

GROUP 2

REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES FOR FEMALE OFFENDERS — FOCUSING ON REDUCING REOFFENDING OF FEMALE OFFENDERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the treatment of female offenders had not received sufficient attention due to their small population in comparison with male offenders. However, the population of female offenders is on the rise in many nations recently, which has increased the demand to enhance treatment of female offenders.

The offences committed by females differ from those committed by males in terms of the types of offences or the motives for the offences. Arising from biological and psychological differences, female offenders require special consideration of human rights issues and appropriate treatment meeting their needs — both in the institution and in the community.

This report is the culmination of the learning points from the Senior Seminar and the experiences of the group participants. This group concentrated on the topic “Rehabilitation Programmes for Female Offenders — Focusing on Reducing Reoffending of Female Offenders”. The discussion was conducted according to the following agenda: 1) Characteristics of female-committed offences; 2) Effective assessment/classification methods for female offenders; 3) Necessary rehabilitation programmes for female offenders and 4) Surrounding issues of rehabilitation programmes of female offenders.

II. SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of Female-Committed Crimes

The resolution of a problem is likely to be facilitated by starting with a clear definition and sound understanding of the issue at hand. In the case of reducing reoffending of female offenders, the profile of female offenders and the crimes they commit should be established.

1. Types of Offences Committed by Females

In the majority of the nine countries represented in this group, a significant proportion of the female offenders committed theft-related and illicit-drug-related offences. Further, female offenders in most of the countries are generally less likely to commit crimes of a violent nature. In countries with a higher rate of violent crimes committed by female offenders, the social and cultural background of the country seemed to play a part. In most of the countries, female offenders have lower rates of recidivism.

2. Social Background of Females Who Commit Crimes

With the exception of Japan, which enjoys a high rate of literacy among the people, female

offenders in the other countries tend to be poorly educated. Many of them lack vocational skills and face difficulties with employment. It is no surprise that most of them are economically disadvantaged too. Detailed data from half of the countries revealed consistent findings that a significant proportion of female offenders have mental health issues, as well as histories of victimization.

B. Effective Assessment/Classification Methods for Female Offenders

Assessment is crucial to identifying services that offenders need, and the costs of inappropriate assessment are high (Van Voorhis, 2013). The result is a poor fit of clients to programmes and services, leading to the waste of valuable resources (Van Voorhis, 2013). Assessment will yield the level of risk, or likelihood that a person may reoffend, as well as the targets for intervention. Assessments in countries with advanced corrections systems, such as Canada and the United States, utilize statistically derived assessments, also known as actuarial assessments.

Actuarial assessments can contribute to decision-making at various points in the criminal justice procedure. They can help determine sentencing during the sentencing phase, in allocation of treatment during incarceration, and in ascertaining suitability for parole during pre-release. Since assessment also illuminates targets for interventions, its value extends beyond decision-making: it can guide interventions and supervision conditions that will promote the rehabilitation of offenders. To fully harness the benefits of actuarial assessment, countries are committed to advocating for its use within the criminal justice system. Highlighting empirical evidence may help to further this cause.

1. Risks and Needs of Female Offenders

To achieve reductions in reoffending, intensive interventions should be reserved for offenders of at least moderate risk of reoffending. This is known as the *risk principle*. Further, interventions should target factors that are related to future offending, known as the *needs principle*.

Emerging research has identified female-specific needs that have been overlooked by gender-neutral assessment protocols. Consequently, no programmes are available for such needs of women. Effective assessment for female offenders must accurately identify their needs, regardless of whether they are gender-neutral or gender-specific. As gender-neutral risk factors are well-established, efforts should now be directed towards identifying those unique to women.

