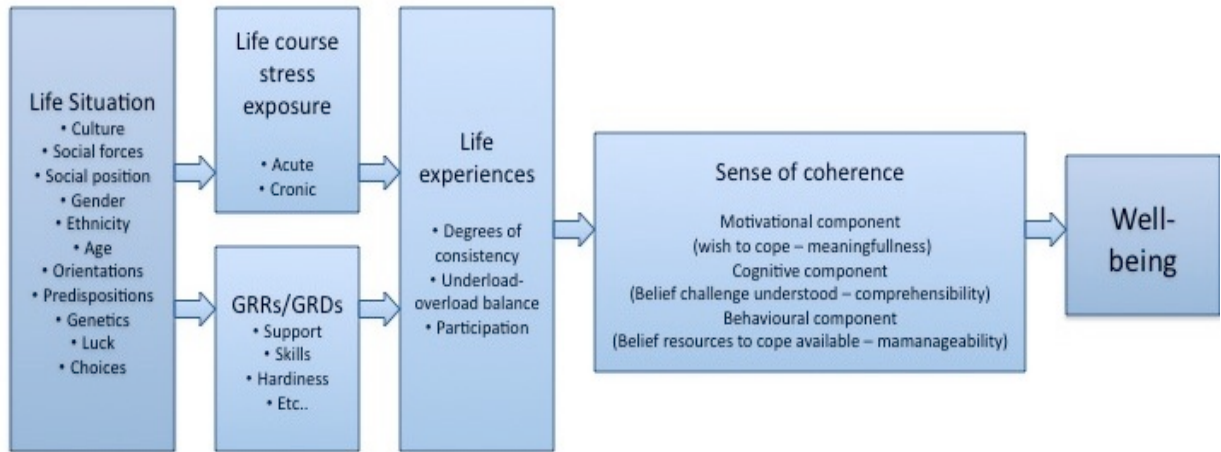
Individuals with high SOC will more likely define "*a stimulus as a nonstressor*" or a stressor as "*irrelevant or benign*". This is because they have a confidence in, and the experience that these things will work out well (42, p.133). What is important to note is that SOC not is a particular coping style, but rather an ability to understand which coping strategies and resources to use.

"What the person with a strong SOC does is to select the particular coping strategy that seems most appropriate to deal with the stressor being confronted. (...) He or she chooses from the repertoire of generalized and specific resistance resources at his or her disposal what seems to be the most appropriate combination." (42, p.138)

There is hence a "*distinction between a resistance resource as a potential asset and the actual mobilization and utilization of a resource.*" (42, p.138) There is also, as mentioned, a distinction between generalized and specific resistance resources. A GRR is a property that helps combating and making sense out of a wide range of stressors, and is more stable than a resource used for a specific purpose in a specific setting or situation (42,43).

A person with a high SOC is then according to Antonovsky (42) “*more likely to be capable of introducing order and meaning into the situation*” and have a “*willingness to confront*” (p.137) the stressors and therefore be more likely to experience successful coping. This way, he argues, the strength of one’s SOC is a “*significant factor in facilitating the movement toward health.*” (43, p.15)

Figure 1 (44)



Based on the work by Antonovsky, professor Maurice Mittelmark (44) developed this, yet to be published, model of the theory of salutogenesis [Figure 1]. Here it is easy to see how GRRs, despite exposure to stress may contribute to life experiences that increase the SOC, which then again makes the individual able to move towards health. What may be missing is an arrow from SOC back to 'life experiences', as it may seem like a higher sense of coherence enables a person to view life experiences as positive challenges that then again would be allowed to increase that person’s sense of coherence. This could help emphasize the circularity or the interactions that probably characterizes these processes.

2.4.4 Relevance of theory to thesis

In this study I adopted the theory of Salutogenesis as a guide for the development of the research questions and interview guide. It was also the framework for analysis after the collection of the data was completed. The literature review indicates that both the resources available along with the ability to use them and the appropriate coping strategies are crucial for a successful re-entry. The interviews illuminates some of the GRRs and strategies held or used by the participants in addition to the importance of

SOC. The theoretical framework provided the toolbox needed in order to categorize and make sense of the data collected.

It may be argued that this project not actually is in line with the original theory and thoughts of Antonovsky. This is because despite what one might think, Antonovsky did to a high degree see the movement towards health as the movement towards absence of disease. Positive ends, like happiness or quality of life, were therefore never a part of his model (42). Offender well-being as a goal in itself is hence quite different from the health ease/dis-ease continuum applied by Antonovsky (42). However, Antonovsky seemed aware that other people would be interested in other constructs and areas of health than him. He also encouraged a development and discussion on the origins of health and the theory of salutogenesis (42). In 1994 he proposed the theory as a “*basis, the springboard, for the development of a theory which can be exploited by the field of health promotion.*” (43, p.14) This opens for a development of the theory by health promotion researchers.

Antonovsky also drew the link between SOC, GRRs and social health inequalities, where social class and the level of SOC of one’s parents to a high degree determines the GRRs and set of life experiences one is exposed to, and thus determines one’s “*location on the SOC continuum*” (42, p.91). It could therefore be argued that to work with sentenced women’s social position and sense of coherence may also increase the sense of coherence and movement towards health for their children, accordingly with Antonovsky’s theory. This would then be an important contribution to the work of health promotion in reducing health inequities.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach employing both one-on-one and focus group interviews. “*Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.*” (45, p.4) Qualitative methods are especially useful for issues where little

research has previously been done and where the aim is to achieve an increased understanding of the perceptions and experiences of a certain group (45).

Phenomenology is a method of inquiry in qualitative research that focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals and aim at understanding their deeper meaning. The phenomenon is being studied through the perspective of the participants and the context is described based on their experiences (46). The phenomenological approach allows me to identify and understand the participants' lived experiences in relation to the phenomenon in question (45).

3.2 Participants

Participants included both previously incarcerated women, women on probation and employees of a local re-entry program.

Participants were recruited based on strategy and convenience. Strategic sampling involves recruiting informants that hold certain characteristics that are strategic in relation to the research objective (46). In this case that would mean women who had been in contact with the correctional system, and employees of a re-entry program.

Convenience sampling is often used in qualitative studies concerning personal and sensitive issues. In these cases it may be difficult to find people willing to participate in interviews, willingness therefore becomes an important selection factor (46). This is highly relevant for this particular study as it concerns a group that may be faced with a lot of stigma and an issue that is quite personal and sensitive. Recruiting based on convenience may be criticized for only attracting individuals who to a higher degree than their general group feel like they are coping. This could lead to a sampling bias where those in the population that suffer the most are being excluded (46). In this study, however, where the aim is to investigate factors of success, this bias could therefore perhaps not be seen as a bias, but rather an additional strategic sampling strategy. This assumption was to a certain degree confirmed with the several responses from programs reporting that they didn't have any participants doing well enough to be interested in being interviewed.

The inclusion of both program workers and previously incarcerated women in the study increased the richness of the data. To achieve an understanding of the processes taking place as these women changes their lives through different points of view.

The size of the sample was determined by how many who were willing to participate, the time and resources available, and at which point the data collection reached the point of saturation. When the collection of more data does not seem to provide any further understanding of the phenomenon being studied, one has reached the point of saturation and the sample is considered large enough (46). This point of saturation was not reached, as the group is very heterogenic. Still, a lot of the same issues came up in the interviews. The sample size was therefore determined by a practical saturation point where my time and possibilities were depleted.

3.2.1 Recruiting

Women offenders were recruited through contact with various programs and organizations. Aside from the main program in which most of my research took place, additional programs and organizations were found through online searches and by advice from those I already had contact with. This would range from mentoring programs, drug rehabilitation programs and housing programs. A challenge here was to find programs that actually thought they had women who could be interested in participating. Most of the time they would pass me on to other programs or people they thought could help me. In several cases this meant either going in circles or dead-ends. All of the programs were given information about the study that they could pass on to their participants. The participants could then decide for themselves whether or not to contact me and be a part of the project. This way of doing it may have raised the threshold for participating as the initial contact then relied on the informants. The turnout through this method was thus extremely poor.

Throughout my study project I worked in close contact with one particular program. It was the staff of this program that was included in the group interview. This program also allowed me to hold a small information meeting in which possible informants from the program were invited to. I could then explain the purpose of the study and arrange a meeting with those interested. This made the recruitment process much easier as the threshold for participating was lowered. Additionally, I could feel confident that the participant had the sufficient information needed to make a choice, while they had the opportunity to see who they were going to be interviewed by. To have met, although briefly, once previous to the interview, made the interview setting feel more comfortable and perhaps less intimidating.

The recruiting of women offenders was a lengthy process. This is probably because the target group is so small. An even smaller part of the group would be the ones in continuous contact with a post-release program, as many probably return straight back to their previous environment. One would also expect those who are doing well several years after completing a sentence, to at some point stop having contact with programs and therefore almost impossible to reach with the chosen method. The challenge was therefore to find and recruit those who are doing well with some sense of stability and consistency in their lives, but not so well, for such a long time that they are beyond contact with post-release programs. Additionally there seems to have been a “drought” in the post-release programs for the last period of time, according to a contact in one of the programs, which made the recruitment process even more challenging.

3.2.2 The Program

The program in which the employees and majority of participants were recruited from is a local women’s project hosting several activities for women before, during or after serving a sentence. Activities include support groups, individual counselling, practical help, and social activities (e.g. art groups, yoga classes etc.). It is a low threshold offer and women are free to be a part of the project for as long as they want after the completion of a sentence. All of the sentenced women in the study from this project participated in a group-counselling program called VINN. VINN is a support group program especially tailored to meet the needs of women. Its focus is on motivation, cognitive change, coping and resources and is partially based on Antonovsky’s concept of Sense of Coherence (47). The project contacted my advisor, as they were looking for people interested in doing an evaluation of the work they are doing. Although this is not an evaluation study, I hope the study could help them in their future work and to disseminate awareness on the work they are doing.

Two of the women in the study were not a part of the program. They were, however, both engaged in a local work-training program. This program provided a work place for women who for various reasons had difficulties getting in to the regular job market. The aim is to provide real job experience and build a sense of pride and self-worth through the work they are doing. This would then enable them to return to the regular job market.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected through multiple sources, so called data source triangulation which means using “*different kinds of information to investigate a given research question*” (48, p.66). In this case the triangulation involved interviewing both program workers and women with a sentence.

In-depth interviews with both program workers and participants were conducted. The program workers were interviewed collectively in a group interview, and the women offenders through one-on-one interviews. Since the main aim of the study is to find the “success factors” in order to map the salutogenic processes in play, the exploratory possibilities of in-depth, qualitative interviews were necessary. Each interview started off by an explanation of the purpose of the project, as well as their right to confidentiality and to withdraw at any time. The participants were given an information sheet [Appendix 1] that we went through, followed by a question of whether they still wanted to participate. They were then asked whether they were ok with the interview being recorded.

3.3.1 Group interviews

The program workers were interviewed as a group. The group consisted of four program workers and the researcher. This approach was chosen because it could both save valuable time (49) and “*encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic in focus.*” (50, p.150) The interview was located at the premises of the re-entry program and lasted for nearly two hours. Repstad (1987, ref. in 46) stresses that: “*group interviews are best suited for situations where the participants are somewhat coordinated*” (46, p.85). This was very much the case in this interview as the informants regularly work closely together as a small group. The impression was that everyone felt free to express their opinions and that they were used to discuss these issues openly together.

A semi-structured interview guide [Appendix 2] with open-ended questions was used to steer the discussion. In order to maintain exploratory and open, the guide was not used in a strict way, but rather as a tool to keep the conversation going and to somewhat steer it into a direction useful for the study.

The group interview was audio-recorded which allowed me to be more of an active listener if I was tied to the task of writing extensive notes.

I considered doing a focus group interview with the program participants as well. However, after conversations with the workers I understood that making appointments with the participants often is an extensive process with many rearrangements. It therefore proved enough work to schedule proper one-on-one interviews, without having to find a time where everyone is able to meet at the same time. Additionally, the interviews were more sensitive and private for the sentenced women than for the program employees, in which case a one-to-one interview could be assumed to be the most appropriate form.

3.3.2 Individual interviews

Previously incarcerated and paroled women were interviewed one-on-one. The interviews were conducted at a place suggested by the interviewees, which in all of the cases was at the premises of the program they participated in. The interviews took from 30 to 40 minutes, and followed a semi-structured guide [Appendix 3] including the main themes. However, as the purpose of the study was to illuminate the factors important to the women themselves, the course of the interviews was to a great degree determined by them. I was careful to thoroughly explain the purpose of the project and they're role at the beginning of each interview. I then asked them whether they still were interested in participating

As a fresh researcher, I had a lot to learn, and the first interviews made me aware of issues I then had to moderate in the following interviews. One of these issues was to give sufficient time for the interviewees to think. What felt like several minutes of silence, was on occasions hardly enough time to catch a breath when listening to the recordings. To ask clear question, and allowing the respondents to reflect on it before answering was thus something I had to learn throughout the process. I also experienced some difficulties in adapting the interview questions to the specific case of the women being interviewed. The interview guide was therefore followed very loosely. It would be of great help to have some information about the situation of the women and their histories before conducting the interviews, but the acquiring of this information could be problematic both practically and ethically. I could probably have been bolder in my questions, being a bit scared of stepping on anyone's toes, but I also think that it is wise to stay careful and humble in this situation as a very fresh researcher. I therefore found it more important to keep a good tone throughout the interview than to dig in to find the most interesting answers possible.

3.4 Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the gathered material was taking place throughout the entire study. During the interviews and while transcribing, important themes and words were highlighted and possible connections in the data were noted.

