

8-2012

What Incarcerated Women at the Women's Center Say They Need from the Criminal Justice System

Jillian Foley

University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/muskie_capstones

 Part of the [Criminology Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Foley, Jillian, "What Incarcerated Women at the Women's Center Say They Need from the Criminal Justice System" (2012). *Muskie School Capstones and Dissertations*. 125.
https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/muskie_capstones/125

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Muskie School Capstones and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN MAINE:

*What Incarcerated Women at the Women's Center Say They Need
from the Criminal Justice System*

GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN MAINE:
What Incarcerated Women at the Women's Center Say They Need from the Criminal Justice System

August 2012

Author:

Jillian Foley

Advisor & Editor:

Lisa Morris

This study was conducted as a final capstone project, part of a graduate school requirement at the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service.

Acknowledgements

Erica King, Co-facilitator & Mentor

Lisa Morris, Advisor & Editor

To the participants:

Thanks you for your participation in the focus group discussions. Your perspectives are a vital resource for policy professionals.

To the staff at the Women's Center:

Thank you for your collaboration and dedication to service quality, and policy improvement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
KEY FINDINGS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
Purpose	6
Statement of Problem	6
Significance of the Study	6
Maine’s Women Offenders	7
Key Terms	8
Summary of the Literature	8
METHODOLOGY	13
Setting	14
Sample	14
Data Collection Procedures	15
Data Analysis	16
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	17
What is working well, and what needs to be changed to be more gender-responsive?	18
The “college dorm” set up	18
A Relational Community	19
A connection to their families and children	21
Work Assignments	23
Programs and Activities	24
Planning for life after incarceration	26
Services: Medical, Dental, Mental Health	27
The Staff: Women need to feel mutual respect, dignity, and safety	28
Are there inconsistencies between policies and practices?	30
The women need better communication about what is expected from them	30
Do the women feel that their time spent at the Women’s Center has been more or less beneficial than what they may have experienced in other correctional environments?	31
LIMITATIONS	33
CONCLUSIONS	34
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND PROGRAMS	35
APPENDIX A: THEME CODES	37
APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT	38

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Female offenders have unique experiences that have led to their incarceration compared to men. Maine women offenders are no exception to this fact. These women, while incarcerated are still mothers, grandmothers, daughters, friends, business owners, students, and members of our community. Incarcerated women need the same things we all need: to feel respected, to have hope for the future, to be able to support themselves financially, and to feel connected to their families, friends, and community. Research shows that some of the most important factors that can help reduce recidivism among women is to ensure they can support themselves and their families through gainful employment, have a support system in place to deal with any mental health, trauma related, or substance abuse issues, and have a pro-social peer and family support network. Corrections facilities are designed with the purpose to “correct” the criminal behavior that has resulted in incarceration, and therefore should focus their policies, practices, and programs on those risk factors and needs that will help to achieve this goal. In order to reduce recidivism and truly help these women, criminal justice systems must implement gender-responsive policies that address the distinct needs and experiences of incarcerated women.

The purpose of this study was to give a voice to Maine’s incarcerated women and potentially influence the ongoing policy revision process in Maine. The researcher conducted 3 focus groups with 18 residents of the Women’s Center- a gender-responsive facility that houses about 70 to 80 incarcerated women at the Maine Correctional Facility in Windham, ME. Researchers wanted to know what works well at the women’s center, what does not work, and how the women felt the policies could be improved to better fit their needs as incarcerated women. The perspectives of the participants varied, however, the findings of the study were largely in line with the literature guidelines for gender-responsive policies and practices. The participants expressed a desire for an environment where they can feel safe, respected and empowered to change their lives for the better. In order to live independent, crime free lives after they leave, the participants said they need more hands on, concrete re-entry planning and help finding supports in the community they are returning to. The women also expressed a need for job training and experience. For many of these women the most important motivation to change was the connection to their families and the hope for re-unification. In order to address these needs, gender-responsive policies and practices need to be developed and consistently implemented.

KEY FINDINGS

- The needs and wants of the women at the Women’s Center are in line with theoretical guidelines for gender-responsive policies, practices, and services.
- Incarcerated women need to feel respected, safe, and empowered to change.
- A relational community and positive social relationships with peers can be better encouraged through the development of appropriate policies.
- The women need more appropriate activities that will help them feel a connection to their families and practice positive parenting skills.
- The participants stressed the importance of more jobs and vocational training.
- The women need concrete re-entry planning that ensures they will have the necessary supports to succeed, such as: housing, employment, substance abuse and mental health supports, and help with family re-unification.
- Policies need to be clear and consistently implemented by all staff members.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The goal of this project was to give a voice to the incarcerated women and learn what they need from the criminal justice system. The project was conducted as a Master's capstone project, a requirement for the Muskie School of Public Service Master's degree program. The researcher collected data from focus groups with the women at the Women's Center at the Maine Correctional Center in Windham, Maine. The researcher compared the results to the theoretical guidelines for gender-responsive policies and practices. The hope was that this data may be used to inform the ongoing policy revision process in Maine, as well as possibly to inform a National Institute of Corrections policy bulletin on gender-responsive policies nationwide.

The researcher aimed to answer the following questions:

- Are there policies and practices that are gender-responsive and work well?
- What policies and practices should be changed to be more gender-responsive?
- Are there inconsistencies between policies and practices?
- Do the women feel that their time spent at the Women's Center has been more or less beneficial than what they may have experienced in other correctional environments?

Statement of Problem

Incarcerated women have very different pathways that lead to their incarceration when compared to men. Research shows that the majority of incarcerated women are from backgrounds where they have experienced poverty, drug use, and physical, mental and sexual abuse. When compared to male offenders, the crimes committed by females are less likely to be violent crimes, but rather financial based or drug related crimes. Women are also more likely to have been the primary caretaker of young children before their arrest compared to men (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; County of Santa Clara Department of Corrections, 2008; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, Women Offenders and the Gendered Effects of Public Policy, 2004; Cobbina, 2009; Labelle & Pimlott Kubiak, 2004; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dieten, 2012). According to Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) "Women offenders are disproportionately women of color who are undereducated and unskilled, with sporadic employment histories" (p. 2). Punitive, male-based, policies are not working to stop recidivism for these women. They need rehabilitative programs that will help address the issues that lead to their incarceration and help them live an independent, crime free life when they leave the system. Facility policies should reflect the experiences of women. Routine correctional policies and practices (e.g. strip searches) have the potential to be re-traumatizing and exacerbate behavioral challenges for these women. Therefore, if we are going to stop the cycle of recidivism for these women, the criminal justice system needs to create policies and programs that address these unique needs and experiences (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, Women Offenders and the Gendered Effects of Public Policy, 2004; Patino, Ravoira, & Wolf, 2006; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dieten, 2012).

Significance of the Study

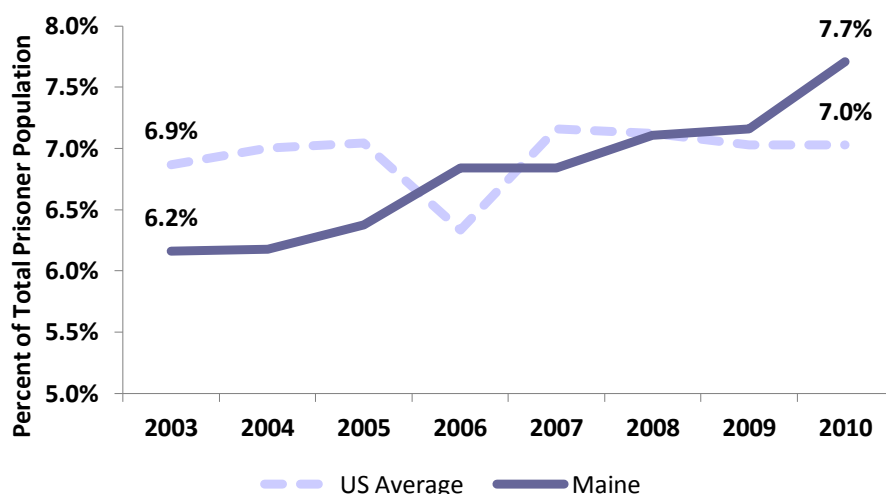
This study is significant in that it investigated what gender-responsive policies might look like in Maine. This is important because women prisoners have different needs than male prisoners and so gender-responsive programs and policies need to be developed to address those differences. A review of the literature suggested that there is a lack of concrete gender-responsive policy models, and thus it is the hope that this study will help guide policymakers as they create gender-responsive policies in Maine. Any significant findings in this study may also be used to inform a National Institute of Corrections policy bulletin. This study could potentially be significant for

incarcerated women in the state of Maine and nationwide as corrections professionals review their policies for gender-responsiveness.

Maine's Women Offenders

In 2010, females represented 7.0% of the United States prisoner population. Maine was slightly above the national average with females representing 7.9% of the prisoner population (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). While women represent a small percentage of the total prisoner population, the rates of incarceration for females are growing faster in Maine. Figure 1 shows the female prisoner percent of the total prisoner population from 2003 to 2010. Since 2003, the percent of female prisoners in Maine has grown from 6.2% to 7.7%, compared to the national average which has remained relatively the same¹.

Figure 1: Percent of female prisoners, as a percent of the total prisoner population, 2003-2010



A 2009 study² of case records of women who entered probation between 2004 and 2006, found that female offenders in Maine were predominately white, and had a mean age of 32 years old. About half were single, and the majority had no more than a high school education. Only one-third of the sample was employed full time at the time of their arrest. The 2009 study also found that the average age at first arrest was 24 years old, and the women had an average of 3 prior offenses (King, 2009).

¹ As the graph shows, the only significant change in the US average percent of female prisoners was in 2006 when it dropped to 6.3%, however in 2007 it was back up to 7.2%.

² See: King, E. (2009). *Maine's Women Offenders: What Do We Know?* Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service. This report can be found at: http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/justicersearch/adult_research.html#wmn.

Key Terms

Gender-responsive:

For this report, gender-responsive (gender specific/ informed) means that the program, practice, or policy is designed in a way that addresses the specific needs of women and women's lives and is guided by research on women. These programs take into consideration the unique pathways that lead to women committing crimes and are trauma-informed, strengths-based, and culturally competent (National Institute of Corrections, 2010; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004). It is important to remember that the term is not meant to be exclusive, but rather stresses the importance of recognizing the gendered differences for both men and women in psychological development, socialization, exposure to trauma, culture, and lifetime experiences (National Resource Center on Justice-involved Women, 2011).

Recidivism:

For this report, recidivism means that the individual has been arrested for a new crime. Recidivism is the measure that most states use to gauge the effectiveness of correctional/criminal justice programs designed to reduce future criminal behavior (King, 2009).

Evidence-based Policies:

Policies should be evidence-based in order to ensure that they are an efficient use of resources and effective at achieving the desired outcomes. According to the Urban Institute (2008) evidence-based policies are based on a rigorous approach that draws on careful data collection, experimentation, and mixed methods analysis. When developing evidence-based policies, policymakers should ask the following questions: What exactly is the problem? What are the possible ways to address the problem? And what are the probable impacts and costs? (The Urban Institute, 2008).

