

LITERATURE REVIEW

BEST PRACTICE WITH WOMEN OFFENDERS

Chris Trotter & Catherine Flynn

Professor Chris Trotter and Dr Cathi Flynn
Monash University Criminal Justice Research Consortium
Monash University, Caulfield
christopher.trotter@monash.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines literature on best practice with women offenders. It attempts to use the principle of systematic review although the general scarcity of material on the topic makes this difficult and we have had to source many studies with less than rigorous methodology. The review focuses on general principles of effective practice with women including, Aboriginal programs, transition and reintegration programs, offending behaviour programs, personal development programs, programs and services for young women, women with a disability and programs and services for women from culturally diverse backgrounds. In some cases, however, we were unable able to locate relevant studies which addressed good practice with these groups.

Excluded from the study are drug and alcohol programs (AOD), sex offender programs, mental health services, education, employment and industries, mother and child programs and programs for women under 17 years of age. However often the literature addresses these issues along with other issues and in some cases these studies are included because they inform practice in the areas under consideration in the review.

It seems clear that women have specific needs which are often different to those of men. In particular the research refers to relationship and family issues including parenting, mental health, housing and drug use. There is also some evidence that addressing the specific needs of women may help to reduce their recidivism and improve their well-being.

The research is clear that, surveillance-oriented, punitive and blaming interventions, whether in prison or in the community, are ineffective and have the potential to increase recidivism. On the other hand the evidence also seems clear that rehabilitation interventions are generally effective and on average reduce recidivism by around 20%. The reductions are greater in community based than prison based interventions.

One of the important factors in the effectiveness of interventions with women (and with men) relates to the way the interventions are delivered. The evidence suggests that worker skills make a difference to recidivism of around 30% in community based settings and that they also make a significant difference in institutional settings. Interventions are likely to be more effective if those delivering them are supported in the development of their practice skills through training, supervision, coaching, program manuals and other methods. Worker skills, such as problem solving skills and a strengths focus appear to be at least as important if not more important than the nature of the intervention and are a vital part of effective interventions with women (and men).

Similarly program integrity, in other words the extent to which interventions or programs are delivered as intended. This can also relate to ineffectiveness. Similar support mechanisms can help to ensure that specific structured programs are delivered as intended.

It cannot be assumed that an intervention which has worked elsewhere or one that has worked with men will work in a new setting. Ongoing audits and evaluations of interventions may also help to maintain program integrity and to determine whether interventions are successful in different settings.

Risk assessment, including actuarial instruments such as the Level of Supervision Inventory (Andrews and Bonta 2010), are widely used in criminal justice agencies both in prison and in the community. There is some evidence that these instruments, which have been developed with mixed or male samples, may work better if they are adapted to include or emphasise gender sensitive items such as family and children. This is important if the instruments are used to inform case planning or to refer to other services.

Services to women should be holistic. In other words they should address the multiple issues which most female offenders face. This means that assessments and interventions should not be single issue focused. In other words effective treatment of any one issue is likely to involve treatment of other issues. A women with a housing problem for example may not progress unless issues relating to drug use,

an abusive partner and relationships with her children are also addressed. Services which work collaboratively with offenders to identify issues seem to work best.

Prison based services should be linked to community based services particularly at the time of transition and there is some evidence that strong transition support services are helpful. .

Family focused interventions may be particularly helpful for women - in particular services which focus on quality relationships with non-criminal family members and with children.

Mentoring programs can be beneficial so long as they are delivered correctly and women receive sufficient contact with mentors.

Housing interventions particularly those which can actually supply or facilitate housing for women when they are released are beneficial.

There is some support for mindfulness programs in prison.

It is acknowledged that many women in prison and on corrections orders have experienced trauma. Interventions which focus on trauma have some support in the research.

Finances and debt seem to be a serious problem for many women and while there is no research examining interventions to address this issue it seems likely that interventions in this area would be helpful.

The research on women offenders and disability is limited and we were not able to locate specific interventions to address issues for this group.

Similarly we were no able to locate specific material on best practice with Indigenous women although there are some projects which seem to be helpful.

Worrall and Gelsthorpe (2009) examined 30 years of issues of the *Probation Journal* and found only 30 articles of around 600 which were focused on women. They argue on the basis of the articles that we have learn certain lessons about supervision of women in the community. Services should be for women only, integrated with non-offenders, empower women to address their own problems, meet the learning styles of women, holistic, address offence related problems, link women with mainstream agencies, provide ongoing assistance where required, provide mentors for personal support and provide practical help. Programs should address women's needs including transportation, protection from abuse child care and relationships.

The research as a whole tends to support these views as they apply to women in prison or in the community. However, as the authors point out the research is limited and of variable quality. Nevertheless the overwhelming message from the research about best practice for the delivery of services for women (and no doubt for men) is that rehabilitation interventions work. They work particularly well if they are delivered by skilled practitioners, as they were intended and focused on the individual needs of the offenders.