3.4.1 Transcribing the interviews

The interviews were transcribed by myself and included every word spoken, pauses and audible expressions like “hm.. eh.. hehe..” of the interviewee. Audible expressions made by me while the interviewee was talking were not transcribed as it interrupts the flow of the text. The transcribing was conducted as soon as possible following each interview. This made it easier to understand unclear words or expressions, as the memory of the conversations still was fresh. Audio recordings were listened to at least two or three times in order to be sure of the accuracy of the transcripts. It was all written down in its original language, Norwegian. I wanted to analyse the material in its original form as far as possible, it is therefore only the quotes included in the final thesis that is translated to English.

3.4.2 Analysis

The data was analysed guided by the analytical tool of thematic networks by Attride-Stirling (51).

“Thematic networks systematize the extraction of: (i) lowest-order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes); (ii) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract principles (Organizing Themes); and (iii) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (Global Themes). These are then represented as web-like maps depicting the salient themes at each of the three levels, and illustrating the relationships between them.” (51, p.388)

This method of analysis thus employs a hermeneutic approach to build up thematic networks based on concepts and quotes from the interviews. The overall Global Themes were however based on the theory of Salutogenesis to get an impression of the connection between the results and the theoretical framework of the study. The Global Themes are therefore the central components of the salutogenic model; “Stress exposure” [Appendix 4], “GRRs/GRDs” [Appendix 5] and “Life experiences” [Appendix 6]. It is

important to note that the Basic Themes and Organizing Themes were drawn from the interviews and organized before any links with the Global Themes or overall theory was drawn. The web belonging to the Global Theme “Stress exposure” does not include Organizing Themes as the thematic group is significantly smaller than the other two.

3.5 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

Reliability is related to the quality and trustworthiness of the research process. In qualitative research, the researcher must claim reliability by explaining how the data have been produced throughout the research process (46). This is done to demonstrate *“that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results.”* (52 p.41) A qualitative study could probably never be repeated with the same exact results. However, minimizing errors and biases, and documenting the procedures of the study are some efforts that could be made to increase reliability in a qualitative study. (46). In this study the audio-taping of the interviews as well as thoroughly securing the accuracy of the transcripts, contributed to a strengthened reliability by minimizing errors in the data. By keeping an open mind and by thoroughly explaining my role and the purpose of the study to the participants, I also tried to minimize biases in their responses and my reaction to them.

While reliability is related to the data collection process, validity is related to the interpretations made on these data and the accuracy of the findings (45,46). It is important to maintain critical to one's own interpretations. One element of validation is that the result of the project should be possible to verify by other research. This means that the basis for interpretation must be documented thoroughly, for example by elaborating how the relationship with the informants affected the reached conclusion (46). In all qualitative research, the background of the researcher will influence both the interview situation and the interpretation process (45). My social and cultural background, as well as my academic background in the field of health promotion and my lack of experience in the correctional system, all had an impact on my perceptions and interpretations throughout the study. Although I tried to keep my biases at a minimum, the most important thing was not whether or not I had previous assumptions, but to acknowledge and be honest about their existence. However, to strengthen the validity as much as possible, I found it very useful to frequently consult with others, mainly my supervisor: Mittelmark, about my work.

Construct validity refers to whether the established operational measures are correct, or suitable for the concepts being studied. Use of multiple sources of evidence is one method of increasing the construct validity of a study; triangulating different data sources by interviewing both program workers and participants therefore increases the construct validity of this study (52).

Generalisability “*refers to the extent to which findings from a study apply to a wider population or to different contexts.*” (49 p.224) Some argue that generalisability is neither possible nor an aim in qualitative research as the value of qualitative research lies in its particularity rather than its generalisability (45). It could however be argued that quantitative research are analytically generalisable by comparing the research results with previously developed theories. In this case it would build on the theory and previous research on salutogenesis (52).

3.6 The researcher role

Primarily my role in this research was as an interviewer, but also as an observer as observations automatically was done throughout the interview process, as it should be. It is important to consider the role of the researcher in any study, and in what ways the presence of the researcher affects the behaviour and responses of the individuals being studied (46). After all, the researcher in qualitative research is the “*primary data collection instrument*” (45 p.196). Researcher characteristics, like gender or age, are in many cases crucial for the relationship established between the researcher and the informants (46). In this case it was probably an advantage that I’m a woman. It is however more difficult to know how my young age and high education affected the relationship with the respondents. With this in mind I was careful to properly introduce myself and explain my situation as a student. “*The research interview is (...) a specific professional conversation with a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject.*” (50 p.33) Both the scientific competence of the interviewer and the characteristics of the conversation as being one-directional and instrumental, a research interview will usually hold some power asymmetry (50). I kept this power asymmetry in

mind throughout the interview process in order to respect and protect the integrity of the respondents (46).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research involves direct contact with the individuals being studied, and an interpretation of the social phenomenon that is the focus of the research (46). This leads to several methodological and ethical challenges that I had to carefully consider prior to and during the actual data collection.

The project and my permission to collect and store the data has been reported and approved by the NSD – The Norwegian Social Science Data Services [Appendix 7].

Efforts were made to ensure that the gatekeepers (program staff) did not provide any pressure in recruiting the participants (49), and that the participant's right to withdraw at any time is clearly stated (46). The participants did all seem eager to participate and expressed their appreciation of someone taking interest in their case. Both program employees and women offenders emphasized the importance of studies being done on this subject. Any concerns I might have had on participants true willingness to be interviewed was therefore greatly reduced.

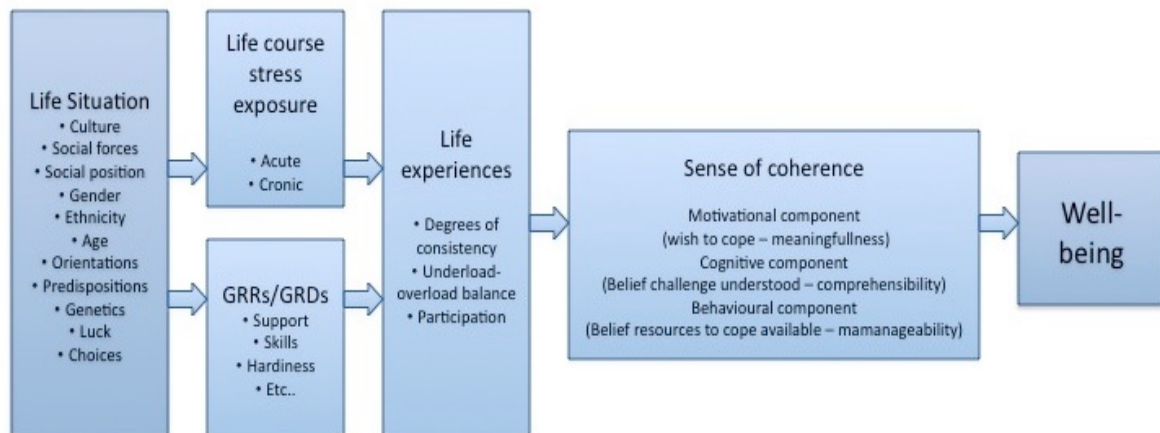
In this study, the issue with anonymity could be a challenge. It is a small setting, and the program workers or director will be reading the thesis after it is completed. Hence, anonymity for the employees and programme participants could be challenging to fully uphold. It is therefore very important that all information that might reveal the identity of the individuals and which is not completely necessary for the understanding of the findings is excluded from the final thesis. This is the reason why there will not be given a detailed description of each participants. The participants are given pseudonyms and their statements are presented from their relevance to each theme, and not to describe their specific life situation. Special care must also be taken concerning the storing of the data as it contains sensitive personal information. As explained in the informed consent form, all audio recordings will be deleted by the end of the project and will only be available to me as the main researcher. Information about these issues was provided to the participants through informed consent, along with information about the aim and

objective of the study, who is conducting it, other possible risks involved, and whom they can contact for further information (49, p.69).

4.0 Results

The results from this study will be presented by Global themes drawn from the Salutogenic model [figure 1] described in the literature review. This way, the reader will not have to wait for the discussion to be able to picture how the findings are related to each other and the theoretical framework. The headlines in this results chapter are thus; Stress exposure, Generalized resistance resources, and Life experiences. The meaning of these theoretical concepts in relation to the findings will be introduced in each section and their connection with the concept of Sense of Coherence will later be discussed. Each section will also be divided into their respective Organizing and Basic themes. It is important to note that although the findings are presented according to a theoretical model, I do not claim to show any causal relationships. The causal relationships suggested are merely those expressed by or interpreted from the stories of the informants.

[Figure 1] (44)



4.1 Participants and Setting (life situation)

All of the participants were female and aged from 30-55 years. I interviewed three previously incarcerated women (“Charlotte”, “Dina” and “Emilie”), two on probation (“Anna” and “Britt”) and four program workers (“Frida”, “Grete”, “Helene” and “Ingrid”). All of the names used are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the

participants. Two of the women offenders worked at a job training facility, while the three others were a part of a conversation group facilitated by the local re-entry program. The program workers were all from the same re-entry program, which was the same program as three of the women offenders were recruited from.

4.2 Stress exposure

In order to understand the factors enabling women offenders to cope, we also need some understanding of the challenges they're faced with. The women expressed several challenges and difficult experiences through their lives, leading to their current situation. Trauma, bad relationships and networks with people who would take advantage of them were some of the stressors these women faced throughout their lives.

Difficult life experiences

In various ways, the women expressed really difficult experiences in their lives, either related to their current situation, or to past experiences that have had great influence on their life.

Emilie, with a long history of drug use, had a daughter in foster care and a mother she'd cared for except from the time she had to be in prison. Although Emilie stopped using drugs upon her release, the child services limited her ability to see her daughter even more. She therefore explained her current situation as very difficult.

“Right now I’m in a sort of slump that is just real low. So right now there is nothing that is good. My mother is in the hospital with broken legs and my girl I’m only allowed to visit... I used to visit her once a month, right, and now they’ll just... Suddenly put it down to six times a year.” (Emilie)

Most of the women in the study had, like Emilie, histories of drug or alcohol abuse. For three of them, this seemed as being one of their major challenges and obstacle to overcome on their way to a better life. Britt did not talk about drug abuse, but about serious traumatic experiences leading to a need for psychiatric treatment and help.

“After some of my family members passed I was so unfortunate that... I didn’t have any network to help me in any way. So I’m still in a queue, five

years later, to see a psychiatrist, to talk about what's happened to me.”
(...) “This cannot fix the fact that I've found four dead bodies. And that I've found my own mother... that, this cant fix.” (About the program and her continuous need for psychiatric help) (Britt)

The employees spoke of a pattern of women being abused in their childhood and therefore ending up where they are as adults. They also had the impression that women push themselves even more towards the edge and being worse off upon imprisonment than men.

“We see that a lot of the problems recurs... in relation to early childhood and abuse... and neglect and... that is, a lot of the things that have made them end up where they have. So what we also see is that the women who go in [to prison], they're even more exhausted than a man is when he comes to prison, so the women are completely broken when they get in, right. They're on the edge.” (Ingrid)

They also emphasized the challenges of problems clustering or replacing one another, making it even more difficult for these women to move forward.

“When you resolve one problem, another one appears. When you get off drugs and stop pushing, you don't have the money to live as you used to, and then you're suddenly poor”. (Frida)

Re-entry challenges

The challenges of actually re-entering to society after incarceration were not a major part in any of the interviews. However, some concerns were stressed, relating to both small changes in the environment and everyday challenges, and the worry of finding employment when faced with the stigma of being a previous inmate.

“No, so right now you're in this sort of... limbo in a way, 'cause now there's only insecurity... do you get a job? One's been in prison for a long time, people are bloody (Jævlig) judgemental. Yeah, so there's a lot of insecurity until you get stuff in order... 'Cause you've got nothing. Right. So we'll see how it goes.” (Dina)

“In the beginning after being released it was... not much fun. Because it feels like, “wow, is this how they do it?” I mean, there was so many things that was changed in these four and a half months I was away..”

(Charlotte)

Insufficient services

Although not commented by the women offenders, the employees were very concerned about the old-fashioned prison system not adapted to the needs of women.

“It is not designed for women to develop, and to come out with a better life quality, in the same way as we think of life quality, that is... So the solution is: pure women-facilities, or what we should call it... that works intensely with identity...” (Helene)

The fact that women are a minority also seemed to be a challenge as it causes them to receive less services than men on for example drug-rehabilitation. To some degree, the lack of help with drug rehabilitation in prison was also expressed by some of the women offenders.

“... and drug rehabilitation, ‘cause you say that a lot of those imprisoned is perhaps not supposed to be imprisoned, they’re supposed to be offered treatment. (...) But you have drug rehabilitation for men, but there aren’t enough women [to get services].” (Frida)

Being used

Several of the women spoke of being used and taken advantage of by their previous social networks. In some cases this was explained as a direct cause for their sentence as they were being “too nice” and letting people take advantage of them.

“Well, I’m not a snitch.” (...) “I’m better at thinking of others, so.. yeah... I guess that’s what made my penalty. Or made it so that I got a penalty, because I’ve cared too much about other people..” (Britt)

For Dina, these one-way-relationships especially proved themselves once she went to prison and noticed the lack of support from her social network.

“Because then you can be with all the wolves and let people use you and say yes to most things and... And you’ll have nothing in return. When you

get to prison there is no one who cares about you. Then you're totally alone.” (Dina)

4.3 GRRs-GRDs

Generalized resistance resources and generalized resistance deficits (GRRs-GRDs) are constant resources that on a continuum range from being able to strengthen or weaken a person's SOC. The women in the study expressed several resources that in their view made the process of taking back the control of their lives possible. As there are some factors, like social networks, that seemed very important, the lack or insufficiency of them could be labeled as a deficit. Also, as positive personality traits work as resources, weaker personality traits could work as deficits as it provides additional challenges. Such personality traits were however not prominent in their stories, as the focus was on the causes of their positive development.

The GRRs-GRDs are organized into social resources/deficits, personal resources/deficits and environmental resources/deficits.