Current research identifies the following risks and needs factors that are gender-neutral (Bonta & Andrews, 2007):

1. Criminal history
2. Antisocial personality pattern
3. Pro-criminal attitudes
4. Social support for crime (e.g. criminal friends)
5. Substance abuse
6. Family/marital relationships (e.g. poor family relationships)
7. School/work (e.g. poor performance)
8. Pro-social recreational activities (e.g. lack of involvement in pro-social recreational activities)

Van Voorhis and her associates (2013) identified risks and needs factors that are specific to women:

9. Mental health history
10. Depression/anxiety (symptoms)
11. Psychosis/suicidal (symptoms)
12. Child abuse (institutions)
13. Adult victimization (community)
14. Relationship dysfunction
15. Parental stress (community)
16. Housing safety (community)

The same research recommends an assessment of female offenders' strengths: self-efficacy, family support, parental involvement, and educational assets (Van Voorhis, 2013). There should also be

consideration of a history of victimization (domestic abuse, sexual abuse) to be assessed by certified psychologists (Van Voorhis, 2013).

2. Effective Assessment for Female Offenders: Development, Improvement and Maintenance

The group agreed that classification and assessment were necessary and separate processes. All the countries carry out classification of offenders based on information related to demographics, offence and sentence, with the intention to inform management and treatment decisions. However, only one country, Singapore, conducts actuarial assessment to identify the risks and needs of offenders. Even then, the same assessment tool, the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory, is being used with both male and female offenders.

Accordingly, the group identified measures to develop and introduce effective assessment tools for female offenders: capacity-building and policy-setting. Countries which are not yet carrying out actuarial assessment of female offenders prioritize the recruitment of mental health specialists, training for staff to raise awareness of gender differences and equip with skills to engage female offenders, as well as nurturing research capabilities. Within each country, various agencies may work together. For example, the academia could be leveraged to enhance research capabilities. Externally, countries may wish to form partnerships with one another to share information and knowledge. For all countries, policies on gender-sensitive practices will facilitate the development and introduction of effective assessment tools for female offenders. Furthermore, policies will improve and maintain the assessment methods in the years to come.

C. Rehabilitation Programmes Necessary for Female Offenders

Identifying the needs of female offenders is only part of the equation, the other being suitable programmes and resources to address them. Effective assessment should be the basis for treatment decisions, such as the type of treatment and the intensity of treatment to be provided.

1. Developing the Necessary Rehabilitation Programmes

The group acknowledged the importance of diversionary alternative sentencing measures for female offenders. With their lower risk of reoffending and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, some female offenders may not require incarceration. For them, diversionary measures such as probation, community service orders and parole could be considered. Additionally, alternative sentencing measures may be adopted for the protection of female offenders when necessary, given the high prevalence of the experience of victimization.

A survey of the programmes in each country indicated that all the countries have in place educational, vocational, and healthcare programmes, as well as pre- and post-release plans for social reintegration. Some countries should be commended for their efforts to help offenders maintain contact with their families, as many female offenders have children and place high importance on relationships. However, in most countries, the available programmes do not target criminogenic needs. Even in countries with such programmes, they tend to be gender-neutral and not gender-specific.

All the countries agreed that the foremost task in the development or introduction of the necessary rehabilitation programmes is to be familiar with the profiles and needs of the female offenders of each country. The group proposed to engage female offenders, including ex-offenders, to discover their needs and how they preferred to be helped. At the same time, the group suggested the use of scientific methods and reference to current literature. Information systems should be in place to store and share such valuable data.

Countries which do not currently have programmes targeting criminogenic factors aim to implement interventions that address the needs of female offenders. The needs include gender-neutral ones such as criminal thinking and substance abuse, as well as gender-specific ones such as mental health issues, victimization, dysfunctional relationships, etc. Even with gender-neutral risk factors, there appear to be gender-differences in the experiences and pathways to offending. For example, in terms of mental health problems, more female offenders experience mood disorders than male offenders. In another instance, female offenders tend to use substances to help them cope with the effects of victimization, while male offenders tend to have different motivations for substance use. Such nuances

must be taken into consideration so as to provide appropriate interventions.

