

Victims of Imprisonment: Incarceration and Post-Release Effects of Confinement with Women with a Mental Illness

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Abstract : This study explores the effects of the imprisonment of women together with females with mental disorders on the well-being of the former both during imprisonment and after their release from prison. Based on in-depth interviews with 22 women ex-prisoners who had been imprisoned for a period of at least two years in the single Israeli female correctional facility, Neve Tirza Prison, and released one to three months before the initiation of the study to a community-based agency managed by the Israeli Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority, and based on a qualitative, constructive strategy. We found that: (i) mentally ill prisoners' conduct creates severe feelings of stress and discomfort among many of the prisoners without a mental disorder prisoners; (ii) The intimate and often long-term encounters with prisoners with a mental illness lead to increased feelings of distress, helplessness, fear, and frustration among many of the women prisoners; (iii) the damaging encounters between women prisoners and mentally-ill prisoners harmed the reintegration of the formers into society after release, and (iv) The women ex-prisoners lacked the basic mental, cognitive, and social tools necessary for dealing with female inmates with a mental illness and had received no psychological or emotional support from the prison personnel. Consequently, they suffered – and still suffer – from traumatic and upsetting memories Our findings led us to conclude that women prisoners should be imprisoned separately from female prisoners with mental disorders or be offered a wide range of psychological and emotional coping tools as well as various rehabilitative treatment programs.

Keywords : women, prisoners, mentally ill, health

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