4.3.1 Social resources/deficits

All respondents emphasized the importance of having some close relationships with people they could talk to and rely on. This could either be close family, friends or social workers. These close relationships seemed important in both being a motivator for wanting to change, and also as providers of the support needed to achieve these changes. However, the social situation of women offenders also entails challenges (or deficits), especially in relation to stigma.

Social networks/close friends

Some of the women spoke of the importance of having close friends they could rely on and spend meaningful time with that not only concerned using drugs/alcohol. It did not seem important to have a large network, as long as there were *someone* that were close and real friends.

“I do of course have people that I care about and that I spend time with (...) it has to be people that I can talk with, and who at least share some of the same interests as me.” (Dina)

“I’ve like, made sure that the friends that I consider good friends, they’re few, but they’re good, and I keep them even if they do drugs or not.

‘Cause, I can look past the drugs. We have not only been getting high. We have like been good friends aside from that. (...) It’s people you can trust, people you can talk with and... show all your sides to and they still love you... someone who’s there when you need it. And... yeah, someone who loves you and whom you love.” (Anna)

The employees also emphasised the importance of having friends. Especially with those involved with drugs, spare time seemed not to necessarily be something good, and to have someone outside of the drug environment to spend time with was expressed as an important resource.

“If you have someone to be with who’s not in the drug environment or in the criminal environment, then that’s an advantage. A huge advantage. Because, ok, we can get them a place to live, we can get them a job or work training or schooling or something, but we can’t get them something on every single afternoon, so they get lonely afternoons, right. When the thoughts starts to grind and... things get shitty.” (Helene)

However, also the employees seemed to acknowledge that it was not about the size of the network, but rather the characteristics of it. There was always *someone*.

“I don’t think it’s necessarily those with the best network, or parents who... but that there’s always one. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone with a success story who have made it alone, (...) I don’t think it has to be a so called resource-person in the same way as we think of that word, right... It can be anyone, but that there’s someone you feel... that you don’t feel ashamed with. I think it’s that simple.” (Frida)

Someone to talk to

An especially important part of having a social network seemed to be to have someone to talk to. To be able to express ones feelings and experiences without judgement or disbelief was something both program workers and sentenced women regarded as important.

The conversation group of the re-entry program was mentioned as an important resource for being able to talk to someone. This could either be program workers who always had time, or an opportunity to talk in groups with peers in similar situations.

“Because I was so lucky to... I got to be a part of this project. And it is actually possible to talk about yourself and your life and various things. (...) drugs and... sentences and... sex... things like that we sit here and talk about, right. And they will be here after this course too, for us.” (Britt)

“That we get the chance to be together and discuss and address issues and have groups like this. I think that is very positive. (...) So, there’s a togetherness, or yes... time with people who have been through... if not exactly the same, at least very similar to the things you’ve been through your self. And are able to relate to the things you talk about.” (Anna)

“To be seen. I think it’s really important to be seen... and heard. That someone actually takes you seriously (...). ‘Cause then you have the strength to face it. That someone supports you in that.” (Ingrid)

Support

In addition to being able to talk to someone, the social networks and the re-entry program provided the women with support that helped them cope.

“You’ll always see someone providing support, that is, you can be as motivated as you want to, but if you don’t have anyone to mirror you, or to remind you or, someone to support you (...). To make it completely on your own is something I don’t think any of us expects any of us to make, so there is always a significant other there.” (Frida)

Sometimes the support was from individuals or social workers in form of “pushing” them to make positive choices for themselves, to show them the possibilities and their abilities to do make it. Anna had both a social worker pushing her to go to rehab, and a friend suggesting that she probably could get away with probation if she straightened out some things in her life.

“There was a buddy of mine who went to drug court¹ himself. He said that... you have to apply for drug court and they’re very nice and there you will be taken good care of and you’re a star candidate for the project, he said... because, you sort of have much of what it takes, and if you just work a bit more you’ll get the rest that it takes... and then you’ll just slide straight in to it, he said. And, quite right. I did.” (Anna)

Others used their social resources actively to cope with certain challenges or difficulties they would face. The re-entry program was also here an important resource for the women participating in it.

(on how to cope with difficulties) “Then... I either talk with someone, or I address it while I’m here, or... perhaps it isn’t that important to me after all... So at least now I know that I have a support system around me.” (Britt)

“You are being welcomed here and taken care of when you come if they see that your in a... a situation that you’re not able to handle alone, they’re there for you. They don’t just sit and say, ‘no, we don’t have time now, come back later’. I’ve never experienced that here, and... so I’m really happy for that.” (Charlotte)

Relationships

Romantic relationships were described as something that could be of great support and comfort, but in other cases a major risk factor. Some of the women offenders talked about the help and support they received from their boyfriends, in addition to expressing the importance of him not being related to criminal behaviours, as this would affect them poorly. The program employees had a lot of experience with sentenced women’s histories of picking the “wrong” boyfriends and described that as an important risk factor.

Anna compared her new boyfriend with her previous boyfriend. The fact that her current one was not related to any criminal activities was expressed as some of the important changes in her life.

¹ This is a probation arrangement especially for drug sentences.

“First of all I have a stable and nice boyfriend. I didn’t have that before. Then I had an unstable and not so nice boyfriend. Who were super criminal... is super criminal, and were in and out of prison all the time. And it was only a matter of time before I would disappear after him in to prison, right, ‘cause ‘Guilty by association’, right... I was arrested many times because of him. (...) But yes, now I at least have a very nice and non-criminal boyfriend, so that helps a lot.” (Anna)

Charlotte spoke of her boyfriend in terms of the day-to-day support he provided. She also described how they together would take a stand against her previous lifestyle and prefer to spend the evenings and weekends together in the safety and comfort of their own home.

(About her boyfriend when she has to get up early to work) “He’s like... if he’s going to work at two, he’ll wake me up at five o’clock in the morning and wait with me one and a half hour and drink coffee, then he’ll say ‘have a nice day’ and ‘see you later’ right, so that’s very nice.” (Charlotte)

Children

The women did to a various degree express concern and care for their children. Emilie strongly emphasized her relationship with her daughter and her ability to see her as the main motivation for getting her life back on track.

“I have to do it for the girl, right... So that’s why. If I even bother to get up in the morning or... or else they could just put me inn, had it not been for... that I have to fight to get to visit her every month again.” (Emilie)

“But it’s for the girl... that she won’t... stand there without a mother, so. No, so that’s why I manage to keep myself [sober]. Or even want to keep myself [sober]...” (Emilie)

For others the children were definitely expressed as important in their lives, but not as crucial to their will to cope as with Emilie. The employees had mixed impressions of

the importance of children to the motivation for rehabilitation and coping among the sentenced women.

“It might as well be a negative weight that you have children that have been taken from you. (...) ‘I’ll never get them back again anyway’. So it might as well be a hindrance as a help.” (Frida)

Family

In the same way as social networks and children, the rest of the family could work as resources for support. For Emilie this was especially important, as she would have frequent contact with her brother. She seemed to find great motivation in the affect her drug use had on her brother. To see that he cared and how happy he was when she was sober, together with the concern for her daughter, was expressed as the major causes for her current success in staying off drugs.

“And then there was my brother and them on me all of the time, and I could like, see in their eyes how happy they were each time they saw that I was sober, right. In comparison to before I went to prison, then I just saw how sad they were. So that’s a... that has done... I would say that it has helped.” (Emilie)

Despite the difficulties in her life, Britt attributes a lot of her own strength and the fact that she was doing reasonably well to a good childhood and her resourceful parents.

(About whether she’d always had her current strength) *“Yeah, I guess I have. Got it from either my mother or my father. Both are very resourceful persons. Now my father has gotten very old, but that’s fair enough... but... that’s how it is now. And he has been sick and so on, but my mother was very young when she died. But that was acute heart attack. But that’s something that can happen. That’s life.” (Britt)*

Ingrid, one of the employees, explained how the lack of a stable family situation in the childhood might more severely affect women than men.

“Because we see that women has this need for that... that sense of community in a family... It is much more important for us [women] to be a

part of a bigger whole. And if you didn't have that in early childhood... ”

(Ingrid)

Stigma

Stigma was a social resource deficit expressed by some of the women, especially the program workers. For Dina the issue of stigma was mainly relating to her concern for finding employment.

“Cause you have to stand there with... with your cap in your hand [Norwegian expression of feeling humble and inferior] and practically beg to... to show that 'here I am, and I am actually able to work even though I've been in prison', and all that. Because it is very, very much prejudice in the society and... So it's an eternal fight, to fight and show that, I'm actually able to do this even though I've been in prison, right. 'Cause then you're in a way labelled then.” (Dina)

The program employees emphasized the additional stigma towards sentenced women compared to sentenced men. This they explained in part by our conception of women as the main caregiver for children, and our understanding of women's nature.

“Criminal women it... doesn't “really” exist. But...no! It doesn't, women aren't supposed to do anything wrong.” (Helene)

“Like, in the society, it is more acceptable that the father disappears (...) than that the mother disappears, and leave the children, because... the mother is supposed to at least be the one stability, right, love and care, it... is mothers responsibility.” (Ingrid)

4.3.2 Personal resources/deficits

The respondents listed several individual traits that they attributed their coping to. This ranged from explicitly stating their strength and determination, to more implicitly implying important skills like being able to learn from mistakes and take advantage of possibilities. Many of these traits are closely related or may be seen as different concepts for the same phenomenon. Either way, I chose to keep the separate labels as it maintains the actual expressions of the respondents.

Will

One of the personal resources important for some of these women to be able to make fundamental changes in their lives, was a strong will. For Emilie, the most important cause of her ability to stay off drugs was her strong will combined with her strong motherly instinct.

“It’s a strong will! And it’s the will and sort of that motherly instinct (...) that causes me to not take that injection... Even if I really desire it, right.”
(Emilie)

Ingrid also emphasized the importance of having a strong will when having to face the difficulties of life and being able to cope with it.

“What is really evident (...) is exactly that will. The will, that is, they have to have an inherent will to take a hold of and stand through it all, and swallow those camels and be able to take it.” (Ingrid)

Determination

Closely related to having a strong will; the women expressed an ability to make up their mind and then sticking with it. They decided to change, and made it happen despite their challenges and disbelief from those around.

For Emilie this disbelief from others was especially evident when her rights to see her daughter was restricted and her mother got ill. But, what others saw as a certain relapse, she saw as an even stronger cause for staying determined and keep fighting.

“They thought I was going to use this as an apology to do drugs. But for me it’s exactly the opposite. Right, ‘cause now I have to, now I have to fight with everything that I can. Now I just have to force myself to not even take one...not have one single relapse.” (Emilie)

For Anna, the real risk of her having to go to prison upon her arrest awoke a strong determination to get certain aspects of her life on track. This was so that they would let her go to drug court. She got an apartment and a job, then went to rehabilitation and stayed sober, all in time to avoid a prison sentence.

“I didn’t want to go to prison. And I knew that it was an alternative, or that there was a risk for me going to prison and then I thought that, no, I have to do something to avoid that. So then I managed it. Yes.” (Anna)

For Dina the determination came as sort of an epiphany in a moment where it seemed to have been a choice of “either or-“.

“I guess it’s a sort of survival mechanism that hits in and says, “Man up, this is something you just have to do!” Right.. fortunately.” (Dina)

Being kind/caring

Most of the women described themselves as being kind, caring and unselfish

“Basically, I’m nice, actually. And sociable. Yes. (...) Caring (...), but I’ve been that way ever since I was little, and my girl is like that too. Very, like, caring and taking care of others and... putting myself secondly.” (Emilie)

For many their kindness was not necessarily something positive, but in several cases a cause for being taken advantage off and not being able to take account of their own needs. For Britt, this was one of the most important things she had learned through the conversation group in the re-entry program. She explained some of the causes for her situation by her being to nice and letting people take advantage of her. To learn to take care of her self and listen to her own needs was therefore important.

“This course really helps me to take extra notice of stuff. Like, my feelings and that. ‘Cause I’m not always that good at thinking of myself.” (...) “At least I’m a lot better at thinking of myself and my life [now].” (Britt)

Patience

Patience was another personality trait important for coping mentioned by two of the women, Anna and Dina. For Anna this was something she had gotten better at with time and that helped her complete tasks and goals.

“I guess I’ve become more patient. I’ve always been patient, but now it’s like... I give myself time! If I feel that I need time to complete something, I just take the time I need. Instead of rushing and hurry, and do everything at the same time.” (Anna)

Dina got transferred to a low-security unit quite early considering her long sentence, and then further on to a transition housing facility. She attributed much of this process to her patience, which in her view, other inmates often lack. Being able to pace herself and do things at the right time was in her view key for being able to get a good progress in the sentencing process.

“I haven’t been rushing myself. Because I knew that I had to be there [in prison] this long. There are many who rush themselves and send in applications long before they even have the chance at getting it (...). So I’ve saved myself a lot of trouble with exactly that, that I have waited.”
(Dina)

Being strong

Both Britt and Dina put much emphasis on their personal strength. This was by them explained as the main reason for them being able to cope after the things they had done and been through.

“But I’m lucky, to be so resourceful as I am, not everyone is that. Unfortunately. And they suffer... a lot. (...) It is because I have a black belt in tragedy and misery. Ever since I was a little child. And that makes you strong. (...) No, not everyone becomes strong, but... I don’t know why I’m so strong, but at least I’m happy about it.” (Dina)

“When I’ve been at the lowest in my life, I’ve been kicked and trampled on... But, I’m able to get up, so if it hadn’t been for the strength that I have, I wouldn’t be sitting here today.” (Britt)

“If anyone else ends up in my situation... and they don’t have the same strength as me, they would probably take an overdose of heroin or... they would kill themselves by hanging or something. Easily.” (Britt)

The program employees were somewhat more mixed in their belief in an “inner strength” that just helped someone to make it despite everything. It seemed important to have the courage to face the reality and real challenges of their lives, but strength was more associated with an outer shell that many women put on and that needed to be peeled off for the women to be able to change their lives.