1. INTRODUCTION

This literature review has been undertaken at the request of Corrections Victoria to assist in the ongoing development of evidence based interventions for female offenders in Victoria. The review is divided into seven sections. Section 2 outlines the methodology of the review including the systematic method, the aims of review, the inclusions and exclusions and sources of the search. Section 3 outlines the background to the review including the research on women's needs and how they differ from those of men. Section 4 considers the general principles of good practice with offenders in both institutional and community based settings. This is drawn from the growing body of research which has predominantly focused on men or mixed samples. Section 5 considers the smaller body of studies which have been undertaken with female samples and the extent to which the general principles of good practice apply to women. It identifies general evidence based practice principles as they apply to female offenders. Section 6 identifies research on specific programs and interventions which have been undertaken with women in both institutional and community based settings. Section 7 summarises the research and provides a set of general recommendations for the development of evidence based interventions for women offenders in both institutional and community based settings.

2. METHODOLOGY

Systematic Review

The review follows the general guidelines of systematic literature reviews. It has been argued that systematic literature reviews provide a more rigorous approach to synthesizing the literature on a particular topic compared to the more open style of conventional reviews (Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011). According to Jesson et al (2011) systematic reviews are clear about their aims, what databases have been searched, and what studies have been included and excluded and why. In addition, systematic reviews have a specific focus and report on the quality of studies that have been examined.

This review is more akin to a systematic review than to a conventional literature review (Jesson et al., 2011), although the lack of rigorous peer reviewed research has meant that we have we have had to rely to a large extent on studies without control groups and with small samples.

Research questions for the review include:

- 1) What are the Best Practice Principles for programs and services to Women Prisoners and Offenders?
- 2) What programs and services have been demonstrated to be effective in reducing reoffending in Women Prisoners and Offenders?
- 3) What programs and services demonstrate significant social and life benefits for Women Prisoners and Offenders?
- 4) What programs and services have been shown to positively impact Women's transition from custody to community?

Method

As far as possible we aimed to include in the review studies with (1) recidivism or re-offending measures (2) comparison or control groups (3) test of statistical significance and (4) sound methodology. Our preference was for peer reviewed meta-analyses and systematic reviews, peer reviewed articles, book chapters and reports and departmental evaluations where the methodology included control or comparison groups

This has however generally proved difficult. Lipsey and Cullen (2007:299) in a comprehensive review of systematic reviews on the 'effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation' comment that:

'much of the available research comes from quasi-experiments with nonrandomized control groups, modest sample sizes, and varying completion and attrition rates' (p299).

This comment applies to research predominantly undertaken with male samples. Rigorous research with control groups and recidivism measures is even more sparse when the search is limited to interventions for women. This is commented on in the literature consistently (e.g. Tripodi et al 2011). There are challenges to both providing comprehensive programs to women and evaluating these to build a solid research base about effective practice when women remain a consistently small group in the overall prison population who offend less often and less seriously (Bartels & Gaffney, 2011; Stewart & Gobeil, 2015).

The lack of rigorous research on women is exemplified by our manual search of the two primary journals which focus on women in corrections, '*Feminist Criminology*' and '*Women and Criminal Justice*', in which we found virtually no studies that met the criteria referred to above.

Our search was therefore widened to include studies and evaluations which have often focused on interim measures such as program completion, worker or offender satisfaction or studies with mixed samples of men and women and evaluations with sometimes less than rigorous methodologies. Despite these limitations some clear principles and examples of effective practice have emerged from the review.

As far as possible we have included in relation to each study or review the details of the intervention/program, including components such as timing, risk levels, whether it is prison or community based where the study was done, sample size, outcome measures, population description and levels of statistical significance

Inclusions

At the request of Corrections Victoria the following specific programs are included in the review: Aboriginal Programs, transition and reintegration programs, offending behaviour programs, personal development programs, programs and services for young women, women with a disability and programs and services for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

Exclusions

At the request of Corrections Victoria the following were not included in the review: drug and alcohol programs, sex offender programs, mental health services, education, employment and industries, mother and child programs and programs for women under 17 years of age. Often the literature addresses these issues along with other issues and in some cases references to these issues are included because they inform practice in the areas under consideration in the review.

Data sources

Searches were conducted in criminal justice abstracts and pro-quest criminal justice, psychinfo, CINCH and social services abstracts. We used terms including women, effectiveness, recidivism, community, programs, transition, integration, personal development, disability, CALD, community service? The search also used other methods recommended by Jesson et al. (2011), including scanning reference lists of articles consulted, consulting with colleagues with expertise in the this topic, and manual searching of relevant journals for example *Feminist Criminology*, *Women and Criminal Justice*, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *the Probation Journal* and *The Prison Journal*. We also undertook google searches using similar terms. Our aim was to reach a point of saturation, in other words, as we did further searches the same studies and findings began to appear. Once a point of saturation is reached it is unlikely that further searches will show up additional relevant material. We reached this point of saturation in our search.