Psychological methods such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) have been found to be effective in forensic treatment. However, such methods were employed based on existing knowledge of offending, which has hitherto been derived overwhelmingly from male offenders. Now that we have more knowledge of gender differences, CBT may be limited in its ability to fully address the complex issues of female offenders; methodologies in addition to CBT ought to be explored. A holistic approach is necessary when considering the needs of female offenders, considering psychology, physiology, social and economic background, etc.

A prime example of a gender-specific aspect is childcare. Most female offenders have children and most of them will return to the community as parents after their release. To aid reintegration, female offenders who do not have adequate parenting skills would benefit from programmes to help them parent better. This has significant positive potential as the literature points to the likelihood of drug-dependent women having difficulties in nurturing their children and the risk of intergenerational transmission (Morita, 2013).

2. Considerations for Delivery of Rehabilitation Programmes

Care has to be taken when delivering rehabilitation programmes to female offenders. In countries where female offenders are often significantly disadvantaged economically and socially, basic needs may be prioritized over rehabilitation needs. Service providers ought to be aware of issues that affect more female offenders than male offenders, such as experiences of victimization and worries over childcare. An attendant consideration is the need to recruit more female staff to work with the increasing number of female offenders.

3. Evaluation and Monitoring of Rehabilitation Programmes

There is a general consensus among the countries on the importance of monitoring and evaluating programmes to ensure programme integrity and measure programme outcomes in objective ways. This information will allow countries to determine if programmes are suitable for their female offender populations to determine where and how programmes can be further improved and to promote the sustainability of programmes.

Structures, plans and minimum standards have to be in place to facilitate monitoring and evaluation. The group recommends that a team be appointed to be responsible for monitoring and evaluation. All stakeholders should be engaged in the process of setting structures, plans and minimum standards. They include, but are not limited to, ministries, inmates who participated in the programmes and corrections staff. There is also value in engaging ex-offenders who are maintaining crime-free lives to identify factors that contributed to their desistance from crime.

D. Issues Surrounding Rehabilitation Programmes of Female Offenders

Several issues surround the rehabilitation programmes of female offenders. The first relates to improving the work environment for, and capacity-building of, staff. The next issue pertains to coordination between agencies and the third, international cooperation. To ensure sustainability, the group proposes the establishment of a unit dedicated to the rehabilitation of female offenders.

1. Staff

Staff are the backbone of rehabilitation programmes. Just as we accept that female offenders have distinctive needs, it is equally imperative that we embrace that staff — in particular female staff — contend with distinctive obstacles as they carry out their mission of rehabilitating female offenders. Their issues must be attended to in order to attract and retain staff. Efforts must be made to initiate and maintain engagement with staff working in female institutions, especially female staff.

In some countries, the reality for staff working in female institutions is that they tend to work in facilities that are few and far between, often in less accessible areas. This means that they are more likely to be far away from family and friends. Such separation is exacerbated for female staff due to their lifespan development (i.e. milestones throughout the life of an individual) and cultural norms such as marriage, childbirth and childcare. Consequently, female staff working in female institutions may

choose to resign and focus on their families when they find themselves unable to manage both work and family. A possible resolution that has helped to retain female staff in some countries is to increase work opportunities for them, for example working in institutions for male offenders.

Since female offenders have different needs than male offenders and require different treatment, the same basic training for staff working with male offenders is insufficient. Additional training on gender-specific corrections should be provided for staff who will work in institutions for female offenders.

The group is of the opinion that institutions for female offenders should be staffed mainly by female staff but should include male staff as well. Rules and ordinances to govern contact between male staff and female inmates should be established for the latter's protection. The intention is to avoid the creation of an artificial environment devoid of male presence, which is different from reality. For female offenders who had traumatic or otherwise unpleasant experiences with men, stable and reliable male staff present as opportunities for corrective experiences which may contribute towards their reintegration after release.