“I don’t think it’s just an inherent property, that someone just is strong and makes it either way. I really don’t believe that. (...) But it is those that comes out of that, who start something else, and take control of their lives, they’re the ones who peel off some of these shells, these “strong-women-shells” and admits, right?” (Frida)

Being motivated

Several of the women stressed the importance of being motivated. Even though it was important to be helped by people around them, if they were being pushed to hard in one direction without the proper motivation, it would be counterproductive.

“You have to be motivated. And you have to have a network, and help. But if you’re not motivated, there’s no point.” (Britt)

Also the employees saw a clear distinction between those motivated for change and those who were put into the program without any real motivation.

“We’re so lucky to experience those who want to do something, they call us and say: ‘I’m going to serve a sentence, I need help planning it’. They really want to do something. It’s obvious that their plans are being better followed up, that they’re more engaged, and that they’ll achieve more.” (Frida)

They also explained how their project was based on voluntary participation and that there would be no point in forcing anyone to make a change for the better in their lives. This matches well up with the answers from the participating women.

“I think it has to come from within, and no chance in helping someone who doesn’t want it. You can run until you’re bleeding...” (Frida)

Shame

One result of having committed crimes and been through the process of being punished for it are, especially according to the program employees, layers of shame upon the women offenders. The paradox situation of making someone pay for their wrongdoings combined with the knowledge that rehabilitation only is possible without that overpowering shame is a challenge the employees face in their work. This sense of

shame could be categorized as a general resistance deficit as it is so closely related to the society's stigma towards women with a criminal background.

“You have sort of that general deterrence effect of imprisonment versus individual prevention. And there shame lies as a part, it's like embedded in all of it that you are supposed to be ashamed of yourself. Because it will be to consider what is best for the individual, and what is best for the society, and all of that is a total crash. (...) it is supposed to be a punishment. And you are to be ashamed. Shame on you!”, right, you've done a mistake here, you've done something wrong. And then we're supposed to go in there afterwards, and then we'll try to peel off, or pick off all of that shame or stigma that actually have been put there for a reason... that is, for the society in any case...to make so that others don't make the same mistakes as this person did.” (Ingrid)

Judgement

Many of the changes these women had made over the last period of time was based on their sense of judgement. They would use this ability to separate between the good and bad, the right and wrong, in their lives.

“Of course there's always changes, but I notice it more... I see more and more now than I did before, that is, my eyes have gotten a bit more open than they were. I see more the things, what's right and what's wrong.”
(Charlotte)

For many, this sense of judgement was not necessarily a new skill they developed, but something that had been deeply hidden as a result of long term alcohol or drug use. Getting sober would therefore increase the likelihood of making better choices also in the future as they regained this ability to judge.

“I'm good at... I'm able to see... I had real bad impulse control before, when I did a lot of amphetamine. And that has become a lot better. I'm able to look further ahead and just the moment I'm in the middle of something. I'm able to see the consequences and to weigh for and against... in the moment.” (Anna)

Being able to learn from mistakes

Closely related to judgement, the ability of being able to learn from mistakes seemed important for the women to be able to change their lives. Charlotte especially stressed this as she talked about how she never again wanted to go to prison and how she would avoid doing the same mistakes as before.

“I’ve said to myself: never sign papers... never again start anything with other people.(...) I won’t start a company with anyone. So that part, I’ve learned. And I’m never going to prison again. Never. Because it wasn’t anything that did, it was just that I was thinking: This is just too stupid (Dette blir for dumt)” (...) *“So, not prison. I’m definitely done with that. It’s not any fun even if you’re there for one month or four months or three.”* (Charlotte)

Being able to take advantage of/seeing possibilities

The women in the study seemed to have a clear conviction that they had to take the opportunities they were given. It was evident that for someone who had been rather unlucky throughout their lives, and now with a motivation to change it for the better, opportunities were few but crucial.

“And as long as this chance is in front of me now, I’ll take it. I won’t get it back I think. I’ll not take the chance of getting that chance again. Therefore I have to grasp it while I can... and when I get the opportunity I’ll say ‘yes please, ok, I’ll try’. And I’m very glad about that.” (Charlotte)

The ability to notice and appreciate these opportunities was therefore very important. Instead of just seeing hindrances to overcome, they were able to focus on the positive things and take advantage of them. Britt saw the whole penalty, which she was innocently charged with, as an opportunity to change her life for the better.

“I actually see this penalty as... yeah... it can help me...” (...) *“Because everyone have the opportunity to change things in their lives. Everyone have ups and downs in their lives. But someone gets wrongly convicted, someone is rightly convicted, but either way I believe that you have to deal with it (ta det på strak arm) and make the best of it. And then you can see it as a possibility to change your life actually.”* (Britt)

Emilie always had the dream of working with people, something that's near to impossible with a criminal record. Still she was able to motivate herself in continuing training and working for other jobs. This she explained with her learned ability to make use of what she had the opportunities that were present.

"It has never gone the way that I wanted in my life either way, right, so I'm so used to that. If you can't do this, then you'll have to take what you get, or do what you're able to. And then you'll have to abide to the situation... and sort of that attitude that I'll have to do the best of what's possible to do something of, right." (Emilie)

4.4 Life experiences

In the salutogenic model, life experiences are the results of life situation, stressors and GRRs-GRDs that determines a person's sense of coherence. In the case of these women, their life experiences was to a great degree characterized by important changes and new ways of seeing and handling their situation. It may be appropriate to think that through such critical changes, the women may eventually not only strengthen their sense of coherence, but also change their resources (GRRs) available to increase the possibility of further positive life experiences. Thus, it could be argued that coping mechanisms triggered by certain experiences and learned through important life changes, over time may be established as personal skills (GRRs).

Life experiences are organized into reflection, coping and consistency.

4.4.1 Reflection

It was striking how prominent a process of reflecting over their own situation was in these women's histories. To acknowledge the responsibility they had for their own situation was to some degree stated by all of them, including the program employees. The process also seemed to include a realization of the situation they were in and how they actually wanted something else out of their lives. To find their inner worth and being able to reflect upon who they were and what they wanted, also seemed crucial. The employees explained the facilitator or the starting point of this process for many women as being the experience of reaching the bottom. This may be what happened to

some of the sentenced women I talked to also, although they never expressed it explicitly.

Acknowledge responsibility

Again, all participants mentioned the importance of acknowledging responsibility for their own situation. This acknowledgement was both expressed through admitting their responsibility, but also through accepting the situation they were in.

“To be in prison and do illegal actions, I mean its... it’s not something you can change, argue, because it did happen, right.” (Charlotte)

In Emilie’s case this also concerned her responsibility for her daughters situation, which was a source of great concern for her.

“Of course, it’s my fault that my girl is where she is in the first place, right.” (Emilie)

Anna also acknowledged that the penalty she had was something she had put on herself, and held no grudges towards the correctional system in that sense.

“No, and... in that way everyone does get the punishment they deserve. Or at least it adds up for what they have done.” (Anna)

Dina was the one who was the most eager to express the importance of acknowledgement. She was also the one with the longest time in prison, which may have been a part of the reason for her emphasis on this form of reflection. In her view, time spent in prison gets unbearable if you’re not able to acknowledge your responsibility for being in that situation. To feel sorry for oneself and believing that you are unjustly treated was, according to her, not doing you any good.

“I usually say that (...) you’ve deserved this, and that’s that, and then it gets easier. It’s no good sitting down and feeling sorry for yourself, ‘cause done is done and... There’s nothing you can do about it and you get what you deserve, and then you just have to get it over with.” (Dina)

“And most people they don’t even want to acknowledge what they’ve done you know. It’s a lot of this... that you lull yourself in this... in your own world in a way, where you sit and feel unjustly treated for being in this

situation and if you then can't say to yourself that... 'ok, Dina, this here is actually your fault. You deserve this and you have to take the consequences of your actions', right, and just go on. There are very many who don't see that." (Dina)

Dina did not only stress the importance of not holding a grudge towards the correctional system, but also to actually acknowledge and accept the things you had done. She explained this as a possibly painful, but definitely important process to be able to get on with your life.

"But the first thing you have to do is acknowledge what you've done. Because when you... even if it's truly ugly... when you've acknowledged it, it actually gets easier... it doesn't sound true, but it is true. (...) It gets easier because if you always go about every day, and wake up and say to yourself that "why am I here? I'm innocent", even if you're not, the days get really tough. Right? And then you lull yourself into self-pity, and in the end you actually believe it I think, that you're innocent, but you're not. And that makes the days very tough. (...) So you create a lot of problems for yourself." (Dina)

The program employees pictured this process as peeling of layers, look into yourself and accepting the things you've done and situation you're in.

"But there are those who get away from that, who start something else, and who take control of their lives. They're the ones who peel away some of these layers, these "strong-lady-layers" and admit, right?" (Frida)

"The ability, or will to look into yourself I think is crucial. Externalization only makes you go on in the same way, but to dare and being able to take on some of the responsibility for you own situation..." (Frida)

Realization

Closely related to acknowledging their responsibility, several of the women talked about having been through a process of realization. This could perhaps be explained as an epiphany, or moment in time where these women get a new understanding of their situation and their need to change.

For Charlotte this realization was related to seeing with new eyes how her life had previously been and how much she wanted to avoid ending up back there.

“I totally distanced myself from it. I got totally, you know... many times I got all (...) and thought God, I’ve been walking around like that once. Never again.” (Charlotte)

For Anna, one part of this process included admitting her need for help and realizing that she might not be able to make all these important life changes on her own.

“And she suggested that we should contact [the rehabilitation clinic], and that we should put me there, I was very against it at first. I was supposed to make it on my own, because I had made it [gotten sober] before, on my own. But it was ten years since I did it last time so... I just had to realize that maybe I needed some help after all.” (Anna)

Also Grete, the program employee, stressed the importance of realizing your need for help and assistance though such difficult life situations.

“Accept that you perhaps in a period of transition need to make contact with voluntary support person, or someone who is paid to be with you, to guide you into a new network. That is, to acknowledge that you won’t be able to do this on you own, but if someone helps you, then maybe.” (Grete)

Dina did not explain this process in relation to specific events or challenges, but rather spoke of a general epiphany at a moment of time when she realized that she had to make changes to be able to keep going. For her it seemed like it was this critical point in her life where it was either sink or swim and where some mechanisms in her convinced her to swim.

“Gosh, if only more people could realize it an be as lucky [as me]. And get such an epiphany (a-ha opplevelser).” (Dina)

Helene, one of the program employees emphasised the process of the sentenced women putting their problems into words. Only by realizing and expressing the problems, could they, in her view, be able to actually solve them.

“If the girls get help to really put their problems into words. (...) They’ve lulled themselves into something so difficult, but if they manage to resolve themselves from that, and go there to put the problem into words. Only then they’ll be able to actually work towards solving it, right?” (Helene)

Self-worth

Finding her self-worth was expressed as some of the most important changes in Dina’s life. Although not expressed explicitly by the other women, they all spoke of how important it was to being able to work and have a real influence in their own lives. This could be understood as important partly because it strengthens the women’s sense of self-worth. Getting sober was explained as one of the main causes for Dina being able to regain this value.

“I guess I’ve found my, my own value more now than I did before. Because then... then you could be together with all the wolves and let people take advantage of you and...” (Dina)

It was also important for her to know in herself that once she’d complete her sentence; she had the right to keep her head up. She would keep her self worth, despite the resistance she might be met with from the society.

“And you shouldn’t come out of prison and walk around looking down at the ground. At least I’m not going to... Because I don’t deserve that. After serving my penalty I should be allowed to keep my head high. Even if the society don’t see it that way.” (Dina)

One of the most important sources for self-worth was in her view the ability to work. She would often tell her younger colleagues, also working through the occupational training program or in prison, about the importance of working. She would recognize and relate to their lack of self-worth, mostly caused by continuous drug use.

“It’s important for your own... or for your self-worth. It’s... I usually tell the girls here that because they’re so discouraged. And they don’t understand, ‘why should I stay here and work for free?’ and so on. Then I say ‘You should do this for your self, you have to find your self-worth, and it’s a terrible way to walk, but it is there and you will find it, at least in my experience. Because you don’t have a lot of experience... a lot of worth,

when you've been using substances and ruining your life. Then you're just so small, right. And it takes time to get that way, and it takes time to build it... to get it back together again. If you catch my drift?" (Dina)

Self-reflection

All of the women seemed to have done a lot of thinking about themselves, their situation and their identity. To figure out their own strengths, values and their right to a decent life, was important to most of them.

For Britt this self-reflecting process was to a great deal facilitated by her participation in the program. She appreciated the experiences of being increasingly able to think about herself and her needs. She also stressed her right to a good life and had a strong belief in her ability to get one.

"There are many things that I'm good at... but, at least I've become a lot better at thinking about myself and my life. And that there are many things I have to work on to be able to get a good life. Because everyone has the right to a good life." (Britt)

Anna also seemed to have done a lot of reflection about her self and appreciated her own ability to take credit for her accomplishments. For her, the ability to reflect and appreciate things in her life was also related to her getting sober.

"I'm good at being proud of myself. And proud that I've managed to get sober, and stay sober... and, yes. I appreciate the things I have around me. I've actually always done that, but I perhaps didn't have the time to do it earlier because I was so high. Now I have time, and I appreciate the little things. The small steps I manage to reach along the way instead of getting really disappointed if things don't work out straight away." (Anna)

In addition to the importance of finding your self-worth, Dina explains the difficulties of going through these thought processes. She describes the process of self-reflection as being though as issues previously hidden in alcohol, now came up to surface. But she also described it as very important as this was the only way to actually regain her true self.