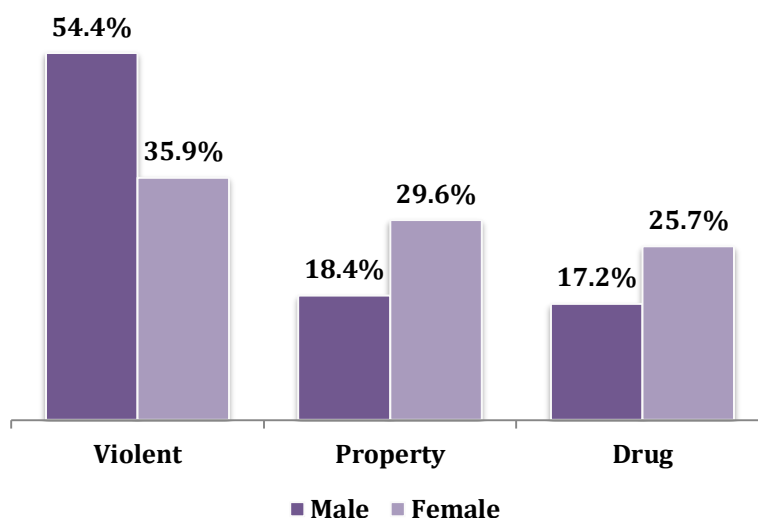
Summary of the Literature

There is a great deal of research on women prisoners and thus it cannot all be summarized here. Therefore, this literature review focused on the justification for and implementation of gender-responsive policies, programs, practices and services. The researcher examined various types of literature that looked at the development and implementation of gender-responsive strategies and programs in order to shed some light on how Maine might incorporate these ideas into corrections policies. The literature review revealed some important themes about incarcerated women and needs for services, but overall lacked in providing concrete models to implement the new strategies and policies. Some themes from the literature included: the unique pathways of women offenders and their diverse needs; recommendations for transforming the system; a need for clearly written gender-responsive policies; a need for trauma-informed, evidence-based programs to aid in re-entry; and the importance of family for female offenders. Overall the literature review revealed a need for more research and empirical studies to provide more evidence to the theoretical gender-responsive service guidelines and to develop concrete gender-responsive models that can be used by policymakers and corrections professionals.

Research suggests that women's pathways in and out of the criminal justice system are different than men's. Thus, much of the literature specified a need for gender-responsive policies and practices as a result of the unique pathways of women offenders. For example, women are more likely than men to find themselves in situations involving trauma, abuse, neglect, relationship issues, and substance abuse before they become involved with the criminal justice system (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Bloom B. , Owen, Piper Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002; Calhoun, Messina, Cartier, & Torres, 2010; Hannah-Moffat, 2006; Center For

Gender & Justice, 2011). Studies suggest that about half³ of all incarcerated women report to have experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime, compared to about 10 percent of men (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Women are also more likely than men to be incarcerated for non-violent crimes. According to Labelle and Pimlott Kubiak (2004) women are the most rapidly growing population in the criminal justice system and the majority is under its jurisdiction for drug-related crimes. Women are more likely to be convicted for crimes relating to drugs, or property crimes- such as theft or fraud (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). Figure 2 shows the estimated percent of sentenced prisoners in 2009 under state jurisdiction in the U.S. by their offense type and sex⁴. In 2009, females were less likely to be incarcerated for violent crimes than males (35.9% and 54.4% respectively). Females were also more likely to be sentenced for property (29.6%) and drug crimes (25.7%) compared to males (18.4% and 17.2% respectively).

Figure 2: Estimated percent of sentenced prisoners under state jurisdiction, by offense, sex, 2009



Another difference between male and female offenders is the fact that women are more likely than men to have been the primary caretaker of their children prior to their arrest. When they leave prison, women also have a harder time securing housing, re-connecting to their families, and finding employment when compared to men (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Cobbina, 2009). According to Cobbina (2009) men are more likely to return to families and have an easier time finding employment when they are released. Literature suggests that gender-responsive policies need to be implemented to help address these gendered experiences and in turn possibly reduce the likelihood of recidivism among women offenders.

An additional suggestion from the literature was that any new gender-responsive program or practice needs to be supported by clearly written policies. Literature suggests that the current criminal justice system, and its policies, is based largely on best practices for males, due to the comparatively small female offender population (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). These male-based policies and practices are not working for females as a result of their different pathways into

³ While most studies suggest about half of all incarcerated women have experienced some past abuse, others have estimated numbers up to 80 percent of incarcerated women (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Harner & Burgess, 2011).

⁴ Data is from (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011)

the criminal justice system (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Center For Gender & Justice, 2011). However, while many new gender-responsive practices and programs are being developed and implemented, they do not appear to be backed by changes in policy. Thus, policies at the facility, state and federal levels need to be changed to address the issues that are different for women (Bloom B. , Owen, Piper Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002). For example, some facility and state policies that should be changed to better reflect women's needs and situations include: clothing, visitation, hygiene, family, searches, restraints, and classification (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004). Backing these new programs and practices with gender-responsive policies is important to ensure clarity and consistency across jurisdictions, facilities, and among staff members. It will also help ensure a more efficient use of scarce resources by requiring that the best practices and programs be implemented by all. Gender-responsive policies are vital to developing a gender-responsive criminal justice system and addressing the unique needs of female offenders. Without policy to support the programs and practices, there is little that departments can do to ensure all the women are being treated consistently and effectively. While much of the literature focuses on the development of gender-responsive practices, programs, and service provision. There is a need for more research on the development of gender-responsive policies-what it means exactly to have a gender-responsive program or policy and how one can develop and implement these strategies and policies.

Another common theme from the literature was recommendations and guidelines for transforming the criminal justice system to be more gender-responsive. Staff training was one of the most common recommendations for creating a more gender-responsive system. Research suggests that many staff members may be reluctant to work with women because they hold common stereotypes about incarcerated women such as: being more difficult to work with, more demanding, needy, more complaining, and less likely to follow orders (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Others may be willing to work with women, but lack the necessary skill sets to do so effectively because their prior training and experience has been largely with male prisoners. For example, women and men have different communication styles and thus staff should be trained to effectively communicate with women, such as: appropriate listening skills, language and knowing how to set professional boundaries with the women (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Since incarcerated women are disproportionately more likely than men to have been victims of abuse, addicted to drugs, and have low socioeconomic status, staff need to be aware of these demographic differences. The literature suggests that staff should be trained to better understand the incarcerated women and be more sensitive to their needs so that they can work with them more effectively (Berman, 2006; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Bloom B. , Owen, Piper Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002; Cain, 2010; Calhoun, Messina, Cartier, & Torres, 2010; Garcia & Lane, 2010; Livers & Hiers; McDermott; Bloom B. , Owen, Piper Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002). The United Nations (2008) makes the following recommendations for effective gender-responsive management of women's prisons:

- The recognition of the different needs of women.
- A capacity and willingness by prison staff to communicate openly with prisoners.
- Skills such as active listening, and patience in explaining rules and expectations.
- Awareness of emotional dynamics, and the capacity to respond firmly, fairly, and consistently (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008).

While many of these recommendations may also be useful for working with male offenders, literature suggests that they are vitally important to working with females because they have disproportionately higher instances of trauma and substance abuse compared to men (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Harner & Burgess, 2011; National Resource Center on Justice-involved Women, 2011). Therefore, all staff working with female offenders should at the very least be required to be trained in and have the ability to adhere recommendations such as these.

Literature also suggests that policies and services should be changed to be more trauma-informed. According to Harner and Burgess "Available services in women's facilities are often based on male models of care that do not consider the interrelationship of gender, trauma, and mental illness." (p. 471). Trauma-informed care and policies are particularly important for female offenders because of their higher rates of past abuse, and adverse childhood experiences (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Harner & Burgess, 2011). For example, search policies are a widely used example of a policy that needs to be gender-responsive because this experience could be re-traumatizing for a victim of past sexual or physical abuse, which women are disproportionately more likely to have experienced. Thus, search policies can be changed to reduce the occurrence of triggering a woman's past experience of sexual abuse. The policy needs to ensure safety, respect, dignity, and consistency so the woman knows what to expect, feels less vulnerable, and the chance of re-traumatization is minimized. A common suggestion for this is to search the woman's top then the bottom, so the woman is not completely exposed at any time (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). Consistency is also key to ensure that the woman knows what will be expected of her and thus she is less likely to be triggered by the experience. Therefore, any practice that could potentially trigger a woman's past experience with trauma needs to be backed by a clear trauma-informed policy to ensure respectful, consistent, gender-responsive implementation (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Harner & Burgess, 2011).

In regards to programming, facilities need to incorporate gender-responsive, evidenced-based, trauma-informed programs and treatments, that address the specific criminogenic risk factors associated with women offenders (Calhoun, Messina, Cartier, & Torres, 2010; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008; Frye & Dawe, 2008; Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007; Garcia & Lane, 2010; Garcia & Ritter, 2012; Center For Gender & Justice, 2011). The literature suggests that in general programs for incarcerated women should help with vocational training, independent living skills, employment support services, women's healthcare, family inclusion programs, healthy relationships, and trauma treatment. Overall, the programs need to focus on the needs and life experiences of women and ways to help them re-enter the community, stay healthy, independent, and reduce their chances of recidivism after incarceration.

Another important theme from the literature focused on the necessity of maintaining family ties and building positive social relationships while in prison. Studies suggest that for many incarcerated women, the separation from their children is the greatest cause of distress, more so than for men. Studies also show that when men are arrested their children are often cared for by the mother; however, when women are incarcerated the children are more likely to be cared for by another family member other than their father (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). However, maintaining a connection to children and families can also be the greatest motivation to avoid recidivism (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008; Staton-Tindall, et al., 2011; Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007; Booker Loper & Hontoria Tuerk, 2010; Cobbina, 2009; Frye & Dawe, 2008). Thus, appropriate visitations and contact between mothers and their separated children can be beneficial for both. Parenting programs can also help stop the intergenerational cycle of crime by addressing the fact that "for many children, the very risk factors that contributed to their own mother's incarceration are present in their current lives" (Frye & Dawe, 2008). Evidence-based parenting programs and appropriate visitation policies can help maintain the connection between the families, strengthen their relationships, teach appropriate and positive parenting skills, and help with the transition back into the community.

One of the most comprehensive guides to implementing gender-responsive principles in the criminal justice system was found in Bloom, Owen, and Covington's (2003) "Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders." In this report Bloom, Owen, and Covington offer guiding principles and strategies to creating gender-responsive procedures and policies. They offer the following six guiding principles to developing a gender-responsive criminal justice system:

- 1) *Gender: Acknowledge that gender makes a difference.*
- 2) *Environment: Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.*
- 3) *Relationships: Develop policies, practices, and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others, and the community.*
- 4) *Services and supervision: Address substance abuse, trauma, and mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated, and culturally relevant services and appropriate supervision.*
- 5) *Socioeconomic status: Provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions.*
- 6) *Community: Establish a system of community supervision and reentry with comprehensive, collaborative services* (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003, p. 76).