Given the above reality, female staff may experience a significant level of stress; hence remedial as well as preventive measures should be in place. Psychological help could be offered to female staff in need. Preventive measures include improving the work environment such as having institutions for female offenders in more accessible locations and having recreational facilities for their well-being.

2. Interagency Coordination

The first step in interagency coordination is to identify stakeholders involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of female offenders. Some examples include agencies of the criminal justice system, medical practitioners specializing in obstetrics and gynaecology, mental health care professionals, halfway houses, and human rights officials. In essence, governmental and non-governmental agencies that offer services frequently used by women should work together.

Coordination is necessary to facilitate meaningful cooperation among the multitude of agencies. Regular platforms at various levels, from local to national, should be created. Information pertinent to the rehabilitation of female offenders ought to be accessible to relevant parties. Some examples include pregnancy, childbirth and childcare. Childcare issues must be attended to expeditiously to ensure the well-being of children, which would in turn contribute to the mental well-being of female offenders.

3. International Cooperation

The group is keen on international cooperation to promote and sustain rehabilitation of female offenders. Research and knowledge is especially valuable and the internet is an extremely useful platform for sharing and dissemination. Being an active member of international bodies is another useful step. Its benefits include the exchange of information and expertise so that countries learn from one another. Additionally, such membership entails obligations and adherence to standards. Being open to checks and enquiries will keep member countries vigilant and promote independent development, reducing the danger of over reliance on international aid.

International cooperation is especially relevant to the treatment of foreign female offenders. If they can be better rehabilitated in their home countries, efforts should be made to ratify conventions on the transfer of prisoners, or establish bilateral agreements to do so. Platforms can be established among countries to share information on the existence of agreements and status of transfers, etc.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

In many countries around the world, female offender rehabilitation has not received the same level of attention as that for male offenders. This should not be the case. This group recognizes the risks and needs of female offenders and wants to realize equal treatment for them. Gender-specific classification, assessment and treatment are imperative and long overdue.

B. Recommendations

To realize equal treatment of female offenders, this group makes the following recommendations.

1. Assessment

Assessment should utilize gender-specific actuarial assessment tools. This represents the best method available today to objectively determine a female offender's risk of reoffending, as well as her needs that require treatment so as to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. When assessing female offenders, gender-specific factors such as history of victimization, physiology (pregnancy, childbirth, etc.) and mental health (mood disorders, self-harm, etc.), should be considered.

2. Treatment

Treatment of female offenders must focus on female-specific needs to achieve reduction in female recidivism. As their issues tend to be multi-faceted and complex, a holistic approach that takes into account psychology, physical and mental health, social and economic backgrounds, interpersonal relationships, well-being, etc., is necessary. For the best effect, established methodologies such as cognitive-behavioural therapy should be adopted, along with other approaches that are responsive to female needs, such as trauma care. Treatment considerations can begin at sentencing, with more community-based options such as probation and parole being made available for low-risk female offenders.

3. Wider Context — Environment

Efforts must also be made in a wider context to facilitate the assessment and treatment of female offenders. Increasing resources for capacity-building is a top priority. In terms of infrastructure, more facilities near to communities are needed to house the increasing number of female offenders. More staffing, especially female officers and specialists, is needed to carry out the rehabilitation work. Training has to be enhanced to include knowledge of female offender characteristics and skills to work with them, such as motivational interviewing techniques. Specialists should receive training in the use of gender-specific assessment tools and gender-sensitive treatment methodologies.

Another priority is expanding the knowledge base of female offender treatment, in particular the development of research capabilities. Gains can be enhanced through sharing of information, research findings and good practices, internally between stakeholders and externally between countries.

Female offender rehabilitation will benefit from strengthened partnerships and cooperation between agencies, both local and international, as well as the various stakeholders. Community support can be garnered through raising awareness of the female offender situation among the public and engaging them through activities such as crime prevention events.

IV. REFERENCES

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