“When you’re out in the drug environment, you’re on a pink cloud. And you don’t give a damn (...) about almost anything, right. There’s nothing to care about. And when you then get back to yourself, but it takes a very long time... then a lot of feelings comes up, a lot of shame comes up... because, you can’t imagine that it is you, who have done these things, and all the things you do when you’re drunk or high and so on, it... yeah. It’s a lot of shame to carry. Because you change a lot, right, when you find you self-worth, then you know that, you actually were there all along, but since you’ve been getting drunk, these things didn’t come through. Then it was only... all sorts of shit that came through.” (Dina)

The program employees spoke a lot of self-reflection in relation to finding your own identity and true core. This core seemed to be something that often was hidden behind many layers and which you therefore had to dig in order to find. One picture that was used was the process of getting undressed to be able to get dressed again in the right order.

“For the girl to be able to move on then It’s sort of about getting naked to be able to get dressed in the right order. (...) To then face the world with your underpants underneath the other clothes, right? Because then it’s easier to go to Rema 1000 [a grocery store]. Yes. (...) Of course it’s scary to [go to Rema 1000] when you wear your panties on your head, ‘cause then you’re looking stupid!” (Helene)

Another picture often used was that of peeling an onion where it was important to find the core hidden behind all the layers to find the true identity of the women.

“You want to get into the core of something, but how to peel that onion when every layer makes you want to weep even more than the other.” (Ingrid)

“We’re talking about this true core that you have (...). It’s difficult for us to see that core, right... And it’s difficult for them to see the core themselves. Or know that they actually have one. So it’s basically about peeling. So that they’ll get an experience of who they are in relation to

themselves, and in relation to the society. And then to develop this, this “self”, or this identity, right? To be the “Ingrid” that “Ingrid” is when she is proud of herself, or the person I am when I’m proud of myself. And work thoroughly with that. With finding these core values. I believe that is very important for them. Because they have so many layers.” (Frida)

The employees also missed this focus on identity in the prison and correctional systems. As mentioned, they were often faced with the difficulties of building these women up again, after they’d been broken down in prison. In Ingrid’s view, the fact that you’re incarcerated and kept away from the outside world should be punishment enough. She requests a focus on the individual strengths of the inmates and the building up of ones identity to increase their chances of success and well-being upon release.

“When you go to prison, it should actually be like, the focus should not be on that this is your punishment, that now you’re going to prison and this time is taken from you. The focus should be on; what are your strengths? That is, in a way, what should we address? How can a person be able to build oneself up? It’s the thing with identity in focus. (...) Time is, that’s the punishment, it is taken from you, but besides from that the focus should be an all the good things. Because it’s obvious that if you constantly are reminded that you’re in prison, you did something wrong, you’re a bad person, you’re just crap... right. Then you are just crap! I mean, it just enhances the negative patterns. It does nothing positive for you.” (Ingrid)

Reaching the bottom

When living a rough life like these women had, reaching a point where it hardly could get any worse and you truly are face to face with the bad choices and unfortunates of your lives, may be a turning point.

“I guess it’s a sort of survival mechanism that kicks in and says, ‘Man up, you just have to do this!’ Right? Fortunately.” (Dina)

Dina was the only one of the sentenced women that touched upon the issue of change being triggered as a result of reaching a low point in her life. However, this issue was greatly discussed by the program employees. By their experience, the most reliable predictor of positive change in sentenced women was their age. The older the women

were, the more likely it was that they had worn themselves out and gotten tired of the life they were leading.

“It’s not fun to get high anymore, that’s not why you do it. (...) And maybe you’ve come to a realization, right, you’re in prison, you look at your life, you look at... you’re forty, you have no place to live. (...) You’re addicted to heroin, your network is basically other drug addicts. So in a way you get one of those ‘is this what I really want?’ ‘Was this how I imagined my life would be when I got forty?’ While when you’re 25-30 you’re immortal, right? Your body can take everything and it’s still fun.”
(Ingrid)

“I basically think that they get to a point where they make a choice. (...) You get to a point where it’s sink or swim. (...) I think it’s [the point] to reach your own bottom. Everyone has his or her own bottom... And when you’ve reached it, then there’s this theory that when you’ve reached your bottom then it goes up again.” (Ingrid)

Reaching this bottom was described as in many cases a necessary evil. According to the employees, this was for some the only way to realization and getting motivated for change.

“It’s something about that acknowledgement again, because before you meet yourself for real at the bottom and see that “this is actually me”, you don’t have the motivation to change. Because while you’re at that downward spiral, you still try to hit in every direction, right, and then suddenly you find yourself there. “Now I don’t have any more to kick or hit, now I’m alone with myself here”, right. Then you just have to either take responsibility for something, or you have to just stop being I think. (...) ‘cause then you notice that; this is what’s left and I can’t keep living with it – and this is what’s left, now I’m ready to try and change it. It’s win or disappear.” (Frida)

“But it’s very painful to see. To sit at the sideline and watch young women making so destructive choices, and we know, by experience, that very

many women have to go there in order to want change. It doesn't matter what we say or how we try to motivate them.” (Helene)

“Ultimately, it might be that you have to get down to the dirt in order to get back up. And I think that varies a lot from person to person.” (Ingrid)

4.4.2 Coping

The experience of coping would in this case be thought of as both the appreciation of the positive changes in their lives, but also the acquiring of new appropriate coping skills. In many cases it seemed like a snowball where one step would lead to another and then increase the likelihood of further coping and progress. Their processes of reflection seemed to enable them to appreciate the results of their own efforts, which again may have made them open to new ways of handling their life situation. One certain coping strategy that was frequently repeated was the avoidance of difficult situations and bad social relationships.

Services

The availability of good and appropriate services seemed crucial for most of these women. Equally important was however also the lack of needed services at difficult times. I truly got the impression that the local re-entry program was indispensable for the coping of the women participating in it. However, when faced with serious psychological or drug related problems, additional services or treatment was necessary.

The participating women were good at taking advantage of the services provided, and were very aware of their strengths and weaknesses. In general it seemed very important that the people working in these services were nice people with the opportunity to talk and listen to the things the women had to say.

Emilie was working through a occupational training program and appreciated how they included her in the process of developing the program.

“Yes, It turned out fine, because the people were nice, I did already know the leaders and that they were nice people, they weren't like top-down people. They were... So that went well.” (Emilie)

Britt, who saw her sentence as a rescue in her life, held this view because she got community service instead of a prison sentence and relied much on the help and support she would get from these parole offices.

“And then you have a network and that and... especially the criminal services in freedom², they aren't there to make your life miserable, they just want to help you. That's the reason why you get community service and everything... It's so that you'll get a chance, right? Even if it comes on your criminal record, it's not the same as going to prison. But at least I've seen this as a rescue in my life.” (Britt)

Anna talked especially about one person who was her main contact in the service system. She was the one guiding her into rehabilitation and helped Anna out in most situations. When receiving help from so many instances, to have a permanent and reliable contact person seemed to be a great source of security.

“No, I got some help from... I've gone to a psychologist (...) for a long time, and am a part of this group counselling that's called metallisation-based therapy. And I have a contact over there called “Mary”, and she is amazing and, helps with whatever needs help with. And she suggested that we should contact [rehabilitation centre] and put me there.” (Anna)

See results of own effort

One thing that really came through from these interviews was how good these women were to appreciate the results of their own efforts. They did not hesitate to take credit for their achievements, and to see the ability they had to change their own situation seemed to be a great source of motivation and encouragement.

Dina describes herself as being lucky for not having to serve more of her long sentence in a closed section than she did. Still, she acknowledges that much of this “luck” probably was due to her own efforts. She'd been working hard all of the time in prison, and spent a lot of time in trying to make the situation better for her fellow inmates.

² E.g. community service, probation

“I’ve been very lucky that way. Because I’ve... I do have a long sentence and I’ve only, I’ve been under two years in the locked section (...) But that’s because I’ve been so engaged. I’ve been working a lot and been doing a lot of good things for the inmates, because it’s been one of my big passions, that they’re ok... the others.” (Dina)

For Anna, the efforts she made when getting charged made it so that she got the drug court instead of a prison sentence.

“From the moment I asked to get a drug court, applied for drug court, I arranged it so that I had a job and apartment and treatment and yeah... things in order, so that the drug court could just come sliding in, as a framework around it all, and that went very well. (...) Yes, I worked my way up and got like things into place, so that they didn’t have any choice but to say yes to the drug court, in stead of throwing me into prison.” (Anna)

“Then I sort of did everything I could for them to understand that it wouldn’t be any point in putting me in prison and tear me away from everything that I had build up on my own, right?” (Anna)

For her, it was not only important to get these things in place and get drug court instead of prison, the fact that she did most of it herself, was a big deal. In her experience, to see the results of own effort strengthen her confident in her own ability to cope with difficult situations instead of just waiting for others to fix things for her.

“At the same time as you get things into place, you feel a bit more proud because you did it yourself, you didn’t get everything served to you, because then it gets more difficult to not sit and wait for it the next time something happens, right... that you work a bit for it yourself and then it gets easier to address things yourself.” (Anna)

“I did work for it, right, I did work to make it happen. So that’s the good feeling that I’m left with afterwards. (...) I’ve gotten sober, I have everything in order, I have... there is nothing more I can do! (...) And when I’d done that I thought that ok, now I’ll just have to, it’s not in my

hands any longer. So when it then went as I wanted I was very happy. And proud.” (Anna)

*“It’s something about that dignity that you perhaps get to keep, when you manage to plan your own sentence, you get to keep some of your dignity and. (...) I think that also helps to the rest of... this is just a feeling, but it is a feeling of ‘I did this myself’, instead of ‘someone dragged me into this’.
(Frida)*

Getting off drugs/alcohol

Probably of no surprise, one of the most important changes in these women’s lives was to get sober. Most of them had several years of heavy substance use, which to many was expressed as the main cause of their legal problems. One of the main causes for their current positive developments was therefore related to them being able to get and stay sober.

“What has changed is that I’ve been sober for over six years now. And... I’m going to stay that way.” (Dina)

(Giving advice) “First of all I would... If they know that they’re going to prison, at least I would try to cut down on the drugs, so that they don’t come in there totally sick. (...) So the best thing is to cut down. That is, when they are going in, that they’re somewhat sober when they’re going in, right, and then try to stay off drugs on the inside, but it’s... it’s not easy.” (Emilie)

“So then... somewhat reluctantly, I put myself into [rehabilitation facility]. Because she [case worker] said it was a good idea... But it was. It was the best thing I’ve ever done. So far. So I’m very happy about that.” (Anna)

“It changed me to get sober... only for the better. And I’m feeling much better about myself and am more satisfied of myself as a person now, after I quit”. (Anna)

“Since drugs are criminalized and we do imprison drug addicts. (...) Those we meet have a few months for possession and sale, while it actually

is about life style problems, right? And very many of them have drug related challenges, and they often have backgrounds very similar to each other.” (Frida)

“For many, to take drugs is like putting on, it’s like you’ve been walking around naked all of your life, and then you put on your jacket... You’re actually putting on your clothes when you’re doing drugs... Then you get all the padding and protection against... You’ve been walking around your whole life, actually being naked and then you’re suddenly allowed to put your clothes back on... So it’s a sort of a love story, and there’s a hole in the heart of those who quit. And no-one ever talks about that, the fact that it’s a longing for the rest of your life.” (Ingrid)

Avoiding trouble

Among the experiences that facilitated a positive development in these women’s lives was the acquisition of certain coping strategies that made their lives easier to manage.

One of these strategies was to avoid situations that had the potential of leading to trouble. In the first period of her soberness, Emilie would for example go off for long walks in the mountain so that the possibility of buying new drugs would be out of reach.

“Yeah, it’s been a rough time. There are still tough days, everything is like... it’s tingling throughout the whole of my body. But I... in the beginning I was quite good at getting out, I started walking, and then I was at my mothers place and it was right by the mountains, so I would walk up there. Far away from people, right, to... not make a phone call. So I was pretty good at that, in the beginning. When I struggled the most. (...) I just walked for a couple of hours, so that I wasn’t near people and able to get a hold of anything.” (Emilie)

Charlotte described the program as one method of avoiding trouble. This was a place where she could go to if she had nowhere else to go. Idleness was hence seen as a possible risk factor for getting into trouble again.

“It’s because I think to myself that it is much more fun to go up here [the program] (...) for some time, when you perhaps have a day of, than to fade away into something and then ‘oh, that there is just too tempting’ and then you’re sort of in a track you shouldn’t be in, right so... in that way it’s very good to be here.” (Charlotte)

Besides from turning to the program, Charlotte described the newly found ability to judge certain situations and act so that she as best as possible could avoid getting into difficulties.

“But of course, I do try to like, see conflicts out there, or anywhere... If I’m able to, as we talked about in the group earlier; left, right, or straight ahead when you see the person you’d rather not see go there. Then you would want to take a turn left or right to avoid a conflict. And I do that easily. (...) I make a detour to get some peace... But it depends on the situation. If they’re high, I’ll definitely do it. Then I have no problems with making a choice.” (Charlotte)

Separate between good/bad friends

A similar strategy mentioned by almost all of the women, was to separate between their good and bad friends and cut out people who were a bad influence or who were taking advantage of them.

“I’ve cut out many people and... don’t want anything more to do with them, and it was my own choice. And I’ve told them about it. (...) I’ve had my old network all along. So that’s... I’ve always known that I could come back there anytime I wanted. So I’ve been lucky that way.” (Britt)

“But I do try today to sort of see, OK... who are the friends I can trust now, and who are the ones I can’t? And I’ve started to draw a line there... right? (...) It’s the social network, and you have the line between, ok, what’s fine with me? What’s positive? And what’s like... I mean, you just have to separate it. And that’s the phase I’m in now (...).” (Charlotte)

For Anna, the good friends were not necessarily people outside of the drug related environment, but people she could trust and rely on and who cared about her.