Many of these same themes were found in other literature as well (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dietsen, 2012). All of these guidelines should be included in the development of gender-responsive policies and practices. Implementing gender-responsive practices, backed by clear gender-responsive policies will ensure a more efficient, equitable and consistent treatment system for women prisoners. However, in order to help departments and facilities create these policies, there is a need for concrete model gender-responsive policy examples to guide the process. Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) discuss how to implement these strategies. Yet like others, they do not provide the necessary gender-responsive policy examples. Thus, there is a need for more research and demonstration projects that will create concrete models so that policymakers and corrections professionals can take these guidelines and create real world gender-responsive policies and practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a qualitative, exploratory study that used focus group methods to gather data on incarcerated women in Maine. The study provides an important missing piece of information to Maine's corrections policy development process- the perspectives of those whom the policies are aimed to help. This study allowed the women to voice their opinions about what they need from the system and what they believe an appropriate policy should include. According to Garcia and Lane (2010) "It is rare that criminal justice researchers and practitioners query offenders about what they believe they need and what they believe works in terms of correctional programming" (p. 229). The women are the ones who are experiencing these policies, programs, and procedures first hand and they know what they have found to be the most beneficial to them, which can be useful information for policymakers (Garcia & Lane, 2010).

The researcher examined literature about focus group methods. Focus groups can be particularly useful when conducting needs assessments, program evaluation, and gathering data before or after implementation of a new program or policy (Sharts-Hopko, 2001). According to Pollack (2003) "Focus group methodology has been advocated for feminist researchers who are interested in examining context-embedded gendered experiences. Feminist researchers have argued that focus groups are a particularly appropriate methodology for research with oppressed and marginalized groups because they have the potential to shift power from the researcher to the participants" (p. 461). As literature suggests, incarcerated women have unique, gendered experiences and thus focus groups are a particularly useful method for studying this marginalized population.

Focus group sampling methods and sizes are quite diverse. However, Pollack (2003) states that ideally researchers should use 3 to 4 groups of 6 to 10 participants. Researchers can conduct more than 3 or 4 groups, but it is likely that they may reach a point of saturation in which no new data is being collected (Pollack, 2003). Incentives are usually provided, however when the participants are of special populations like prisoners, incentives are not recommended. Researchers must be aware of the effect that extravagant incentives can have on the participant's consent to participate. Researchers should also generally allow up to two hours for each session (Pollack, 2003). Questions in focus groups should progress from the general to the more specific and be short, conversational, and open-ended. The literature also suggests some possible flaws in focus group research. During the session facilitators can run into issues such as groupthink and limited participation or domination by a few participants. Participants may also be reluctant to provide information in front of a group or to disagree with the general group opinions. These are all issues that the facilitator can address through skilled and careful monitoring of the discussions (Pollack, 2003; Garcia & Lane, 2010; Sharts-Hopko, 2001).

This study and the methods were approved by the University of Southern Maine Institutional Review Board (IRB)⁵. The IRB reviewed the study for appropriate methods and ethical considerations of human subjects' research with prisoners. The study was also reviewed and approved by Maine Department of Corrections staff.

⁵ For more information about the IRB go to: <http://usm.maine.edu/orio>

Setting

The study was conducted at the Women's Center. The Women's Center is located at the Maine Correctional Center in Windham, Maine. It is one of three units that house female inmates in Maine. The Women's Center opened in 2002 and is designed to house about 70 female residents. According to the Maine Department of Corrections (2006) the mission of the Women's Center is as follows:

The mission of the Women's Center is to provide incarcerated women with a gender-responsive relational community. We recognize that many women offenders have life experiences that diminish their feelings of personal effectiveness and value; therefore, the goal of the Women's Center is to provide direction and incentives for positive spiritual growth. This model will provide opportunities for work, programs, activities and relational experiences to facilitate healthy reintegration into families, places of employment and community (State of Maine Department of Corrections, 2006).

The Women's Center prides itself in being a gender-responsive facility and thus is a great setting for studying this topic. The staff members at this facility are committed to creating an environment of hope and empowerment for the residents, and are open to learning more about how they can improve their policies and procedures.

Sample

The population studied was incarcerated women in Maine, specifically women who are incarcerated at the Women's Center in Windham, Maine. There are about 70-80 adult, female, residents at the Women's Center. Since prisoners are considered a vulnerable population the sample was selected using a voluntary, convenience sampling procedure. The women were notified of the opportunity and a sign up list was provided in advance. While the non-random sampling is not ideal, it helped ensure that the women did not feel as if they were being coerced into participation.

Participants were compensated with a group incentive. They did not receive any individual compensation. An ethical concern of research with prisoners is that any individual incentive given may be too large and thus persuade the individual to a point where their participation may not be fully voluntary. Therefore, the researcher offered a group incentive and donated a microwave to the community to thank residents for their participation rather than an individual incentive. The researcher attempted to have 25 participants, with 4 groups of 5-7 women. However, due to time constraints, scheduling conflicts and the voluntary methods of sampling the sample size was not quite what the researcher had aimed for. The total sample size was 18 adult, women. Focus groups were conducted in 3 groups, of 4-7 women. Table 1 shows the size of each focus group. Groups 1 and 2 had 7 participants and group 3 had 4 participants.

Facilitators took note on the approximate participants' age and race or ethnicity. It is important to note that this is only an estimate. Participants were not asked about their age or race and thus the actual demographics of the sample may be slightly different than what the facilitators assumed. Nevertheless, Table 2 shows the assumed demographics of the participants. The majority of participants were white (83%), and in the 18-39 age range (67%).

Table 1: Focus group size

Group Size	
Group 1	7
Group 2	7
Group 3	4
TOTAL	18

Table 2: Focus group characteristics

Demographics		N	%
Race	White	15	83%
	All other races	3	17%
Age	18-39	12	67%
	40+	6	33%

The Women's Center houses inmates of all crimes and classifications. Thus while participants were not asked to reveal any information regarding their backgrounds, it can be assumed that they were diverse in this regard. From focus group discussions, it can also be assumed that participants' education levels varied as well. Some participants discussed having less than a high school diploma, while others were college graduates. While participants were not asked about their length at the facility or their arrest backgrounds, many disclosed the fact that they had been at the facility before (some multiple times). From discussions, the researcher gathered that some participants had only been at the facility for a couple months, while others had been there for years.

Data Collection Procedures

The data was collected through focus group methods based on literature review of appropriate and successful methodology. Focus groups were facilitated in 3 groups of 4-7 participants in April 2012. Each group lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. The sessions were tape recorded to ensure accurate records of data.⁶

The focus group questions⁷ were developed through a peer review process- the researcher developed the questions and methods based on guidelines found in the literature review and an attempt to answer the research questions, and the questions were then reviewed by the co-facilitator. The questions aimed to reveal more information about the residents' perspectives on the theoretical guidelines about gender-responsive practices and policies, and get the participants' ideas for implementation of those policies. All questions focused on policy and did not directly ask anything about personal information. This was to help limit the possibility of re-traumatizing participants and help to protect their privacy. Facilitators followed a script, however, prompts and follow up questions were asked in order to prompt discussion, gain more in depth information, and clarify answers. The following table provides examples of questions that the participants were asked in the focus group discussions:

Sample Focus Group Questions

- What has been the most beneficial/ helpful experience for you here?
- What policies or practices do you think should be changed to better fit the needs of women?
- Tell me what works well about the visitations policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
- What could staff do specifically that would help you feel more safe, respected, and supported?

⁶ Tapes were physically destroyed after the transcripts were typed in order to ensure participation remains confidential.

⁷ Focus group questions and procedures can be found in the script in the appendix.

Facilitators also thoroughly explained the research project, purpose and procedures to the participants before they began. All key terms were defined and questions and concerns were addressed. Before they began, facilitators read through the informed consent forms orally with participants to ensure understanding and avoid any literacy issues. Participants were then asked to read over the informed consent form and sign the form before the focus groups began. The voluntary nature of the study was stressed and participants were free to leave the group discussions at any time. All focus groups were conducted without any facility staff present to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using qualitative methods. Tapes were transcribed and data was analyzed and coded for themes. All data was de-identified as the transcripts were typed, and no names are used in this report. The researcher compared responses and looked for patterns in the various opinions, feelings, beliefs, and needs of the participants. The researcher looked at what the participants felt were the key issues and looked for patterns in the experiences and assumptions provided by the participants. Analysis was done using guidelines from Krueger's (1994) framework analysis (Rabiee, 2004). In this type of qualitative analysis researchers use a series of steps to condense and interpret the data. While the exact nature of the analysis was based on the data that was collected, researchers used a series of steps that included: familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation (Rabiee, 2004). The researcher first began with familiarization and then a pre-liminary coding scheme was developed. The list of codes was finalized⁸ and themes were defined, and the data was then recoded and checked to ensure accurate and consistent coding. The coded data was entered into a matrix so that it could be sorted by theme, question number, group, and time sequence and then interpreted.

⁸ The complete list of codes can be found in the appendix.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, participants' views varied greatly, which is to be expected since women have diverse experiences and thus there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, for many topics and areas of need there was a general consensus on suggestions for service improvement. Figure 3 summarizes the general discussion themes of all three focus groups. The transcripts were first coded using the following four most commonly discussed general themes: Supports, Activities and Jobs, Staff, and Re-entry planning. Participants in general had the most to say about these four key areas. Participants discussed other subtopics and specific policies as well. In this section these themes will be discussed in more detail.

Figure 3: Focus group discussion themes



Many of the findings and participant suggestions may also be beneficial for male offenders. For example, research shows that “in some cases men and women do benefit from the use of similar approaches such as cognitive behavioral treatment and motivational interviewing” (National Resource Center on Justice-involved Women, 2011, p. 4). However, the content and implementation of the approaches should consider the differences between male and female offenders including: psychological development, socialization, how they experience the world, exposure to trauma and abuse, reactions to trauma and abuse, impacts of culture on their behaviors, and more (National Resource Center on Justice-involved Women, 2011).

What is working well, and what needs to be changed to be more gender-responsive?

The “college dorm” set up

The environment of a facility can be greatly influenced by the layout. Almost all of the participants were satisfied with the layout of the facility. They felt like it was set up like a college dormitory, which they really enjoyed. The participants were satisfied with many of the freedoms, personal space and privileges that they are given. According to one participant:

“It’s a community base up here, we are not called prisoners, we are residents... we are not locked in our rooms... we have personal bathrooms, lockers with locks... we have outdoor access all day.”

The majority of the women agreed that these freedoms allowed them to feel like they have some personal space and autonomy. The set up allows the women to learn how to structure free time and participate in pro-social activities. For example, the women really enjoyed the privilege of being allowed to knit and crochet in their free time. They say that this activity is important because it gives them something to do, it keeps them busy, and it keeps them calm. These freedoms and privileges give the women the ability to take responsibility for their own time and activities and empower them to make the right decisions on their own. It is an incentive to follow the rules so that they do not lose the privileges. According to the participants, women need the control over their personal space and free time to learn how to live among the community. They agreed that it can help teach them social and time management skills that are a necessary part of living independently in society.

While most participants enjoyed the overall set up of the facility, many had issues with the room assignments. Some women expressed concerns over the way they are assigned roommates, and suggested that age, criminal history, and classification should all be taken into account when deciding which women to place together. In the current setting women of all ages and criminal backgrounds could all be placed together. A sixty year old woman could be in the same room with a twenty year old, which could lead to conflict. Many women also expressed concerns about the various levels of criminal histories and crimes among the residents at the facility. Since the Women’s Center houses women of all classifications, there is a wide range of security levels and crimes in the facility. One participant suggested:

“I think the biggest issue is that this is the only place for women, so all security levels, all types of crimes... whereas the men, they can be separated by category.”

