

Characteristics of Female Offenders: Using Childhood Victimization Model for Treatment

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Abstract : Sexual, physical, or emotional abuses are behaviors used by one person in a relationship or within a family unit to control the other person. Physical abuse can consist of, but not limited to hitting, pushing, and shoving. Sexual abuse is unwanted or forced sexual activity on a person without their consent. Abusive behaviors include intimidation, manipulation, humiliation, isolation, frightening, terrorizing, coercing, threatening, blaming, hurting, injuring, or wounding another individual. Although emotional, psychological and financial abuses are not criminal behaviors, they are forms of abuse and can leave emotional scars on their victim. The purpose of this literature review research was to examine characteristics of female offenders, past abuse, and pathways to offending. The question that guided this research: does past abuse influence recidivism? The theoretical foundation used was relational theory by Jean Baker Miller. One common feature of female offenders is abuse (sexual, physical, or verbal). Abuse can cause mental illnesses and substance abuse. The abuse does not directly affect the women's recidivism. However, results indicated the psychological and maladaptive behaviors as a result of the abuse did contribute to indirect pathways to continue offending. The female offenders' symptoms of ongoing depression, anxiety, and engaging in substance abuse (self medicating) did lead to the women's incarceration. Using the childhood victimization model as the treatment approach for women's mental illness and substance abuse disorders that were a result from history of child abuse have shown success. With that in mind, if issues surrounding early victimization are not addressed, then the women offenders may not recover from their mental illness or addiction and are at a higher risk of reoffending. However, if the women are not emotionally ready to engage in the treatment process, then it should not be forced onto them because it may cause harm (targeting prior traumatic experiences). Social capital is family support and sources that assist in helping the individual with education, employment opportunities that can lead to success. Human capital refers to internal knowledge, skills, and capacities that help the individual act in new and appropriate ways. The lack of human and social capital is common among female offenders, which leads to extreme poverty and economic marginalization, more often in frequent numbers than men. In addition, the changes in welfare reform have exacerbated women's difficulties in gaining adequate-paying jobs to support themselves and their children that have contributed to female offenders reoffending. With that in mind, one way to lower the risk factor of female offenders from reoffending is to provide them with educational and vocational training, enhance their self-efficacy, and teach them appropriate coping skills and life skills. Furthermore, it is important to strengthen family bonds and support. Having a supportive family relationship was a statistically significant protective factor for women offenders.

Keywords : characteristics, childhood victimization model, female offenders, treatment

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