“I’ve made sure that the friends that I consider as good friends. They’re few, but they’re good, and I’ll keep them even if they get high or not. Because, I’m able to see past the drugs, we’ve done other things than just getting high together. We’ve been good friends besides from that too.”
(Anna)

“I’ve been together with a lot of garbage. And I’m talking about people. That I’m pretty careful about who I let under my skin. I mean, who I want contact with. Because you get so tired of being used and... Because that’s what you are. So I guess I’m a lone wolf. But I don’t think it... It doesn’t bother me to be alone. I’m happy in my own company. I’m not very social, but I do of course have some people I care about and that I spend time with, but not as it was before. (...) It has to be people that I can talk to, and that have at least somewhat the same interests as me. When you’re out in the drug environment, you’re just sitting around and talking bullshit all the time. Because there’s nothing that makes any sense.” (Dina)

Make plans

Making plans and have something to look forward to, was important for all the women. They all had some goals they wanted to reach that provided meaning and purpose to their current actions and situations.

In most cases these plans were related to getting work or education.

“So, but the plan is to... I’m going to this computer course. So the plan is to at least, but with a partial disability pension, to work. That’s what I want to.” (Emilie)

“I’ve become more strict towards myself. I’ve sort of given myself more of a goal... work! And I do want to increase my working days next year. My future plans are to, at least, long before I turn fifty, to get an education as a cook. Yeah, so... cook, or to work in a canteen, or something else, because I’m getting the basis where I’m working now. Yeah, and that’s very important.” (Charlotte)

“I’ve figured out what I’m going to do the next year, instead of just thinking that ‘ok, now I have to get a job’, now I’ve like, I’m going to build up competence and... yes, get things in order there, so that I’ll have as much as possible on paper. So that I can, yeah, have a lot to show for when applying for a job.”

Me: “a plan...”

“Exactly... I’ve had little of that, I was very bad at it before! Planning and to have purpose and meaning.” (Anna)

“Hopefully I’ll be getting myself somewhere to live and... and find a job and so on... Of course it’s going to be difficult.” (Dina)

“[what’s important] is to continue the track that I’m on, and... achieve the plans that I have in my life.” (Britt)

“I have a lot of things to work on so... I’m going to have a real life and by myself an apartment and... yes, get myself a normal life.” (Britt)

Experiences of control

The importance of experiences of control for a positive development for sentenced women was greatly emphasized by the program employees. This was not explicitly mentioned by the women offenders, however, their appreciation of their own efforts and the importance of making plans, could be a sign that an experience of control in fact was important for them as well.

“It’s that feeling of control. That’s one of the biggest problems when you get out of prison, then suddenly... what do I have, what am I in charge of? Where am I in all of this? When you don’t have that sense of control, I think. Then all the rest happens afterwards. Because you don’t feel that you have any alternatives. Or choices.” (Frida)

“If we’re talking about success after release, then it’s about informed choices! Does the girl have the opportunity for informed choices? Or doesn’t she have any choice? (...). But informed choices, and time. That’s why we’re so concerned about getting contact prior to the sentence, so that we’re able to... so that the girl can start the process early. Because it

has to be informed choices for her to be able to choose something that actually feels right to her, I think. Because she may not have the overview, but many others have. So... informed choices are success criteria I think.”
(Helene)

“The feedback I’ve gotten was at least very positive from those who had us before [sentencing]... is something about the actual feeling of control of their own sentence, that they know what is going to happen when they’re going in and prior to going in, what they have to arrange and...” (Ingrid)

“And we also experience this difference between women who go... are being released straight from closed unit and to the society. From those who come from one of these transition housings, where they have their own studio, run their own economy, have to get their own detergent. Their transition is, I mean, then you have more control over what’s actually happening in the society, than those behind walls... and then suddenly are on the other side of the walls.” (Helene)

Transition from prison to society

As seen in the quote above, one way of increasing the women’s sense of control is by providing a smooth transition from prison to society. Many of the imprisoned women are therefore offered a certain amount of time in a transitional housing unit prior to their release. For Dina, this was expressed as a necessary part of her sentence. She expressed great concern for those serving shorter sentences than her, who therefore lacked this transitional opportunity. In her view, those who were let out straight from prison “to nothing” had small chances of doing well.

“It [transition housing] is like coming to paradise. Because now you run your own course. You go out and you do what is expected of you, right... apart from that you’re... they’ll leave you alone.” (Dina)

“Because they can’t let a person out after almost seven years to nothing. It’s not possible. But unfortunately that’s what happens in many cases.”
(Dina)

Dina’s view on the importance of transitions was to a great degree supported by the views of the program employees.

[About transition housing] *“Slowly, but steady the responsibility is transferred back to the person who is being released, right? Instead of being in prison when you’re getting help to everything, and someone deciding that you should. (...) The responsibility is going back to the person who is going to make it on her own.”* (Frida)

“Success in relation to release is of course that it has been a good transition. That is, that they have a place to call home.” (Helene)

“And it’s needed more progression in women’s sentencing. (...) Even if you have good programs at the closed units, if you come from closed unit one day, and to total freedom the next, you’re doomed to failure no matter how much you get to think about who you are and why you’re there.”
(Frida)

4.4.3 Consistency

For all the women, as with most of us, it was very important to have something to do. They all expressed their appreciation of being able to work, or desire to take on more education to be able to do a more fulfilling piece of work. In many cases it seemed almost as important to keep busy and engaged as getting a certain type of employment.

Experience of consistency

To have regular activities did for many of the women provide a framework for a more stable and structured life. Especially Anna stressed the importance of stability and being able to be consistent herself in following up the activities on her plan.

“It was the period when I, before I got sober when I had something to do every day, and then it was always one of the things that would fall out, one of the things that I didn’t manage to show up to. (...) And then here a couple of weeks ago... I found myself in, on the Friday, thinking that ‘this week, I’ve been to everything’, and I’ve done it without drugs or anything (...) I’ve been on time. That was something that I never was before. So, there are a lot of things that have improved in relation to things like that.”
(Anna)

“Yes, now there is order, and there’s stability, and there’s a framework [rammer], which makes it so much easier for me to stay sober” (Anna)

Another dimension of the importance of consistency is predictability. Helene argues that if the sentenced women are able to plan and start contact with the prison services before going in, consistency will be provided to the process and hence an increased chance for her to succeed.

“Yes, predictability... (...) The girl is on the outside, is going to prison, but is already in dialogue to cope with the detoxification process inside prison. Right. Huge weight of her back!” (Helene)

To have something to do/routines

The most important thing for providing consistency for the sentenced women was real activity and employment opportunities.

“Yeah, I’m at the drug court now. So I have something to do every day. I have to get out every day and...”

Me: “How important is that?”

“To have something to do? It’s actually very important. It’s like... to like know that you don’t have to get up until like twelve o’clock if you want to, or I’m able to... go to bet at seven in the morning and get up at four in the afternoon, right, it’s like nothing... there’s no routine. So now I’ve got more routines and more structure. So that’s all right.” (Emilie)

Charlotte was very concerned about being able to fill up her days with work or other appointments. She planned on getting a second job when she was done with the program to avoid having too many days off. Having days off seemed to her to be a threat and something that could interfere with the positive direction her life was starting to take.

“I actually think it’s very important. So that there’s not a day that’s like, ‘uhr, what am I doing today? Today there’s nothing because today I’m not at work.’ (...) But after new years... I’ll see. Something, cleaning somewhere or something, just to... have something to do besides the three days that I’m working now.” (Charlotte)

For Dina, working was a natural part of life. The routine of going to work and doing what is expected of you seemed to be of great value and importance for her.

“You’re used to go to work and you’re used to get up early in the mornings and do what is expected of you and... so there’s... it gets a routine.” (Dina)

Education

Both Charlotte and Anna relied much on their educational opportunities in order to strengthen their occupational opportunities. For Charlotte the educational process had started while she was in prison where she got to work as a cook. She also continued working in a kitchen when she got released. To become an educated cook was a central part of her future plans.

“My future plans are to, at least long before I turn fifty, to get an education as a cook. Yeah, so... cook, or to work in a canteen, or something else, because I’m getting the basis where I’m working now. Yeah... and that’s very important.” (Charlotte)

“I used to work at [a charity shop], in the warehouse there... but it was so much of the same, over and over again, and no variation, no variations in the tasks and... a bit static. So then I figured that I had to find something else. So now I’m here [the program]! And then, when I’m done here I’m going to get the computer certificate, and some more training, via NAV, and build up some competence this year, because I’ll get back to work, next year.” (Anna)

Employment

As already mentioned, employment and work was mentioned several times by most of the women. The importance of employment was explained in various ways, either by filling their time up with meaningful activities, by the value of employment itself, or by interest for a certain field.

“Yes, if we think about the women here who are actually working (...). That they enjoy a better life quality compared to before they went to prison. Yes, I think so! And that they have more control over their lives and am much more afraid to loose what they have now, yes, I believe so 100 percent.” (Helene)

“I don’t know... I’ve sort of focused a lot on working in a store, because that’s what I know, that’s what I’m good at. That’s what I’ve been doing all along. But now I’ve started to think that, perhaps I should broaden my horizon a bit, and see if there’s anything else I would want to be doing. Even if they’re not paying me for it.” (Anna)

One of the strongest advocates for employment among these women was without a doubt Dina. Not only did she see employment as an important way of filling her time up with meaningful activities, it was also a way of strengthening self-worth and source of therapy.

“Because I’ve done exactly the same things in prison as on the outside, and that is to work and that’s the only way to make the time pass when you have such a long sentence, then you just have to keep going, because otherwise you’ll simply go under. And then there’s no point in getting released. Then you might as well just stay in prison.” (Dina)

“There are many who choose not to work. Because they think it’s unjust that they should work for the correctional system. They’re there... you’re there against your will, right? But that’s actually the only solution to it if you’re going to get through a long sentence like that. You’ll have to keep going... at least that’s my opinion.” (Dina)

“But it’s... I believe that to work, it has to be... that’s really therapy. Thoughts are grinding and everything. Yeah, you don’t get to think that much and then it’s not that easy to just sit down and feel sorry for yourself and jam yourself down in misery, because then you know that you have a responsibility and you have to do this and that.” (Dina)

“And there are probably many thinking this way and... ‘why should I work when I get money anyway?’ But it’s sort of two different types of money,

because those you work for you've sort of made yourself really, really deserving of, if you catch my drift? So if they manage to... if you manage to see that, I think it gets easier.” (Dina)

To do something meaningful

Even though it was important for the women to have regular activities to maintain stability and structure, it was not for all of them indifferent what activities they were kept busy with.

Although settled with the thought that she probably never would be able to fulfil her dream of working with people, Emilie pointed out the importance of meaning in what she did.

“Yes. And get to do something meaningful, right?” (Emilie)

“I’m in the situation where I am now that I’m allowed to be employed. I get to give something back, right, I’m not just sitting here and thinking ‘what shall I do now? Tomorrow?’ I mean, it’s quite nice that it’s not like that.” (Charlotte)

Anna got a job while working to get her life in order for her drug court. Although she managed to stay sober and got the drug court, she quit her job as it got too tedious. For her it was not enough to only have a job, it was more important to work towards something more rewarding. She therefore spent her time on counselling groups and training opportunities that could build her competence and enable her to get more meaningful work in the future.

“It went all right with the apartment, but it didn’t go to well at work and... I was to much absence and... But then I quit my job this summer, but it was not because of drugs, it was because it simply got too boring.” (Anna)

4.5 Summary of Findings

How do programme clients and staffs define well-being? For the most part wellbeing seemed mostly related to being able to lead what we would call a “normal life”. Having stable and meaningful employment, owning an apartment, having close and trusting

relationships/friendships/families – a life characterized by stability, safety and self-worth.

To what factors do programme clients and staff attribute their recent positive life changes? Both women offenders and program staffs attributed positive life changes to experiences of reflection, coping and consistency. By being able to reflect upon their situation, the women could re-gain their self-worth, locate their identity and acknowledge the situation they were in and the measures needed to move forward in a positive direction. Experiences of coping were to a great extent related to getting off drugs and a withdrawal from bad social networks. It also seemed crucial to be able to take credit for the positive changes made and thus acknowledge their own abilities to affect their situation. The importance of consistency was mostly regarding having employment or other meaningful activities to fill up their time with. Additionally they all had some social networks or sources for support that were consistent, safe and reliable.

What are the specific GRRs/GRDs held/used by the women in the study? These sources of social support were one of the most important GRR held and frequently used by the women in the study. Family, friends and social/program workers were all important actors in supporting the positive development and facilitating positive experiences for these women. Besides from social resources, the women held some strong personal resources that seemed crucial to change their lives for the better. These personal resources included the determination to go through with their efforts to change, an inner strength that would not let them be defeated despite the harshness of their lives, and an ability to see and take advantage of the possibilities and opportunities that came along.

To what degree is the theory of salutogenesis an appropriate framework when studying and working with female offenders? The theory of salutogenesis proved to be a very useful framework for studying female offenders. It was possible to locate GRRs/GRDs held and used by the women. The theory could also help us understand how these resources and experiences could affect health and well-being through a strengthened SOC. Experiences of reflection and acknowledgement could, for example, make the world more comprehensive and possible to understand. The recognition of the effects of their own efforts, on the other hand, could make their situation to a greater degree manageable. To locate their self-worth and to recognize their positive close

relationships would thirdly give their life meaning and a source of motivation. Resources like social support and personal strength gave the opportunity to experiences of reflection, coping and consistency, which again would increase their sense of coherence. This increased sense of coherence would then further increase their chances of well-being, coping and positive life changes.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction to discussion

As expected, there was not expressed one simple miracle factor that helped these women transform their lives and cope with their difficulties. There were several aspects of these women's lives that they had worked on in order to get to the point where they were now. Most of the women in the study were still in the correctional system, but none of them were still in prison. Three out of five had been in prison while two were in probation-programs. All of the women expressed great changes in their lives since they were charged with their offence, mostly regarding getting sober and attaining a new outlook on their lives and themselves. Central in this process was their own motivation for change; a social network with perhaps few, but close relationships; social workers or program employees with genuine interest in the wellbeing of the women; real opportunities for meaningful activities, especially employment; being able to reflect on their own situation, responsibilities and abilities to affect their own lives; distance from previous bad relationships and networks.