Some of the women expressed concerns over the fact that those with violent or sexual crimes are housed in the same facility. It is important for women to feel safe in their everyday environment. One way to ensure that everyone feels safe may be to take criminal histories and classification into account more when assigning rooms. Even if they must all be housed in the same facility, the rooms should be a safe space for all residents.

Some participants also expressed concerns about the availability of space for programs and recreational activities. Many suggested that program rooms are too small and too few to accommodate the desired activities, and thus scheduling and space can be an issue. Some of the younger women expressed concerns over the size of the recreation areas. Some desired a larger outside area that would accommodate more physical activities and sports. One younger participant discussed how she felt that women are often stereotyped as not being as active and into sports as men, and thus they are not given those opportunities. However, many of the women would love the opportunity to be able to participate in more physical activities, particularly outdoors. According to the United Nations (2008) “Prison authorities should make every effort to provide women with equal access to sports as men” (p. 47). Physical activity is an essential part to improving and

maintaining both physical health and mental wellbeing. Unfortunately, with the increasing female incarceration rate, space is likely to continue to present a problem.

A Relational Community

Gender-responsive theories suggest that a relational community should be encouraged particularly for female inmates (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Messina, Grella, Cartier, & Torres, 2010; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dieten, 2012). Research suggests that while family process variables (such as effective supervision and appropriate discipline) are risk factors for delinquency in both males and females there is evidence that suggests that relationship-based risk factors (such as parental neglect, sexual abuse, and the lack of emotional bonds with parents) are more significant for women (National Resource Center on Justice-involved Women, 2011). Relationships have also been linked to substance abuse among female offenders, who often site negative personal relationships as their reason for using (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003).

The majority of the participants agreed that an important part of their support system within the facility was their peers. The women suggested that many of the residents relied on one another to get through tough times they were having. A large part of living at the Women's Center is being a member of a community. The women discussed how it was important for them to be able to develop positive relationships and help their peers when they are in need. In their time at the facility many of the women bond with their peers and look to each other when they need someone to listen. One participant said:

"You know, people don't come into jail to make friends, but you end up having them...we take care of each other."

While the point of a correctional facility is obviously not to make friends, pro-social relationships among peer groups should certainly be encouraged as they allow the women to practice positive social skills. Another participant discussed how important for her it is to be able to discuss hardships with her peers. However, many felt that a relational community was discouraged by some of the staff members and the policies. One woman stated, *"We can get in big trouble for helping each other out,"* and the majority of participants agreed with this statement. Some felt that staff members even discouraged discussing problems with peers. For example, one woman said, *"[You need] somebody to process it with... because if they hear you processing with your friends, then they take it as disrespect..."* Encouraging positive social relationships among peers is an important part of a gender-responsive corrections system. Literature suggests that positive social relationships are a major factor in reducing recidivism among women (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008; Cobbina, 2009; Staton-Tindall, et al., 2011; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dieten, 2012). For many women, their peers are an important support system that when healthy and positive can encourage them to live crime free lives out in the community. According to the participants two important factors for encouraging positive social behaviors and a relational community are: an appropriate touch policy, and an appropriate passing and receiving policy.

Many of the women expressed a need for *an appropriate touch policy*. According to participants, the no touch policy needs to be revised to encourage appropriate, positive, social relationships among peers. Some participants suggested that the no touch policy comes from a fear of sexual activity among the residents. The idea behind the no touch policy is likely that it is a straightforward way to prohibit any physical misconduct among the residents, whether that is sexual, physical fighting, or any other unwanted or inappropriate touching. However, female inmates are still human beings, and human beings need physical contact as an important part of emotional and mental well-being. According to one participant, *"the emotional needs are not met, and that's what causes a lot of their inappropriate touch issues."* Many participants agreed that the emotional and physical needs of the residents are not being met, and thus this can result in inappropriate physical touching. For example, the women were most frustrated with the fact that

they are not allowed to console their peers when they are upset. They felt that this is a gender issue because women are socialized to be more nurturing than men. However, it is against policy for any resident to give another resident a hug no matter what the situation may be, and many recalled stories of people getting in trouble for giving someone a hug. The following statements illustrate this point:

"You see someone hurting like that... as a woman more than a guy you are like... what can I do to help you?"

"Right, sometimes you just need a hug."

"Someone got in trouble a couple months ago for hugging somebody, we aren't talking about fooling around or what not, we are talking about over there right in front of the CO's desk... they lugged her to the pods⁹ and she had to make her way all the way back through here for hugging somebody."

An appropriate touch policy could be created to encourage the women to practice appropriate social behaviors among their peers and continue to discourage inappropriate or unwanted physical contact.

The majority of the women also desired *an appropriate passing and receiving policy*. According to the participants, the current passing and receiving policy discourages a relational community among the residents, promotes waste, and encourages the women to break the rules. The women want to help their peers in need. Many expressed concerns over the fact that some of the residents do not have any monetary funds and basic necessities like shampoo are too costly. According to the participants, under the current policy, if a woman has an extra item she is not allowed to donate it to another peer who may not have enough money to buy their own. The participants also expressed concern over the fact that when they are caught with an extra item, (e.g. an extra tank top, or an extra bottle of shampoo) the staff throws the item out. The women expressed a desire to be able to donate extra items to others, rather than seeing it go to waste. Also, when the women leave the facility they want to be able to donate their unwanted items to others who are still there. For example, when a woman leaves she could be allowed to donate her clothing items to someone who needs more but cannot afford to buy more. The following quotes illustrate these themes:

"Say I am leaving and I don't wanna take jail attire with me and I might think that you don't have money, so I would be like here."

"If you are caught on your body with somebody else's name, they will take it away from you and will not give it back to you or that person."

"But rather than them throwing it in the trash you should be able to give it to somebody."

"We used to be able to lend stuff to people that don't have anything."

"A lot of the officers will say don't let me see it. I think they don't wanna see stuff get thrown out either."

⁹ Lugged back to the pods means that the woman was brought back to be housed in the female unit within the men's facility at MCC for disciplinary reasons. MCC has two female housing units, the Women's Center, and the pods within the men's facility. When a woman first arrives she is placed in the pods and has to work herself up to the privilege of being housed in the Women's Center where she will be awarded with special freedoms. When a woman is sent back to the pods for disciplinary reasons she usually loses many of the things that she has worked for and it could take a few weeks or a few months to get back into the Women's Center.

"The phones for example, I just found out if I let her make a phone call on my account and get caught doing that, I will lose my phone privileges."

Again, sharing and helping those in need are part of a relational community and encourage pro-social behaviors among peer groups. While women should obviously not be allowed to pass and receive contraband an appropriate policy could encourage sharing allowable items under staff supervision.

Many of the participants discussed how they believe the current no passing and receiving policy is based on the largely male practice of *"strong-arming,"* which they agreed the women do not do. Many felt that among men it might be common to gamble, steal, and share contraband, but the majority of women have no desire to do any of those things. The following quotes represent this idea:

"I think that might be why, it's strong-arming, we don't strong-arm... We are not like oh you better give me 5 dollars right now or I am gunna punch you in your face..."

"We don't do that up here (with laughter in voice)."

"Ya we don't do it like the men do."

"It's not worth sharing contraband up here, because as a parent I get a lot from my visits, having the contact visits as opposed to having the glass and the phones... So I am not going to jeopardize me seeing my kids for passing something stupid."

Many of the participants agreed with these statements and felt that passing and receiving contraband has never been an issue with the residents there. An appropriate passing and receiving policy should be developed to encourage a community of sharing among the women, while continuing to control contraband. Many women suggested that not being allowed to share items has forced the women to trade things at risk of being caught. In order to get their needs met, many felt that they had to *"work the system"* and break the rules. A new policy would allow the staff to control what is being shared among the residents in the open, and help discourage women and staff from feeling like they have to break the rules.

A connection to their families and children

Literature suggests that incarcerated women are more likely than men to have been primary caregivers prior to their arrest (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dieten, 2012; Frye & Dawe, 2008; Booker Loper & Hontoria Tuerk, 2010). Yet one of the most overlooked characteristics of women offenders is their status as mothers (Frye & Dawe, 2008). Many of the participants were concerned about the separation from their children, families, and communities. The following quotes represent these concepts:

"Because I am here does not mean that I'm not still a woman...a mother, a grandmother..."

"We have family issues, whereas the men getting out [they] have one of us on the outside that are usually taking care of [them]. They have their mother, their wife, their girlfriend."

"Men worry a lot less, like my ex-husband, he doesn't worry about anything. I worry about every little thing that's going on with my children."

Just because a woman is incarcerated does not mean she stops being a mother, or a part of a family. Family can be one of the most important motivations to change, and to avoid recidivism. It is important for the women to be able to feel like they are still connected to their children and their families, even though they are incarcerated. According to Gonzalez, Romero, and Cerbana (2007) maintaining family ties while incarcerated is difficult if not impossible for most incarcerated mothers. Strengthening family ties and teaching the incarcerated women positive and appropriate

parenting skills can help reduce recidivism and prevent future problems (crime, substance abuse, mental health issues, etc.) with the children of the incarcerated women (Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007; Cobbina, 2009; Frye & Dawe, 2008).

Many of the participants felt that the contact visits with their children and families were very important. According to one participant:

"Contact visits with our children, being able to see them, hold them; it's the only real human contact that we get."

For many of the women, being apart from their children is the hardest thing about being incarcerated. Several participants described the stress that being separated from their children has caused them, and suggested that they worry about their children's wellbeing. One young mother described how she did not get to see her young son when he was an infant and now when he comes to visits he does not allow her to hold him because he does not know her. It is important for both the children and the mothers to have visits that will enhance their relationships. The women can also participate in activities that help them feel a connection to their families even when they are not visiting. For example, one mother discussed how being able to knit and crochet allows her to feel like she can be making something for her families even when she is not home with them. When you are incarcerated, it is the simple things that many of us take for granted that can make all the difference to these women. For example, having a picture with your children is something that many of these women will not have for years. Programs and activities could be developed to help the women stay connected to their families, and practice positive parenting skills.

It is just as important that the families and children feel welcomed and connected to their mothers when they come to visit. Many women expressed concerns over staff treating visitors poorly or children not being allowed to use the restroom during visits. Many participants felt very strongly about these issues and recalled examples of visitor mistreatment:

"I have witnessed a guard scream at all the visitors in the visit room before they left. It doesn't matter if you are a visitor or an inmate they treat them all like inmates. They are totally disrespectful."

"They treat them like they are inmates, and I don't want my mother being treated like that."

"The only downfall to the contact visits... is that the children that do come in here they should be allowed to go to the bathroom."

"My son was here and he had to go to the bathroom and I asked if they could take him and they said no and he peed his pants... He felt so embarrassed that he literally like hid under the table."

"Ya, so why not for visits have a designated bathroom."

"Ya, it's a child, I can understand maybe the grownups, but it's a child you know they don't understand the concept."

Not only can these negative experiences discourage future visits from the families, but it can be traumatizing for the children. Visitors should be treated with respect and visits should be a positive experience for everyone. Facilities should create a more conducive environment for family visits including: appropriate visit rooms and facilities, child oriented activities, and flexible visiting schedules (Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007). According to the United Nations (2008) any visit that involves children should take place in an environment that is not hostile in terms of both the physical surroundings and staff attitudes. Visitation policies that allow positive family activities and experiences should be developed to help the inmate continue to develop appropriate, positive, relationships with their children and their families.

