

WOMEN, INJECTION DRUG USE, AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Women inmates have consistently higher rates of drug use and HIV infection than do male inmates. The needs and circumstances of women in prison and jail require increased emphasis and tailored interventions.

Women Inmates Need Special Attention and Programs Designed Just for Them

In 1980, 13,420 women were in prison or jail. In the 20 years since then, this number has soared more than 500 percent. Women are now the fastest growing group of inmates. At the end of 1999, 90,688 women were in prison or jail. There are compelling reasons why women inmates need more attention and tailored interventions.

Women inmates' behaviors and past lives place them at high risk.

Drug use is common: About 80 percent of women inmates have used drugs and/or alcohol. Around 54 percent used drugs in the month before their current offense, 25 percent were under the influence of drugs when they committed the crime for which they were convicted, and 24 percent committed their crime to get money for drugs.

Many also have high-risk sexual behaviors, including trading sex for drugs, sex with multiple partners, sex with partners who are injection drug users, and prostitution. A significant number of women inmates – 43 to 65 percent – have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse before their admission to prison or jail.

As a result, their rates of infectious disease and other health problems are high.

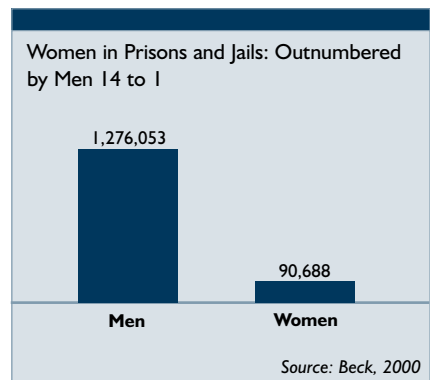
At the end of 1999, 3.4 percent of women in state prisons were HIV positive. In addition, various studies show hepatitis C infection prevalence ranging between 22 percent and 55 percent of women inmates.

Sexually transmitted diseases are another major problem for women inmates: 3-28 percent have syphilis, 1.4-6 percent have chlamydia, and 0.7-7.4 percent have gonorrhea.

Many have mental health problems, including anti-social personality disorder, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders, possibly due to histories of abuse.

Most women inmates are mothers who are separated from their children.

About three-quarters of women inmates are mothers. Of these, 62 percent are single mothers and 66 percent have children under age 18. At the time of their arrest, 6-10 percent of women inmates are pregnant. In 1998, more than 1,400 women delivered a baby in prison. In most correctional systems, babies are taken away shortly after delivery and placed with family members or in foster care. The Federal Bureau of Prisons and 11 states have residential programs for inmate mothers and their infants.



Correctional Infrastructure and Programming Should Meet the Needs of Women Inmates

The Federal Bureau of Prisons and most states have separate facilities for women. Some women prisoners serve their terms in alternative settings, such as halfway houses, pre-release centers, work release centers, or day supervision programs. Many women inmates, however, are housed in prisons and jails that also house male inmates. Because of their much smaller numbers compared to male inmates, the needs of women inmates are often overlooked. Their particular characteristics and situations should be taken into consideration when interventions are designed and resources allocated:

- Many facilities use the same type of screening instrument to assess male and