One could question whether the stories these women tell may have been "practiced stories". Especially related to the cognitive therapy employed by the re-entry program, some of the women in the study may have been "trained" to think of and tell their story in a certain way. This may not make them any less true, but it should be interesting to further study how female offenders (and their stories) are being "institutionalized". According to Maruna, when an ex-offender is making the "*enormous life transformation*" of desistance, "*the person needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround*" (35, p.85). This narrative is explained as a "*believable story of why they are going straight*" (35, p.86) working to convince both the ex-convicts themselves and the surroundings of the authenticity of the change. Maruna found that

these narratives usually followed the same pattern in what he called “the redemption script”.

“The redemption script begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator – a victim of society who gets involved with crime and drugs to achieve some sort of power over otherwise bleak circumstances. This deviance eventually becomes its own trap, however, as the narrator becomes ensnared in the vicious cycle of crime and imprisonment. Yet, with the help of some outside force, someone who “believed in” the ex-offender, the narrator is able to accomplish what he or she was “always meant to do.” Newly empowered, he or she now also seeks to “give something back” to society as a display of gratitude.” (35, p.87)

Thus, although a reconstructed narrative or a redemption script is needed to convince both the society and the ex-convicts themselves of the legitimacy of the change, and thus making the change possible, there might be a difference between the forces explained to be important for this change to happen in these narrative, and what actually made the change.

Still, whether or not the factors being emphasized for enabling change in the stories of the women in this study is reflection what *really* made the change, I think it is important to acknowledge the experiences of these women, as well as their recounts of them, as providers of further insight into the situation of a group often forgotten or neglected.

5.2 Well-being

One of my research questions was how the participants define wellbeing. The reason for this was to provide an alternative to research where success is measured through desistance, and instead measure or define success based on the perspectives of the group being studied. Although the question was not posed explicitly to the participants, I was able to get an impression of what wellbeing meant to them based on the things they saw as important and the goals they had in their lives. There is, for example, little doubt that being sober was an important part of this picture. Although staying off drugs was a source of ambivalence to the heaviest users, like the love-story pictured by Ingrid, the effect their substance abuse had on their closest relationship and overall life quality was their main motivation for staying sober. Besides from that, wellbeing seemed mostly

related to being able to lead what we would call a “normal life”. Having stable and meaningful employment, owning an apartment, having close and trusting relationships/friendships/families – a life characterized by stability, safety and self-worth. This impression of wellbeing is well in line with the definition of well being presented earlier where it was stated as “*A subjective assessment of health which is less concerned with biological function than with feelings such as self esteem, and a sense of belonging through social integration.*” (16, p.126) As mentioned, to achieve this degree of social integration, factors and processes at both the individual, social and material level must take place.

5.3 Factors affecting wellbeing among women offenders

The factors and processes found to influence a positive development among women offenders in this study is to a great deal in line with results from previous studies. Several studies, along with this one, show that resources and processes must take place at both the individual, social and material level to properly enable change and successful reintegration for women offenders (8,30,33,38,53,54).

5.3.2 The individual level

First, the individual must be motivated for change and have the determination or self-efficacy (8,33,55) to go through with it. Self-reflection, especially in terms of self-efficacy is emphasized in several studies on female offenders (8,38,55).

“In addition to the women’s insights about their change in consciousness or attitudes about “making it”, their development of strategies for fostering and rebuilding relationships, and their ability to build upon small successes in order to develop confidence, they expressed their need for counselling and support to help them deal with past traumas and conflicts with family members”. (8 p. 294)

Self-efficacy is an individual’s perception of own capabilities (56). This may be strengthened through processes of reflection, achievement and experiences of control. The concept of self-efficacy has been used several times in the offender rehabilitation literature. [main findings and references] In this study, self-efficacy did not seem to be an important factor for the onset of a positive development in the women. However, the life experiences posed by these changes seemed to affect their lives partly by

strengthening their self-efficacy as the women saw the results of their own efforts. This strengthened self-efficacy would then enable further changes and maintenance of their positive development. The concept of self-efficacy is closely related to the concept of sense of coherence, especially the manageability component. Some literature does explore the differences between the two with contested findings (57). Self-efficacy is mostly related to its effect on coping behaviours, it may thus be explained as a more narrow and strictly behavioural concept compared to the more broad concept of sense of coherence. While self-efficacy indirectly affects an individual's well-being through coping behaviours (56), SOC may also affect well-being directly by representing a person's understanding of the world and thus mental health (42).

For most of the women it seemed like a moment in time where they just decided or realized that they needed to change. This determination or motivation might in some cases come from being faced with harsh realities of your own situation (32). This could be related to what the program employees spoke of as reaching your own bottom in order to be motivated for climbing up again. In a study on male high-risk offenders in Sweden, Haggård et al also found that a decision to change often was triggered by a shocking experience. In a combination with stable relationship, care for children and decreased drug use, this decision enabled their positive outcomes (32).

5.3.3 The social level

Strengthening an individual's self-efficacy and motivation are processes that re-entry programs, social services, parole officers and personal relationship could help facilitate. Social support from these instances is key (30,33,37,58). There is always *someone*, a significant other. However, the literature is not consistent when it comes to the importance of children and being a mother for offending women (30,33,37,58). This was also the case in this study; the importance of children for the women's motivation to change was mixed. What does seem important is to separate between good and bad social networks and dissolve the friendships belonging to the last group (33,59). In contrast with some of these findings, the results from this study indicate that bad social networks not necessarily includes all networks involved with substance abuse or other illegal activities. What seemed to matter the most was the quality of the relationship and the amount of support the women would receive from it.

5.3.4 The material level

Next, as most of these women have some problems with drug or alcohol abuse, getting sober is a crucial step towards getting a better life (33,38,60,61). Some do this by themselves, simply by determination, but the effect of proper drug treatment programs should not be underrated. Additionally many have severe mental health problems that also need treatment and attention (33,38,60,61). This seems especially important in the process of getting off drugs as previously suppressed issues may come to the surface when the individual gets sober.

As for most of us, the possibility for doing meaningful activities, especially through employment, is crucial to the self-worth and wellbeing of women offenders (7,30,33,38,58,61,62). Programs, like the one in this study, could be an important arena for meaningful activities, as well as possible providers of help to attain employment or vocational training. Additionally these programs could be a safe place for these women to talk about their problems with someone who understand, reflect upon the situation they're in, and learn effective coping skills that help them continue their new pro-social way of life.

“Follow-up after release is especially important, because we know that the prison stay for women usually is so short that a meaningful treatment program would, for the majority of the women, not be possible to conduct in the short time the prison stay lasts.” [my translation] (1, p. 36)

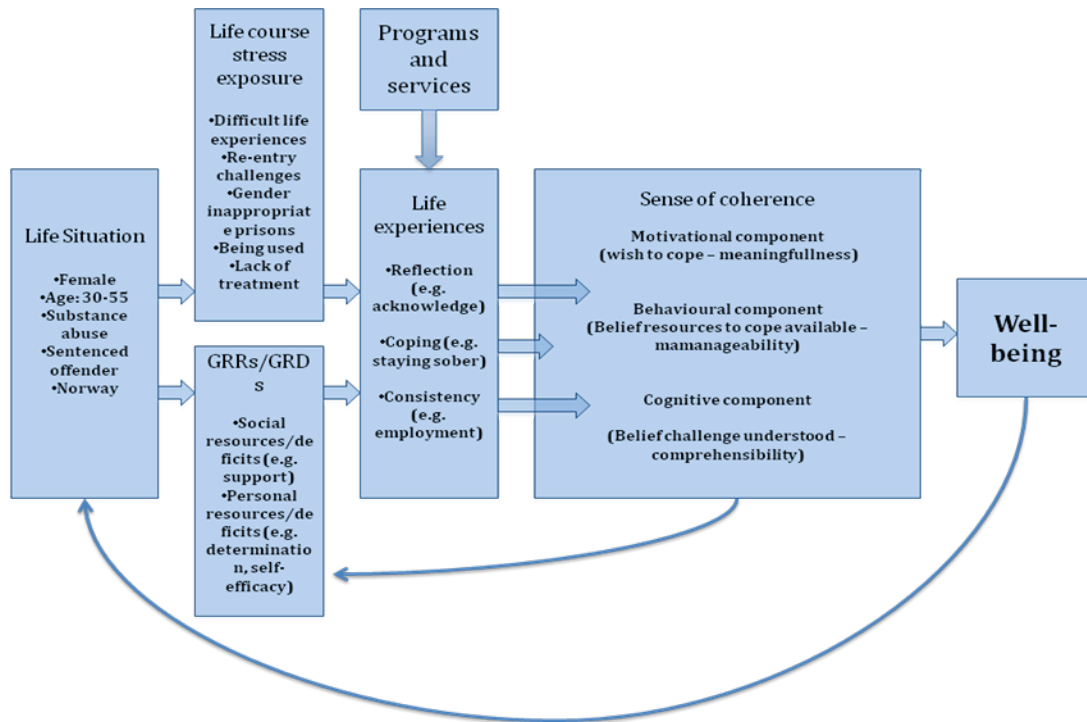
5.4 The theory of Salutogenesis as a framework for research and practice

I would argue for a salutogenic perspective, and an aim to improve these women's positive health through an increased sense of coherence. The focus would therefore be on their overall wellbeing, and not merely desistance from crime (e.g. the society's wellbeing). Not only would we have a basis for a more comprehensive approach in reducing new offences, we would also be able to work towards strengthening their overall life quality in a systematic way.

The results of this study could well be explained through the theory of salutogenesis. Women must have the appropriate GRRs in place to facilitate and enable certain life experiences. These life experiences are also to a great degree provided by programs or services. This is however where the theory may fall short. Programs and services are not

generalized resistance resources as they are there only in a certain situation for these women. Still, to characterize them as life experiences may give the actual efforts made by program planners, workers and users themselves, too little credit. I've therefore modified the model presented earlier to include interventions (programs and services) as a separate factor affecting life experiences for the purpose of this study.

Figure 2. (44) (Modified version)



The model could work as a guideline for program developers and researchers by explaining the processes towards wellbeing through sense of coherence. Although the women's sense of coherence was not measured in this study, the factors that were important for a better life could be argued to affect positive health through their strengthening of the women's sense of coherence. Experiences of coping, reflection and consistency enable the women to perceive their lives as manageable, meaningful and comprehensive [Figure 2]. These experiences are facilitated by the GRRs illuminated in this study, along with programs and services available to the women offenders. The modified version of the model also shows how I imagine the process of being more of a dynamic, almost circular, process rather than a simple linear process. From the findings in this study and on other studies focusing on self efficacy, there seems to be evidence supporting the thought that when life experiences strengthen women's SOC this

contributes to developing personal resources (e.g. self-efficacy) that later may facilitate new positive life experiences.

5.5 Implications for practice

This study not only provides insight in what factors that helps women to attain and maintain a crime-free lifestyle. It also provides a new way of defining the actual goal of working with this group. The goal of not committing crime is a goal based on a negative, desist from certain actions, which is very situation specific and difficult to measure. At what point in time could you say that a person is successfully desisting from crime? How long must it be since her last criminal act, and do we only count those acts that she's being charged with? In addition to the difficulty of defining desistance, it also entails unclear intentions towards what these women need, and difficulties deciding which measures are most effective.

In line with previous research on female offenders in Norway, some of the women in this study had histories of trauma, abuse and mental health issues (1,34). There is little doubt that prevention, protection and health promotion in the early years therefore should be among the prioritized strategies.

It may not be necessary to know exactly which of the factors and resources mentioned that comes first. What is important is to have the necessary services available to make all of these processes possible for all sentenced women. Complex problems require complex solutions, so there are no quick fixes. Additionally, although the stories and issues of these women share many of the same characteristics, they are still very different from each other. To be able to listen and adapt the services to their individual needs is therefore crucial.

5.5.1 VINN and the Norwegian correctional services

As mentioned, VINN is a support group program especially tailored to meet the needs of women. Its aim is to *“build up the women's ability to make more adequate choices leading to a better life in general with less abuse of alcohol and drugs and reduction in crime and violence”* (47). The program is based on theories of cognitive change and motivational interviewing (63). Findings from an evaluation of the program in Norway and Sweden indicate that the participants had great use of the program (63).

In a government white paper from 2007/2009 they mention VINN as a program with positive results and calls for the availability of it, or similar programs, for all female inmates. They admit that it is difficult to offer the same range of services to women as men because they are such a small group (63). This problem is especially highlighted in a qualitative study executed in 2008/2009. The study illuminated that less than two out of ten women inmates received treatment for drug abuse in prison while more than fifty percent state that they wish this treatment (64). This, along with the results from this study, may indicate that there is still a way to go in meeting the needs of women offenders in Norway, especially with regard to treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems.

The white paper further reports on the preliminary success of the new penalty form called drug program with judicial review (Narkotikaprogram med domstolskontroll [ND]). This is tried out as an alternative for prison sentences for drug addicts and in the white paper, the government calls for the program to be expanded to the whole country and to include younger offender-groups (64). One woman in this study was a part of the ND program. For her, simply the possibility of getting into ND instead of a prison sentence gave her the motivation to straighten out several important aspects of her life.