Work Assignments

Work assignments are essential to give incarcerated women current job experience and help them feel more “normal.” According to Ney, Ramirez, and Van Dieten (2012) “economic hardship, lower educational attainment, fewer vocational skills, underemployment, and employment instability are more common among justice involved women” (p. 2). Participants agreed that the women want to work while they are incarcerated, but are prohibited from doing so for many reasons. While the majority of participants were concerned with the availability of work assignments, many were impressed with the new jobs programs available to some of the women. The following table provides the participants’ key points about work assignments:

Key Points About Work Assignments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for more work assignment availability. • Work assignments are important for gaining experience for re-entry. • Work assignments help the women save money and support themselves and their families. • The women have an interest in volunteering in the community. • Other, non-monetary, incentives could be explored to increase the number of jobs available without increasing the need for more funding. • The women who are classified as medium should be allowed to work.

Many participants felt that the men are given more opportunities to work and have more vocational training available to them. They also felt that many of the women have skills that should be utilized to do work in and for the community. The following quote represents these themes:

“A lot of us women, we would love to work... Jobs are very big and guys have more opportunities to go out there and women don’t. We could do so much if they utilized that... especially where it could help people a lot on the outside. You know a lot of women haven’t worked in years, some girls have just been mothers.”

Not only do the women want to work and need more jobs to be able to do so, but they also want to be able to help their communities, and get training so that they can get a job when they leave.

According to the participants, being able to work while incarcerated is important because women need to be able to support themselves financially after they leave. Working allows the women to save up money which will help them pay for their basic needs when they first get out in the community. Working also gives the women experience and teaches new skills which can be transferred into future jobs and careers. Some women expressed a desire to be able to volunteer in the community. They discussed how volunteering would allow them to “*do something good for the community and for ourselves.*” According to the participants, volunteering in the community can help them get contacts, ease transition for when they leave, and it can give them ideas and training for potential future careers. One woman used the example that volunteering in a hospital might inspire someone to want to be a nurse because they realize how much they enjoy doing that work, when perhaps they never would have considered it if they did not have that opportunity.

Aside from the financial aspect, working gives the women something to do, and something to look forward to while they are incarcerated. Being able to get up in the morning and go to work allows the women to feel like they have a purpose and are living a more normal life which can have a positive effect on mental wellbeing. One participant described it this way:

"You know it may not be much, but it's something... They get up every morning and they go to breakfast and they go to work. It's like a real job to them... and that's something that we can work towards."

Many of these women come into the facility with skills that can be explored and utilized. Some have experience in trades, and some have gone to college. These skills should be used, encouraged, and built upon. Also for those who may not have worked much in the past, the experience of working or volunteering while they are incarcerated can be a vital tool for re-entering the workforce when they leave, and possibly an inspiration to start a new career.

According to the participants, many of the women want to work but cannot do so because of classification issues prohibiting eligibility or because of a lack of funding for new positions. Participants suggested that there needs to be more opportunities for those who currently cannot work, otherwise they have very little to keep them busy throughout the day. They also suggested that the eligibility requirements and classification policies for work assignments need to be changed so that more women can work. According to the participants, a woman has to be classified as minimum in order to work, but the requirements to be classified as minimum are ridiculous. The following quotes represent these ideas:

"There could be more for those girls that are doing nothing... because I think that sometimes people just sit up here and rot!"

"I think there should be something for the medium women, like the medium women can't work, for her and I we are long timers because we are over the 5 year mark..."

"It's really foolish; it has nothing to do with who we actually are here... And what you are trying to accomplish and like your case plan, and like they really need to be more individualized."

"There's a catch 22 there because I am here for 6 years. I can't take DSAT until my last year, so what does that mean I have to wait 5 years before I can qualify for minimum?"

Working not only helps the women develop skills but also gives them something to look forward to. Many participants suggested that work assignments do not have to be paid positions. Many desired more non-monetary incentives for those positions that are not paid. For example, one participant suggested that work assignments could be "paid" by allowing women to earn more good time for doing their job. The following quote represents this example:

"They are so worried about funding and money and stuff and the lack of money. So instead of being worried about paying people you know the 60 cents an hour, put more jobs out there but let people earn more good time off their sentences like they do in county."

For those who are currently not eligible to work, policies should be revised to give these women more opportunities to work in the facility. If funding is an issue, then policies could be changed to allow more creative, non-monetary incentives to working.

Programs and Activities

In a correctional facility, the programs and activities are one of the most important pieces for changing behavior and empowering the women to live crime free lives, thus reducing recidivism. The literature states that quality programs should be evidence based, gender-responsive, and target specific criminogenic risk reduction factors (Cobbina, 2009; Ney, Ramirez, & Van Dietsen, 2012; The Urban Institute, 2008; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). Pro-social activities, while they may not be specifically targeting a risk factor, are also important for reasons such as encouraging pro-social behavior, encouraging healthy activities, developing social

skills, creating a sense of community, and promoting positive use of free time. The following table shows the areas where participants suggested there is the greatest need for more programming:

Program Area Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family re-unification and parenting skills • Substance abuse and skills for living substance free lives • Everyday management of mental health issues, such as ADHD • Vocational training

Many of the women were satisfied with the programs that they had completed, however, there was a general consensus that there was a need for more programming in those four areas, as well as a need for more advanced programming for the women who have longer sentences. These issues are all things that the women will have to deal with when they leave and without the proper training and skills they will not be prepared to do so. For example, many of the women discussed the fact that a lot of women will have to deal with custody issues when they leave and there are no parenting education programs to help them. The following quotes represent the participants' perspectives on parenting education:

"You have some women who are going to have to get out and fight through court to get their children back. So when you go in front of a judge and they say, okay what have you done? [And] they have no parenting classes behind them. That's great you've done all this in jail, but you've done nothing for your parenting skills."

"There should be a program for mothers. That's a big recovery thing like you don't understand how much!"

These women need a program that will teach them parenting skills so that they can have a better chance of getting their children back in their lives, and also be better parents to those children.

Managing substance abuse and mental health issues are a huge part of being able to live independently and can have a significant impact on a woman's chance of recidivism (Cobbina, 2009). Many of the participants discussed a need for more ongoing support and management skills development for these two issues. For example, while many of the women complete substance abuse programs such as DSAT¹⁰, they expressed a need for more long-term programs to further develop the basic skills that the program has taught them. There is also a need to help those women who have mental health problems. The women need to be able to cope with and live with these issues on a daily basis and in some cases without medication. The following quotes represent these ideas:

"[We need] more classes on how to manage your ADHD, or depression, or bipolar (disorder), or whatever it may be... because you need to know how to deal with all of that for when you get out, otherwise you are going to go back to taking drugs."

¹⁰ According to the Maine Office of Substance Abuse (2012) "Differential Substance Abuse Treatment (DSAT) is the Motivational Enhancement and cognitive-behavioral treatment model specifically developed, in partnership with the Maine Department of Corrections, to provide a continuum of comprehensive substance abuse treatment services to adult offenders in correctional and community settings across the state." For more information go to: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/osa/cj/adult/dsat.htm>.

"There is DSAT and that's it. And unless you are mandated to go to DSAT nobody does it. And once you are graduated, it's done, which I did over a year and half ago, and then it's done, and that's it."

"I am trying to make myself a better person, but I have a hard time focusing in class. I am very fidgety, I am ADHD ..."

There is a need for more opportunities for developing these management skills over time. Another participant described her positive experience and the effect it has had on her need for medication. She said, *"I went from having to take medication to not having to take medication at all, due to learning new life skills."* Coping and management skills for everyday life can be an important part of reducing recidivism and substance abuse.

Vocational training is also an important part of being able to support oneself and one's family financially. Many of the participants discussed that a lack of money can be a major reason why many women will return to crime when they leave. One participant said:

"Having financial income to leave with so you have a place to live, so you have a present, current job reference, is important to keeping recidivism down."

Participants suggested that if women have no other source of income, many feel that they have no choice but to return to crime. It is important that these women not only have the ability to earn and save money while they are incarcerated, but also to have a plan for obtaining employment when they leave. The women can work and save up money, but if they have no way of finding a job when they get out, the savings will not last them very long. Education and vocational training can be a vital part of ensuring these women have the skills needed to find a decent paying job. Many of the participants expressed satisfaction with the education opportunities that they have been given. Some felt that they were empowered and hopeful for actually obtaining a degree, which they had never before thought was possible. One participant described her college experience as the most beneficial experience she has had while incarcerated:

"For me it's been the ability to take some college classes, I think they need to do more of it. There needs to be more opportunity. But for me just being able to start college and have the revelation that I can actually make it through, is something that I picked up here. So that's been the most beneficial for me."

However, many felt that there was very little opportunity for vocational skills training. There are many areas that the women could be trained in, which could translate into certifications and licenses that will allow the women to obtain good paying, quality jobs when they leave. Participants felt, however, that there are many more vocational opportunities for the men. The women should have the same opportunities for education and vocational training as the men are given.

Planning for life after incarceration

According to Cobbina (2009) successful re-entry planning should at the very least include help finding access to treatments in the community, increase positive social support, and help to improve economic conditions. The women need to feel like they are ready to live independently when they leave. Many of the participants expressed concerns about the quality of the re-entry planning process. Some women who were leaving soon expressed concerns about being ready to go out into the community on their own. Some felt that they were not given enough information about the resources available to them. One participant explained:

"But we are getting out of here with no place to live, no money, on the verge of losing our kids because we have been away from them for so long... DHS isn't going to give you your kids if you don't have a place to live, so it's a vicious cycle, and we are going to go back to what we know,

hustling to make money because we want our kids back... That's not the way, we don't really want to go to that, and that's a scary thing."

Participants agreed that when they leave they need to have a plan for the following basic needs: housing, employment, and supports/ services for substance abuse and mental health issues. Without these basic necessities the women felt that most will end up returning to crime because they are desperate. Many of the participants recalled examples of women who left with nothing more than a ride to the bus station. As one participant described *"These women are dropped off to be homeless."* For many women who have been incarcerated for a long time it is important that they have a transition into community living. While they may be ready to leave the facility, they may not be ready to live completely on their own. They need help finding housing; finding employment and finding community services and groups that will help them deal with any substance abuse or mental health issues. As one participant discussed, *"they look down on you if you come back here and you are not cured. They are like, well we taught you DSAT. But you don't live on the streets!"* Without concrete planning and transitional services, many of the women do not know how to translate the skills they have learned into living in the community.

Many participants expressed mutual respect for their case workers who they believed wanted to help. However, many participants felt that they are not doing everything they can to prepare them to live on their own. According to the participants, it's not just about telling the women what they should be doing, but also *"actually helping them and doing hands on work."* Most felt that *"nobody takes the time to do that"* with them. When the women leave the facility they should be leaving with a concrete plan. Policies could be implemented that lay out specific requirements for the women before they leave. If caseworkers are overbooked, participants suggested that peer mentors or volunteers could be used for those who need more help with developing a plan.

Services: Medical, Dental, Mental Health

Literature suggests that incarcerated women have disproportionately higher rates of infectious and chronic disease and mental health problems (Guthrie, 2011; Staton-Tindall, et al., 2011; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). However, the one-size fits all approach of most correctional health care systems and providers are unable to meet the unique needs of incarcerated females (Guthrie, 2011). According to the majority of the participants, preventative health care and dental care is non-existent. The following quotes represent the majority of the participants' feelings about the medical services:

"They don't give you the health care that you need... "

"Ya, I would pay for it if they let me."

