

The Lived Experiences of South African Female Offenders and the Possible Links to Recidivism Due to their Exclusion from Educational Rehabilitation Programmes

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Abstract : The South African Constitution outlines provisions for every detainee and sentenced prisoner in relation to the human rights recognized in the country since 1994; but currently, across the country, prisons have yet to meet many of these criteria. Consequently, their day-to-day lives are marked by extreme lack of privacy, high rates of infection, poor nutrition, and deleterious living conditions, which steadily erode prisoners' mental and physical capacities rather than rehabilitating inmates so that they can effectively reintegrate into society. Even more so, policy reform, advocacy, security, and rehabilitation programs continue to be based on research and theories that were developed to explain the experiences of men, while female offenders are seen as the "special category" of inmates. Yet, the experiences of women and their pathways to incarceration are remarkably different from those of male offenders. Consequently, little is known about the profile, nature and contributing factors and experiences of female offenders which has impeded a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the subject of female criminality. The number of women globally in correctional centers has more than doubled over the past fifteen years (these increases vary from prison to prison and country to country). Yet, female offenders have largely been ignored in research even though the minority status of female offenders is a phenomenon that is not peculiar to South Africa as the number of women incarcerated has increased by 68% within the decade. Within South Africa, there have been minimal studies conducted on the gendered experience of offenders. While some studies have explored the pathways to female offending, gender-sensitive correctional programming for women that respond to their needs has been overlooked. This often leads to a neglect of the needs of female offenders, not only in terms of programs and services delivery to this minority group but also from a research perspective. In response, the aim of the proposed research is twofold: Firstly, the lived experiences and views of rehabilitation and reintegration of female offenders will be explored. Secondly, the various pathways into and out of recidivism amongst female offenders will be investigated regarding their inclusion in educational rehabilitation.

Keywords : female incarceration, educational rehabilitation, exclusion, experiences of female offenders

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