5.5.3 Health promotion practice

“A comprehensive definition of health promotion can serve as a useful paradigm that links correctional health care to the larger public health system, expands the focus of correctional health services from medical care during custody to preparation for healthy living after release, and provides a rationale for expanding the goals of incarceration to include not only punishment but also rehabilitation.” (65, p. 229-230)

The Health in Prisons Project (HPP) is a European network working to establish prisons as a setting for health promotion practice (25). However, their approach has been criticized for being too individualistic and characterized by reactive disease-oriented risk reduction/prevention (26). Also, it's mostly focused on health in prison and not the reintegration process or the continuity of care and services both pre- and post incarceration needed to improve well-being and prevent recidivism. Hopefully this study could help facilitate a new approach in the HPP. In addition to their great concern

for health services and diseases in prison, HPP should be more concerned with utilizing the strengths and resources among the inmates and work towards wellbeing before, under and after imprisonment. Ramaswamy and Freudenberg explain how the correctional health services may be guided by the five action areas of health promotion (28). They too are mostly concerned about the in-prison health services and disease prevention. However, their involvement of community action and healthy public policies in the offender reintegration process could be of great inspiration to both HPP and the national correctional services.

“The challenge ahead is to develop systematic approaches to making prisons and jails settings that improve rather than harm the well-being of the people who enter the front gate and the families and communities to which they return.” (28, p.243)

The theory of salutogenesis is a central part of the health promotion theory base (43,57). This study has shown how a salutogenic approach may guide research and practice aimed at improving well-being among women offenders. The aim of the correctional services should be guided by the health promotion and salutogenic notions that the goal is to strengthen the individuals and their environment to increase their possibilities for well-being. As one of the program employees in this study expressed:

“When you go to prison (...) the focus should not be on that this is your punishment, that now you’re going to prison and this time is taken from you. The focus should be on; what are your strengths? (...) How can a person be able to build oneself up? (...) Time is, that’s the punishment, it is taken from you, but besides from that the focus should be on all the good things.”

Health promoting principles like empowerment, skill development and community involvement could thus be useful for programs and services aimed at this group.

“A successful program intended to reintegrate women into society has to find ways to help women to have a sense of “agency”. Women need, not as a luxury but as an essential need, a sense that they can alter their social environment.” (Bloome et al., 2002, ref. in 12, p. 325)

5.6 Scientific implications

Although growing, this field of study is still a small field dominated by research in the US context focusing on recidivism, desistance and risk factors rather than wellbeing and salutary factors. There seems to be a positive development with some research on re-entry success also in Europe (64), and this study represent a part of what will hopefully become a growing trend. Still, although with a positive approach in some of the recent literature, no research is done with the theory of Salutogenesis as a framework.

Based on the findings and experiences from this study, if I get the chance to go further with this line of research, my next steps would either be to do a more in-depth discourse analysis on the women's presentation of their own stories, or conduct a longitudinal quantitative or mixed methods study to explore causal relationships between program properties and successful reintegration processes.

5.7 Limitations

One obvious limitation by this study is my lack of experience as a researcher. An experienced researcher may have avoided many of the challenges I faced throughout the study. However, it was indeed a learning process, as it was intended to be. I do feel that I managed to adapt to the challenges along the way and thus end up with a set of valuable data. This was especially made possible by my great supervisor whose solid experience made up for many of my shortcomings.

Also, my academic background and training is mostly limited to health promotion, with some elements of sociology and psychology. The field of criminology was therefore a field I had little experience with from before.

Another limitation with the study is related to the research sample. All of the women in this study were still in some contact with the correctional system, mainly regarding the final phase of their sentence. There were no interviews with women with a long-term absence from the criminal system. Success thus relied on the women's current outlooks and sense of well-being, and not their proven desistance from crime over a long period of time. The inclusion of program workers with long-term experiences may, however, partially add up for this. Still, a longitudinal study would be more appropriate in describing the long-term development in the lives of these women. However, the aim

was not to show any causal links between certain factors and their outcomes. Instead, the aim was to get an impression of which processes or factors were important for the women themselves, or at least what they emphasized as important in a conversation with an “outsider”. Also, the aim was to explore the appropriateness of a health promotion perspective and health promotion theories in researching and working with this group.

Lastly, the study does not explore the differences between services offered to men and women, except from that expressed by the women in the interviews. It solely relies on the literature showing that gender specific research and practice is appropriate as the needs of women and men in this position differ. Also, as this is not an evaluation study, I did not evaluate the appropriateness of the interventions or programs that the women in the study were a part of. The impressions I have of their appropriateness is thus solely based on how the programs were emphasized in the women’s stories and previous research identified in the literature review.

5.8 Conclusion

Well being, as experienced by the female offenders in this study, can be defined as characterized by social inclusion, stability, safety, meaning and self-worth. There were several aspects of these women’s lives that seemed to contribute to a positive development towards wellbeing. These factors are related to personal strengths, social resources and support, appropriate services and treatment, opportunities for meaningful activities, and reflection. It is possible to identify GRRs in the context of the Salutogenic model that seems to help the women move towards enhanced wellbeing. GRRs understood to be held and used by the women in this study that were relevant for their positive development, was mainly related to personal strengths and social support mechanisms. They all expressed some inner strengths or qualities that helped them through harsh life situations, in addition to sources of social support that was not related to drug use or anti-social behaviours. These resources, along with appropriate programs or services, enabled positive life experiences (coping, reflection, and consistency) that might increase their well-being through a strengthened SOC.

This approach provides insights that more traditional studies on recidivism and desistance are not able to give. The Salutogenic model may be well appropriate in studying well-being among female offenders and could be a valuable tool in planning and evaluating interventions aimed at increasing their life quality. Still it shows how the importance of situation specific resources is not covered by the model, and therefore suggests an additional component representing this. Programs and services offered to these women in a difficult situation is to many a crucial factor in the movement towards increased well-being.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Informasjonsskjema

Forespørsel om å delta i intervju i forbindelse med en masteroppgave

Jeg er masterstudent i helsefremmende arbeid ved Universitetet i Bergen og holder nå på med den avsluttende masteroppgaven. Temaet for oppgaven er kvinner som har opplevd å komme tilbake til samfunnet etter å ha sonet en dom. Alle mennesker har noen positive egenskaper og styrker som hjelper dem gjennom livet. Dette studiet vil se på hvilke slike styrker og egenskaper som er viktige når man skal tilbake til livet utenfor fengselet.

Jeg vil i denne forbindelse foreta et gruppeintervju med ansatte i et ettervernsprogram og enkeltintervju med kvinner som tidligere har sonet en dom. Informasjonen fra prosjektet vil bli skrevet i en masteroppgave som tiltak for tidligere innsatte kan bruke til videre utvikling og forbedring.

Dine erfaringer kan gi viktig informasjon til studiet. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker sammen. Intervjuet vil ta omtrent en time, og vi blir sammen enige om tid og sted.

Det er frivillig å være med og du har mulighet til å trekke deg når som helst underveis, uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Dersom du trekker deg vil alle innsamlede data om deg bli anonymisert. Opplysningene vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, og ingen enkeltpersoner vil kunne gjenkjennes i den ferdige oppgaven. Opplysningene anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen utgangen av 2012.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S.

Hvis du er interessert i å delta eller det er noe du lurer på kan du ringe meg på tlf. 47 65 09 93, eller sende en e-post til annette.servan@student.no. Du kan også kontakte min veileder Maurice M. Mittelmark, professor på HEMIL-senteret ved Universitetet i Bergen på telefonnummer 55 58 32 51 dersom du har spørsmål om prosjektet.

Med vennlig hilsen
Annette Kathinka Servan
Thormøhlensgate 24
5006 Bergen

Appendix 2

Intervjuguide fokusgruppe

Introdusering av intervjuer og prosjektet + bruk av lydopptager

Noen spørsmål?

Introduksjonsrunde av gruppen (kort om deres bakgrunn og arbeidsoppgaver)

1. Hva vil dere si er hovedutfordringene til de kvinnene dere arbeider med når de kommer ut av fengsel?
2. Tenk på de kvinnene dere har arbeidet med som dere mener har klart seg bra/bedre enn de andre til tross for hva de har vært gjennom;
 - a. Hva tror dere er grunnen til at de har klart seg?
 - b. Ut fra deres oppfattelse, hvordan pleier de vanligvis å håndtere vanskelige situasjoner og utfordringer?
 - c. Hvordan vil dere beskrive deres forhold til venner og familie?
 - d. Hvilke positive egenskaper er mest tydelig blant disse kvinnene?
 - e. Hvem vil dere si er deres viktigste støttespillere?
 - f. Hva vil dere si er deres viktigste ressurser?
3. Tenk på de kvinnene som har vært i kontakt med programmet både før, under og etter fengselsopphold;
 - a. Har dere opplevd noen forandringer hos disse kvinnene i løpet av den tiden?
 - i. Hvilke?
 - ii. Hva tror dere er hovedårsakene til denne utviklingen?
 - b. Hva oppfatter dere vanligvis som hovedforskjellen mellom livene deres før og etter fengselsoppholdet (hvis det er noen forskjell)?

Avsluttende spørsmål

1. Hjertelig takk for at dere har tatt dere tid til å snakke med meg om arbeidet deres! Kan dere komme på noen spørsmål jeg burde ha spurt dere om for å få en riktig forståelse av de kvinnene dere arbeider med og deres situasjon?

Appendix 3

Intervjuguide enkeltintervju

Åpningsspørsmål

1. *Hvor gammel er du?*
2. *Hvor lenge har du vært i kontakt med Aurora?*

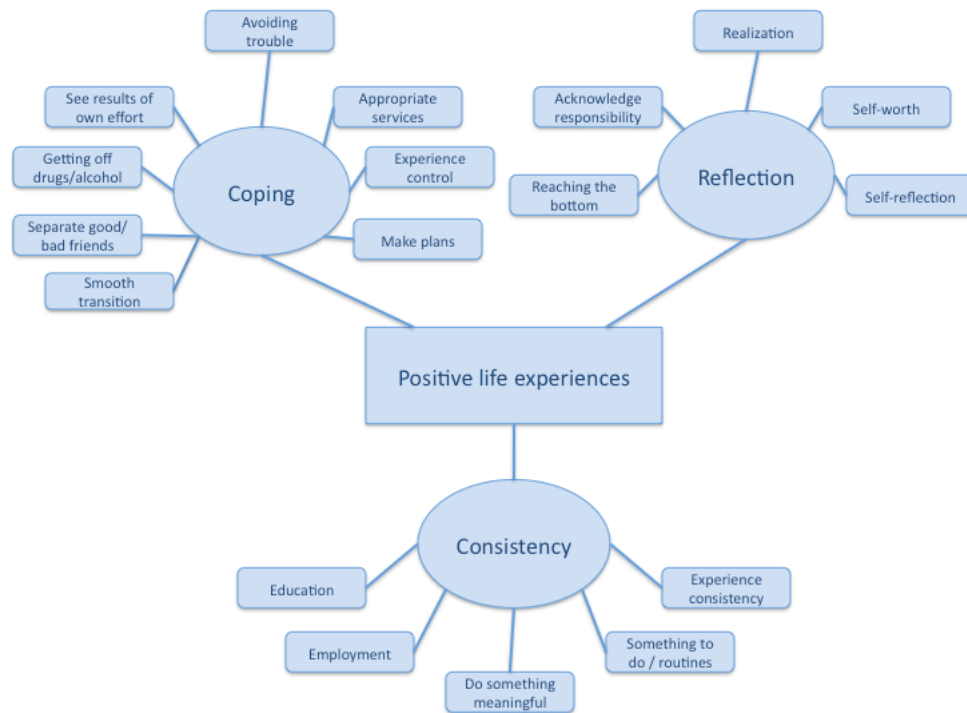
Kan du fortelle meg om livet ditt (detaljerte svar)

4. Har du lyst til å begynne med å fortelle litt om deg selv? Hva er din historie?
5. Hvordan var livet før du startet soning? Hvordan vil du beskrive forholdet ditt til venner og familie var?
6. Hvordan vil du beskrive livet ditt nå? Hvordan vil du beskrive forholdet ditt til venner og familie?
7. Hvordan vil du si at du er kommet dit du er i livet ditt i dag?
8. Hva føler du er de beste sidene ved livet ditt nå?
9. Hvordan håndterte du det å komme ut av fengsel? Hva mener du var det viktigste du gjorde i forhold til å komme tilbake til samfunnet?
10. Hvordan vil du beskrive deg selv som person? Hva er du flink til?
11. Hva motiverer deg?
12. Vil du si at du har forandret deg i løpet av de siste årene? Hvordan? Hva tror du er grunnen til dette?
13. Hvordan pleier du å håndtere utfordringer du møter i hverdagen?
 - a. Hva/hvem pleier å hjelpe deg i vanskelige situasjoner?
14. Hva er dine mål videre?
 - a. Hva skal til for at du kan nå disse målene?
15. Hvilke råd vil du gi til andre som er i samme situasjon du har vært i?

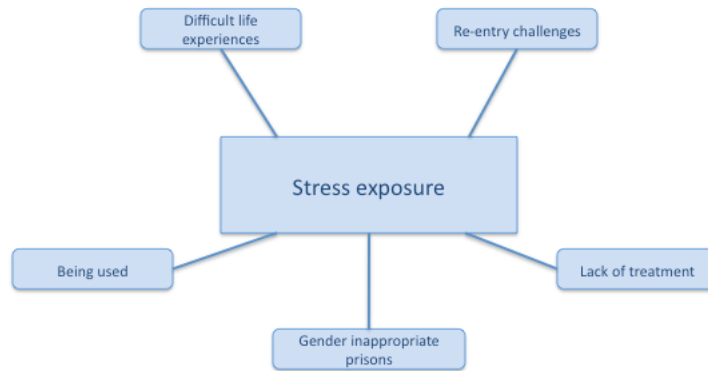
Avsluttende spørsmål

2. Hjertelig takk for at du har tatt deg tid til å snakke med meg om livet ditt! Kan du komme på noen spørsmål jeg burde ha spurt deg om for å få en riktig forståelse av deg og din situasjon?
3. Nå er vi nesten ferdig med intervjuet, så jeg lurer på om det er noen spørsmål du gjerne vil stille meg?

Appendix 4



Appendix 5



Appendix 6