"If you miss your meds and you get in line to get them, if you don't come out with your walk it's called, and you get in line, they say oh well you missed your walk, then your choice is you can take your meds and get room restriction right... or miss your meds. So how many people are gunna not take their meds?"

"And if you miss your meds so many times they take them away, the medical department takes them away."

The participants expressed a desire for more preventative and reliable medical and dental services. Many participants recalled examples of times where they had lengthy waiting periods to see medical staff. According to participants, dental services are basically non-existent, *"they just pull teeth."* Mental health services also appear to be sporadic. Participants also discussed the need for consistent female mental health staff. One participant said:

"When you start opening up to one person, and then that person gets done for whatever reason and they call somebody else... right now a guy comes in a couple days a week...he's here just for us to vent, we can't open up to him."

Many felt uncomfortable talking with male mental health staff, especially when the staff member changes frequently. In all three areas, participants said there is a lack of individualized treatment and care. Appropriate and available medical, dental, and mental health services are important for the women to stay healthy while they are incarcerated, both mentally and physically. According to the United Nations (2008) "prisoners' right to health is a fundamental human right" (p. 48). Incarceration is not only an opportunity to provide these women with quality and preventative services that they may never of had access to before, but also to educate the women about healthy behaviors and preventative measures in an effort to avoid future risky behaviors (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008).

The Staff: Women need to feel mutual respect, dignity, and safety

The facility staff members are the first line in ensuring that the residents feel safe and secure in the facility. Participants had mixed opinions about various staff. Depending on the various positions discussed, many of the women expressed concerns over respect, dignity and safety. In general the participants felt that most of the staff were very respectful and sensitive to their needs, while a few were *"ignorant, disrespectful, and should not be working with women."* The participants felt that many staff members could benefit from more training on working with female offenders. Participants also felt that room searches were an area where staff could be more respectful, as they suggested that some of the staff members were very disrespectful when conducting room searches.

In general participants felt respected by and felt the safest with the program staff and administration staff. The majority of the participants felt that most of these staff members had their best interest in mind and wanted to see them succeed. Most of the participants felt that the program staff was very encouraging. However, there were a few that raised concerns about some of the program staff. Participants agreed that the facilitator of a program is what will make it beneficial or not. One woman said that the most important thing is that the facilitator understands the material and has a heart for it. If the facilitator is not passionate about the topic they are teaching then the participants are not going to get as much out of it. Participants agreed that most of the program staff were great, and wanted to see them succeed, however, there are some who lack the necessary passion and understanding for the topics they are teaching.

There were some concerns over some of the security staff. One participant described the security staff in this way:

"Half of them get it, half of them are trying to do the right thing. The other half, [they] are inmate haters. They think that our punishment is not having to reside in prison, but is how we are treated when we reside in prison."

Many of the participants recalled examples of being treated poorly. They described examples of nasty language, swearing, screaming, name calling, game playing, and a general disrespect for personal space and property. One participant while recalling a specific example described how she felt in the following way:

"You know, why is this person being so hateful towards you? Why is this person treating you like dirt, when all we are trying to do is exist in this place? We are not trying to cause trouble, well most of us aren't, and we are just trying to exist and get our time done. We don't want any more trouble."

The majority of participants felt that some of the security staff did not understand the issues the women were dealing with, such as past traumatic experiences, abuse, mental health issues, and etc. Participants suggested that perhaps some of the staff members could benefit from some sensitivity

training on the unique experiences and gender-specific needs of incarcerated females. One woman said:

"I don't think they are able to put into context just how much a good majority of us have been through, so maybe some sensitivity training [would help]."

Participants suggested that the majority of the security staff might have the residents' best interest in mind. However, many lack the necessary training to be able to effectively work with the women, likely as a result of their training being based largely on working with male prisoners.

Searches are a particular area where residents' ability to feel safe, respected and dignified may be threatened. On any given day, searches could include: room searches, pat downs, strip searches. A search by definition is an invasion of personal space and property. Therefore, the staff member must conduct the search in a way that is respectful of this invasion. The majority of participants said that searches are a part of daily life in prison and they are used to it. However, some felt that staff could be more respectful of personal space when they conduct room searches. The following quotes represent this theme:

"They tear everything apart whenever they feel like it."

"I mean they have a right to protect all of us to do that, but they should do it in a respectful way."

Participants agreed that in general they had no problem with strip searches. However, a couple raised concerns about feeling uncomfortable when being strip searched. A few suggested that not all staff members conduct strip searches in the same manner, depending on how they were trained. For example, one staff member may ask the resident to strip completely, while another will conduct a top then bottom search, which literature suggests is more gender-responsive (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008). Participants recommended that all staff members conduct strip searches in the same manner (top then bottom) so that the resident knows what to expect. Another suggestion was that strip searches should be conducted by two staff members at all times to protect both the residents and the staff members. While the majority of participants had no problem with searches, there are small policy changes that can be made to ensure all residents feel safe in an extremely vulnerable situation.

Disciplinary procedures were also discussed at length. According to participants, disciplinary procedures are not individualized or consistent. At the time that the focus groups were conducted, the facility had recently implemented a new disciplinary procedure that the residents had helped to develop; they called it the "cookie jar". This new procedure put into place a lottery system where residents would pick their punishments out of a jar when they break the rules. While some were annoyed by the juvenile nature of the new practice, most of the women seemed pleased with the change and felt that it was much better than the previous infractions policy. According to one participant:

"I think the jar is a little bit better though than the infractions, because that was sending a lot of fear throughout everyone and we were afraid to even come out of our rooms... it was very stressful and it made a lot of us go pretty crazy."

There were, however, some concerns raised about the implementation of the new procedure. For example, many felt that it could be changed to be more individualized and case-based. Most felt that in some instances the "punishment" they received for breaking certain rules did not necessarily fit with the level of rule they had broken. Participants felt that it was not fair for two residents who break the same rule to get completely different levels of punishments. There were also some concerns about inconsistent implementation of the new policy. Many recalled times where the staff

member would change the “punishment” depending on the person who had broken the rule and thus felt that the staff members were “playing favorites.” One participant said:

“If you pick out of the jar and the C.O. that’s on doesn’t like it, they will make you pick again... Or if they like you and you don’t like what you get, you get to pick again.”

Disciplinary procedures, rules, and punishments for breaking the rules should be consistent and fair. In order to feel safe participants must know what the potential consequences of their actions will be. Staff members need to consistently implement these rules and the punishments for breaking these rules objectively. However, it is also necessary that there be some room for a subjective interpretation of rules and punishments for individual and contextual analysis of a special situation.

A few participants expressed concerns about the grievance process when they do have issues with staff members. Many expressed a fear of not being able to complain about staff members without retaliation. For example, when asked if she had done anything about an issue she mentioned with a particular staff member, one participant responded that she had done nothing, *“because of retaliation, I would lose everything... They would take it from me, they would find a way to take me down and I can’t afford that.”* No resident should ever feel like they cannot discuss an issue that they are having with a staff member. Some participants also felt that grievances on female staff members were not taken as seriously as when they complain about male staff members. One participant offered the following suggestion for dealing with staff issues:

“I really think that goes back to the supervisors and the managers, [they] should really take a look at you know who they pair up together, who they work with, and maybe talk to us more, about our concerns, maybe once a month, or maybe just like a drop in box.”

It is important that the residents feel safe in their environment and respected and encouraged by all the staff members. It is also important that when they have been mistreated that they have a safe way to deal with the issue and that their complaint is heard, regardless of who the staff member may be. One participant suggested the use of the anonymous suggestions, comments and concerns box for when residents do not feel comfortable putting in a formal grievance. Some of the participants were not aware that this box could be used in this manner. An anonymous process could be a solution to this issue; however, this option needs to be better communicated to the residents.

Are there inconsistencies between policies and practices?

The women need better communication about what is expected from them

While all of the participants were given handbooks and policy and procedure manuals, they agreed that the policies in the manuals were not necessarily what they could expect in practice. According to one participant:

“They [the rules] are always changing. We have a copy of the general female handbook, the general rules, but as far as specific rules, it changes and varies every day.”

The majority of the participants agreed that in general, the basic rules were pretty consistent. However, certain rules get changed in practice so often that they never know what to expect. Many recalled examples of times where they tried to look up a policy in the handbook and found it to be different than what they were being told by a staff member. According to some participants, when they ask about an inconsistency between policies and practices, they are told *“didn’t you read the bottom where it says rules are subject to change at any time.”* On a day-to-day basis the residents should know what the rules are, and what they can expect if they break them. One participant said that the women often have to rely on their peers to tell them what the actual rules are:

"If we didn't have the girls here to tell us the rules or be looking out for each other...we'd be even more screwed."

When policies and practices are inconsistent, nobody knows what to expect and it can get both the staff and the residents into trouble. Thus, all practices and procedures need to be backed by clearly written policies and when policies are changed all residents should be notified in an effective manner as soon as possible to avoid any misunderstanding.

The majority of the participants also felt that the rules changed depending on which staff members were present. One participant said:

"These are the rules; they make them up as they go. You know, what works for one group of staff or C.O. doesn't go for the other one. So there is no consistency, there are different rules for different guards."

Some participants suggested that they would rather have a staff member who was strict, but consistent, then someone who was more lenient, but you never know what to expect. They agreed that they liked knowing what to expect better and that without knowing what the rules are, without any consistency, *"you are going to get yourself in trouble."* If the residents are expected to follow the rules, and the staff members are expected to implement them consistently and fairly then everyone must be on the same page and understand what exactly the policies are. In order to avoid inconsistencies with implementation of rules there must be clear policy to back them up, and clear procedures to follow to put them into practice.

Do the women feel that their time spent at the Women's Center has been more or less beneficial than what they may have experienced in other correctional environments?

Overall, there were mixed feelings about the facility. Most felt that the Women's Center was doing a great job, and that *"if you had to do your time, this is where you want to do it."* Others felt very strongly that there was a lot that the facility needed to improve in order to be a true "correctional facility."

"Ya, it's not a correctional facility, in any way."

"They don't give any tools to correct your behavior it's mostly just punishment and oh you are stuck in here."

For the most part, the participants agreed that the Women's Center was doing a better job than other facilities, but there needs to be *"more respect, more consistency, and more job opportunities."* When participants were asked what they like about the Women's Center, many described opportunities that they had been given which they felt they would not have received in another facility. Others described ways in which the Women's Center had improved their self-esteem. The following quotes show what the women felt was the most beneficial thing about the Women's Center:

"We have a lot more here for facilitated programs which is a good thing."

"For me it's that I get to see my children and my family, versus having the piece of glass."

"I am a very avid crocheter... that has given me serious pride...I can make some wicked cool stuff! You know I didn't know that I could be that talented, but it's nice!"

"For me it's been the ability to take some college classes."

"I like the new jobs. We have 22 paid positions now; this time last year we had 4, so that's huge."

"When you make it up here you feel like they think that you can live amongst other people. You know this is a society."

Many also suggested that the quality of life and the community at the Women's Center is what makes it better than other facilities. The following quotes represent these ideas:

"I think this place has kind of done it. A lot of other prisons are violent and the quality of life that we have here in this prison, the consequences of losing it and not wanting to lose it... gives us more incentive to keep our stuff together."

"Ya, we feel good, we are healthy, we are living good, so instead of being locked in a cell and being punished, thinking about how ticked off we can be all day, it's like the quality of life helps give you those life skills that you didn't have coming in."

"I was scared to come to prison, but this wasn't as bad as I thought "

While there is room for improvements in regards to staff training, vocational training, programming, work assignments, and consistency. The quality of life, the sense of community, and the opportunities offered are what make the Women's Center unique and more beneficial for many of the residents than what they may experience at other facilities.

LIMITATIONS

As with any research, there are some limitations to this study. While many of the findings are in line with other literature about gender-responsive policies and programs, the results are not generalizable outside of Maine. The qualitative study design resulted in a much smaller sample size than many quantitative studies, which means that the results may not represent the entire population of incarcerated women at the facility. The non-random sampling methods are also a limitation and thus the sample may be biased. The convenience sampling methods may have influenced the responses. Often those with strong opinions (positive or negative) about a topic are more likely to volunteer and thus the results could have a sampling bias. One of the groups was also slightly smaller than the recommended size, as a result of non-participation and scheduling conflicts. This may have influenced the results of this group. The small sample size and non-random sampling procedures limit the ability to use this study as generalizable knowledge outside of the Maine Department of Corrections. The sample studied is unlikely to represent a wider population because the population in Maine is quite homogenous and thus the sample will likely not be very representative of the national population. Many of the findings may also be specific to the Women's Center at the time of the study and thus not generalizable to other facilities.

The study is also limited in the data that it will collect through focus group methods. The data is only qualitative, and thus no statistical analysis or significance can be calculated. Participants may have been influenced by the group in their responses and thus biased responses may be a limitation. Participants may have provided only socially acceptable answers to the questions or simply agree with the group, this is often referred to as "group think" (Garcia & Lane, 2010). Another limitation to this study is the fact that the researcher asked the incarcerated women for their opinions on treatment, evaluation, and rules that they must live by. Obviously some of the requests of the women are not feasible. However, facilitators tried to steer the conversations so that the discussion focused more on policies and procedures that specifically affect the women and their ability to feel safe, respected and empowered to change. Even with these limitations, the study will be useful as a program and policy evaluation tool for the Maine Department of Corrections. It will also be a useful exploratory tool for developing any future national studies of this nature. Since the general themes of the focus groups were still in line with the needs of incarcerated women as defined in the literature, this study presents more evidence of these unique, gender-specific needs.

CONCLUSIONS

With the increasing population of incarcerated females in Maine, and the unique pathways of females in and out of crime, a gender-responsive criminal justice system is vitally important to reduce recidivism among these women. With some improvements the Women's Center could be an exemplary gender-responsive facility. This facility should be a safe place not only to securely house the female offenders, but also a space where these women can learn how to improve their lives and skills so that they may one day live independent, crime free lives in the community. The purpose of this study was to give a voice to incarcerated females in Maine so that we might learn what these women believe they need from the criminal justice system. The hope is that policymakers and Maine Department of Corrections staff will take note of the results and consider them as they develop and revise gender-responsive policies. In sum, the focus group discussions have resulted in the following conclusions:

- The needs of the women at the Women's Center are in line with the theoretical recommendations in the literature.
- The women enjoy the open layout and the opportunities awarded to them at the facility, which they say helps develop a sense of community among the residents and staff.
- Current touch and passing and receiving policies are discouraging a relational community.
- The women want to be able to work to help improve their economic conditions and to help them feel like they are living a more normal life. However, current policies are preventing many women from being eligible for work assignments.
- The women need more programs that focus on the following issues: parenting education, lifelong substance abuse management, life skills for living with mental illness, and vocational training.
- Visitation policies need to be revised to provide an appropriate, non-hostile environment for family visits, and encourage relationship development for mothers and their children.
- Health care policies and procedures need to be revised to provide comprehensive, and preventative, medical, dental, and mental health services.
- Policies should be revised to hold the staff accountable for being respectful of the residents and their property and creating a safe, dignified environment. Staff training is the key component to educating staff members on appropriate gender-responsive procedures.
- Policies and practices need to be consistent at all times, regardless of the staff that is present.

These findings not only provide support for the theoretical guidelines of gender-responsive policies, but also provide clear examples of what incarcerated women feel are the most important to their success. The women know what motivates them to be crime free and what supports they need to avoid recidivism. All of these findings should be considered by policymakers in the development of gender-responsive policies. The last section of this report provides recommendations for policy revisions based on the focus group findings, as well as examples for implementation of these recommendations based on the discussions and literature review.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND PROGRAMS

- **Develop a gender-responsive touch policy.**
 - Allow appropriate, positive touching among peers (hugs, pat on back or shoulder, high fives, hand-shakes, etc.).
 - Discourage inappropriate and unwanted touching (fighting, hitting, sexual activity, all and any touching between residents and staff, etc.)
 - Define all terms in the policy and display the policy in view of all residents and staff.
- **Develop a gender-responsive passing and receiving policy.**
 - Create a list of allowed, passable items.
 - Define the procedures for passing between residents. This should include some form of approval by a staff member, which ensures that all passed items are thoroughly checked for hidden contraband.
 - Example: A log could be used to record all items being passed between residents and requires staff signatures, and signatures of the giver and the receiver.
- **Revise work assignment policies.**
 - Revise eligibility requirements to allow more women to work.
 - Develop a new incentive system to allow more work assignments to be created.
 - Create more work assignments in the community that could translate into real job experience and help the women obtain future employment, while making connections in the community and easing the transition into re-entry.
 - Example: A tier system could be used that lists certain work assignments and the corresponding incentive at various levels for various eligibility requirements.
- **Implement programs that address a wide range of needs. Programs should at the very least address the following issues:**
 - Parenting education and strengthening positive relationships.
 - Vocational education and skills training.
 - Education and degree completion.
 - Substance abuse and life-long management.
 - Emotional and mental health and management of mental health issues in everyday life.
 - Other topics for programs could include: health and risky behavior education, sexual health after trauma, motivational programs to remain drug free, and financial planning.
- **Create more opportunities for residents to participate in pro-social activities.**
 - Activities and social events allow the residents to choose to participate in healthy activities during their free time, practice positive social skills while incarcerated, and feel more normal.
 - Activities and events could include: physical exercise and organized sporting events, arts and music, or family involvement events (such as holiday parties, picnics, etc.).
- **Revise visitation policies.**
 - Visits should be a safe, enjoyable event for all involved.
 - Visitors must be treated with respect and dignity.
 - Visits must be conducted in a welcoming space and children should never be subjected to a hostile environment.
 - All visitors should be allowed basic necessities such as the use of a restroom.
 - Activities should be provided for the children.
 - Appropriate contact should be allowed between the resident and their visitors.
 - Develop new uses of technology such as videoconferencing to help residents stay connected to their families.
- **Strengthen and revise re-entry planning policies and practices.**

- No woman should ever leave without a clear plan for obtaining the basic necessities including: housing, employment/ or other financial support, and treatment/ services in the community for substance abuse, mental health, and health care issues.
- Residents should not be released until they can prove that they have a plan for these items.
- Case managers should be held accountable for helping the residents develop this plan.
- Policies that prohibit residents from receiving transitional housing should be carefully revised so that those who need help re-entering the community can receive it.
- **Develop gender-responsive health care policies.**
 - Policies should include a requirement that medical and mental health services should be provided within a reasonable time.
 - All residents should be allowed preventative services appropriate to their age, and health history. These should at a minimum include annual dental cleanings, cancer and other disease screenings (PAPs, mammograms, etc.), and physicals.
 - Female medical and mental health staff must be available when requested.
- **Hold staff to the following minimum standards:**
 - All staff that work with women should be required to complete a basic training on gender-responsive policies and practices before they are allowed to begin work.
 - All staff that work with women should be encouraged to attend ongoing professional development on new gender-responsive practices and policies.
 - Any form of intolerance, disrespect, favoritism or harassment by a staff member should not be tolerated under any circumstance.
 - Consistent and fair policy implementation must be required of all staff.
- **Ensure that grievance process policies allow for anonymity and strongly prohibit any and all retaliation.**
 - As one participant suggested, an anonymous suggestions, comments, and concerns box should be made available to all residents.
 - Residents need to be made aware of and have available to them an anonymous hotline for reporting any mistreatment, abuse, or harassment.
- **Develop a more effective system for communicating policy changes to the residents and staff.**
 - Ensure that during the intake process a staff member goes over all policies and procedures with the resident.
 - All policy changes need to be communicated to residents through effective methods such as: town meetings, memo boards, or handouts.
 - Policy changes should be communicated before the policy takes effect, when possible.
- **Build upon the skills and strengths of the residents.**
 - Vocational training and educational training should be provided and should reflect the residents' skills and interests.
 - Staff should find ways to build upon the residents' skills and strengths to help improve their confidence and self-esteem.
 - Encourage residents to share their accomplishments with the community and recognize those who have done well.
- **Develop partnerships with local community organizations and colleges to provide services and reduce funding needs.**
 - Develop relationships with non-profit and NGO groups that provide similar services in the community.
 - Develop partnerships with local colleges to provide education and vocational training.
- **Talk to the residents more often and involve them in planning and decision-making processes whenever possible.**

APPENDIX A: THEME CODES

General Theme	Sub Theme/ Topic
SUPPORTS	
	Family
	Relational Community
	Programs
	Services
JOBS/ ACTIVITIES	
	Work Assignments
	Education
	Incentives
STAFF ISSUES	
	Treatment/ Respect
	Communication
	Consistency
LIFE AFTER PRISON	
	Re-entry planning
	Empowerment
	Needs
OTHER	
	Physical Environment
	Allowable Items
	Wellbeing
Research Question Theme	
What works well	
What could be improved	
Policies and Practices consistent?	
Women's Center Specific	

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Focus Group Script

Introduction (15 min.)

FACILITATOR:

Welcome! You are here today to participate in a research project lead by Jillian and Erica from the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service. *(Introduce any additional staff members that are also present at this time.)* This project is being conducted as a student research project. The purpose of this research project is to examine corrections policies and procedures in order to understand how we can make them more gender-responsive. Gender-responsive simply means that the policies and procedures address the specific needs and experiences of women. A policy is usually a written law, rule, or regulation and a procedure or practice is how that policy is implemented. We would like to ask you to read your consent form. If you need assistance reading the form we would be happy to help you.

(Facilitator should allow about 10 minutes for participants to read through the consent form and then go through it orally point by point to ensure everyone understands. Give participants the opportunity to leave/ opt out after reviewing the form. Ask participants to sign the forms, collect all signatures and then move on.)

We will ask you specific questions and you will respond and discuss these questions as a group. Please be respectful of all participants and their opinions, it is okay to disagree with one another.

Some of the topics we cover may be difficult for you, if at any time you feel uncomfortable or wish to leave, again just please let us know. Please remember that the information we discuss today will remain confidential. You may refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering. If you would like, you may choose to use a pseudonym today in place of your real name during our discussion. Please be respectful and do not discuss the events or any information revealed in this session after we leave today. Again your individual responses will not be shared with anyone who is not currently present in this room. We want to thank you for your participation in this project.

FACILITATOR: Does anyone have any questions or concerns before we begin? Again, you may choose to leave at any time.

(Facilitator should address any questions or concerns participants may have at this time.)

FACILITATOR: Now remember to be respectful with your answers and try not to include any information about specific people when discussing examples. Also remember not to discuss any information regarding current or pending cases. The tape recorder will now be turned on.

(Facilitator should turn on the tape recorder now).

Let's begin with some quick introductions. Remember if you would like to use a pseudonym please introduce yourself using that name.

Questions (1 hour total)

FACILITATOR: *(Ask the following questions in the order given)*

1. Tell me about the things you like most about the Women's Center?
 - a. *PROMPT: Do you like the staff, the environment, the rules, the programs, and the culture...?*

2. What has been the most beneficial/ helpful experience for you here?
 - a. *PROMPT: A specific program? A specific person (no names please) that has helped you? Your peers?*
3. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being completely disrespectful and insensitive and 10 being completely respectful, helpful, and sensitive, how would you rate the overall staff here? (no names please)
 - a. How would you rate the security staff?
 - b. How would you rate the program staff?
 - c. How would you rate the case managers?
 - d. What could staff do specifically that would help you feel more safe, respected, and supported?
4. How would you rate the environment on being appropriate for women, on a scale of 1-10, 1 being completely inappropriate and 10 being very appropriate? How can it be improved?
 - a. *PROMPT: e.g. Rooms, common areas, program rooms, etc.*
5. Do you have or know where to find copies of the Women's Center's rules, policies, and procedures? Where can you find these copies?
6. How well are the practices of the facility in line with the policies? Please rate on a scale of 1-10, 1 being policies are completely different than actual practices and 10 being practices and policies are always the same. Please describe why you chose this rating.
7. Is there a specific policy or procedure that you think works really well for women?
 - a. *PROMPT: Perhaps something that is different compared to one in the B-Pods or another facility?*
8. What policies or practices do you think should be changed to better fit the needs of women?
 - a. *What things do you think should be different for women who are incarcerated vs. men?*
9. Now we want to focus on specific policies:
 - a. Tell me what works well about the food policy and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - b. Tell me what works well about the dress code and allowable property policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - c. Tell me what works well about the visitations policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - d. Tell me what works well about the programming policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - e. Tell me what works well about the work assignments policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - f. Tell me what works well about the health care and other services policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - g. Tell me what works well about intake process and orientation policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - h. Tell me what works well about the search policies and practices? What could make it more effective for women here?
 - i. Are there any others that you feel work well or could be more effective?
10. Do you have any final comments you would like to make about the policies at the Women's Center?

Wrap Up (5 min.)

FACILITATOR: Does anyone have any final questions or concerns before we leave today?
(Facilitate questions) Again thank you for your participation!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berman, J. (2006). *Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.
- Bloom, B., Owen, B., & Covington, S. (2003). *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Corrections.
- Bloom, B., Owen, B., & Covington, S. (2004). Women Offenders and the Gendered Effects of Public Policy. *Review of Policy Research*, 21(1), 31-48.
- Bloom, B., Owen, B., Piper Deschenes, E., & Rosenbaum, J. (2002). Improving Juvenile Justice for Females: A Statewide Assessment in California. *Crime & Delinquency*, 48, 526.
- Bloom, B., Owen, B., Piper Deschenes, E., & Rosenbaum, J. (2002). Moving Toward Justice for Female Juvenile Offenders in the New Millennium: Modeling Gender-Specific Policies and Programs. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 18(1), 37-56.
- Booker Loper, A., & Hontoria Tuerk, E. (2010). Improving the Emotional Adjustment and Communication Patterns of Incarcerated Mothers: Effectiveness of a Prison Parenting Intervention. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 89-101.
- Cain, L., Stromer, T., Cain, T., Shea, L. (Producers), & Cain, L. (Director). (2010). *Healing Neen* [Motion Picture]. <http://vimeo.com/15851924>.
- Calhoun, S., Messina, N., Cartier, J., & Torres, S. (2010). *Implementing Gender-Responsive Treatment for Women in Prison: Client and Staff Perspectives*. Los Angeles, CA: Federal Probation.
- Calhoun, S., Messina, N., Cartier, J., & Torres, S. (2010). Implementing Gender-Responsive Treatment for Women in Prison: Client and Staff Perspectives. *FEDERAL PROBATION*, 27-33.
- Center For Gender & Justice. (2011). *Center For Gender & Justice*. Retrieved 2011 йил June-July from <http://www.centerforgenderandjustice.org/>
- Cobbina, J. E. (2009). *From Prison to Home: Women's Pathways In and Out of Crime*. St. Louis. County of Santa Clara Department of Corrections. (2008). *Breaking Cycles, Rebuilding Lives: gender Analysis of Programs & Services for Incarcerated Women in Santa Clara County*. County of Santa Clara Department of Corrections. Commission on the Status of Women and the Office of Women's Policy.
- Deaton, C. (2005). Humanizing Prisons with Animals: A Closer Look at "Cell Dogs" and Horse Programs in Correctional Institutions. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 46-61.
- Erickson, B., & Young, M. (2010). Group Art Therapy With Incarcerated Women. *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, 38-51.
- Frost, N., Greene, J., & Pranis, K. (2006). *Hard Hit: The Growth in the Imprisonment of Women, 1977-2004*. Institute on Women and Criminal Justice. Women's Prison Association.
- Frye, S., & Dawe, S. (2008). Interventions for women prisoners and their children in the post-release period. *Clinical Psychologist*, 99-108.
- Garcia, C., & Lane, J. (2010). Looking in the Rearview Mirror: What Incarcerated Women Think Girls Need From the System. *Feminist Criminology*, 5(3), 227-242.
- Garcia, M., & Ritter, N. (2012). Improving Access to Services for Female Offenders Returning to the Community. *NIJ JOURNAL*, 18-23.
- Gonzalez, P., Romero, T., & Cerbana, C. (2007). Parent Education Program for Incarcerated Mothers in Colorado. *The Journal of Correctional Education*.
- Guerino, P., Harrison, P., & Sabol, W. (2011). *Prisoners in 2010*. Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Guthrie, B. (2011). Toward a Gender-Responsive Restorative Correctional Health Care Model. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 497-505.
- Hannah-Moffat, K. (2006). Pandora's Box: Risk/Need and Gender-Responsive Corrections. *Reaction Essay*, 5(1), 183-192.

- Harner, H., & Burgess, A. (2011). Using a Trauma-Informed Framework to Care for Incarcerated Women. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 469-476.
- Immarigeon, R. (2006). *Women and Girls in the Criminal Justice System, Policy Issues and Practice Strategies*. Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute.
- Kaiser Family Foundation. (2010). *Statehealthfacts.org*. Retrieved July 2012, from Adult Prisoners under State Jurisdiction by Gender, 2010: www.statehealthfacts.org/comparetable.jsp?ind=863&cat=1&sub=150&yr=138&typ=1
- Kennon, S., Mackintosh, V., & Myers, B. (2009). Parenting Education for Incarcerated Mothers. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 10-29.
- King, E. (2009). *Maine's Women Offenders: What Do We Know?* Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service.
- Labelle, D., & Pimlott Kubiak, S. (2004). Balancing Gender Equity for Women Prisoners. *Feminist Studies*, 416-426.
- Livers, M. L., & Hiers, T. (n.d.). *Gender Responsiveness Programs: Addressing the Needs of Female Offenders*. Towson, MD: Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.
- McDermott, T. (n.d.). *Cook County's Gender-Responsive Treatment Model*. Chicago, Illinois: Department of Women's Justice Services.
- Messina, N., Grella, C., Cartier, J., & Torres, S. (2010). A randomized experimental study of gender-responsive substance abuse treatment for women in prison. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 97-107.
- National Institute of Corrections. (2010). *Gender Informed Practice Assessment (GIPA) Pilot Site Visit: A Report to the Maine Department of Corrections*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Corrections.
- National Resource Center for Justice Involved Women. (2011). *National Resource Center for Justice Involved Women*. Retrieved 2011 йил June-July from <http://cjinvolvedwomen.org/>
- National Resource Center on Justice-involved Women. (2011). *Resource Brief: Achieving Successful Outcomes with Justice-Involved Women*. Washington DC.
- Nelson, A., Woodhams, J., & Hatcher, R. (2010). Female prisoners' understanding of 'bullying' and their methods of coping: a multinational perspective. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 649-670.
- Ney, B., Ramirez, R., & Van Dieten, M. (2012). *Ten truths that matter when working with justice involved women*. Washington DC: National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women.
- Office of Justice Programs. (n.d.). *CrimeSolutions.gov*. Retrieved 2011 йил July from <http://www.crimesolutions.gov/default.aspx>
- Parker, A., & Tritter, J. (2006). Focus group method and methodology: current practice and recent debate. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 29(1), 23-37.
- Patino, V., Ravoira, L., & Wolf, A. (2006). *A Rallying Cry for Chnage: Charting a New Direction in the State of Florida's Response to Girls in the Juvenile Justice System*. Oakland, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.
- Perdue, T., Williamson, C., Ventura, L., Hairston, T., Osborne, L., Laux, J., et al. (2012). Offenders Who Are Mothers with and without Experience in Prostitution: Differences in Historical Trauma, Current Stressors, and Physical and Mental Health Differences. *Women's Health Issues*, 195-200.
- Pollack, S. (2003). Focus-Group Methodology in Research with Incarcerated Women: Race, Power, and Collective Experience. *Affilia*, 461.
- Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 655-660.
- Schmitt, J., & Warner, K. (2011). Ex-offenders and the labor market. *The Journal of Labor and Society*, 87-109.
- Sharp, S., & Pain, E. (2010). *Study of Incarcerated Women and Their Children*. Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth.

- Sharts-Hopko, N. C. (2001). Focus Group Methodology: When and Why? *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS care*, 89-91.
- Smiling Hall, R., & Killacky, J. (2008). Correctional Education from the Perspective of the Prisoner Student. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 301-320.
- State of Maine Department of Corrections. (2006). *Women's Center*. Retrieved 2011 йил December from State of Maine Department of Corrections:
<http://www.maine.gov/corrections/Facilities/mcc/women/index.htm>
- Staton-Tindall, M., Frisman, L., Lin, H.-J., Leukefield, C., Oser, C., Havens, J., et al. (2011). Relationship Influence and Health Risk Behavior Among Re-Entering Women Offenders. *Women's Health Issues*, 230-238.
- Staton-Tindall, M., Leukefeld, C., Palmer, J., Oser, C., Kaplan, A., Krietemeyer, J., et al. (2007). Relationships and HIV Risk Among Incarcerated Women. *The Prison Journal*, 143.
- Tatar, J., Kaasa, S., & Cauffman, E. (2011). Perceptions of Procedural Justice Among Female Offenders: Time Does not Heal all Wounds. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 268-296.
- The Urban Institute. (2008). *Beyond Ideology, Politics, and guesswork: The Case for Evidence-Based Policy*. The Urban Institute.
- Thigpen, M., Beauclair, T., & Buell, M. (2006). *Women Offender case management Model*. Washington, D.C.: Orbis Partners, Inc.; National Institute of Corrections.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2008). *Handbook for Prison Managers and Policymakers on Women and Imprisonment*. New York: UNITED NATIONS.
- West, H., Sabol, W., & Greenman, S. (2010). *Prisoners in 2009*. U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.