Limitations

Literature reviews, systematic or not, have limitations. Reviewers may favour studies with positive results, although Lipsey and Cullen (2007) present a strong argument in their systematic review that this is not the case at least in the reviews and studies which they examined. It maybe also that limiting the data collection to specific research questions excludes some material which might have been useful. There is also a limitation regarding the volume of literature, particularly internet based reports

which make it virtually impossible for two researchers to access all the material. Reference was made earlier to the concept of saturation which helps to minimise the likelihood that important material has not been covered.

3. BACKGROUND

Women are the fastest growing group in the prison system. They are growing at a consistently faster rate than men, across international jurisdictions; with such trends evident and well discussed in Australia (ABS, 2014), the UK (Corston, 2007) and the US (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008) since the 1980s. National Australian data (ABS 2014) show that the number of women in prison has increased by 55% over the last decade.

Belknap (2015) argues that scholarship on women offenders has grown in similar proportions. This scholarship tends to fall into one of two streams: that focused on criminogenic need and evidence-based (largely gender-neutral) risk assessment or that focused on gendered pathways to crime. Stathopoulos et al (2012:6) argue that

“statistical analysis and empirical research on female offending since the 1980s demonstrates that the trajectories by which women end up within the criminal justice system are not the same as men’s offending trajectories”

Lart, et al (2008) refer to some concrete examples of such differences, including later age of onset of offending for women, less frequent offending and earlier desistance. It seems clear that while women and men share some risk factors/criminogenic needs, a range of other distinct factors have been identified – initially by feminist criminologists – which point to women’s differing pathways into crime. These factors are consistently described as high levels of victimisation and subsequent trauma; higher levels of mental illness; and higher levels of substance use. These factors are seen to be interacting and interconnected. Taylor (2015) refers to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics finding that 40% to 57% of female inmates were sexually or physically abused prior to the age of 18 compared to only 7% to 16% of male offenders. Rates of mental illness are also higher among female offenders. Whereas 55% of male inmates have a self-reported mental illness, 73% of female inmates report having a mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006). High rates of substance abuse are also an important factor in gendered pathways to crime. Although rates of

alcohol use are higher for males, female prisoners are more likely to have ever used drugs, have used drugs regularly, and have used drugs at the time of the offense (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999).

This information is relevant because in seeking to respond to prisoner need and contribute to effective rehabilitation and recovery, while there is some overlap in treatment targets between men and women (Stewart & Gobeil, 2015) there is also a need to respond to their additional needs. There remains considerable debate about if addressing these needs reduces reoffending; Monster and Micucci (2005:169) state that “Researchers argue that programs targeting noncriminogenic needs have a negligible impact on recidivism”. On the other hand Hannah-Moffat (2009) argues that omission of these risks results in lack of attention to essential programming for women. Such authors have argued for the need to incorporate gender-responsive approaches which emphasise relationships, are strengths-based, provide continuity of care, address trauma and are holistic and culturally competent (e.g. Stewart & Gobeil, 2015). The importance of addressing the impact of trauma for women in prison is discussed regularly in the literature, because of its links to current and ongoing problems, including AOD, mental health and unhealthy relationships (Stathopoulos et al 2012).

Focusing on the imprisonment period, Monster and Micucci (2005) gathered data from women in one rural Canadian prison (N=11), along with service providers (N=8) and prison staff (N=5), with a view to mapping women’s needs. Inmate participants in outlining their priorities, tended to nominate what the authors described as non-criminogenic needs, but which might be more appropriately described as gender-responsive needs, e.g. relationships, but also including AOD. Although this study is small and non-representative it provides supporting evidence on women’s views about the need to address gender-responsive needs.

By way of contrast, Bergseth et al (2011) sought the views of community-based service providers (N=24) in two US counties, on the most pressing needs of women re-entering the community and the extent to which these needs are met. Similar to Monster and Micucci (2005) employment, housing, family and mental health were the four issues most commonly noted. Of these housing was seen as both the most urgent need and the one most poorly met, while mental health was seen to be the

second most urgent, and also poorly addressed. Interestingly AOD was seen to be reasonably well addressed (perhaps reflecting how, as an accepted gender-neutral criminogenic need, reasonable services are observed to be in place).

Women also appear to be more likely to identify their needs and to be interested in receiving support for those needs. Spjeldnes et al (2014) examined the needs of 2,386 men (81.5%) and 542 women (18.5%) in US jails. They found that women showed much greater health and re-entry needs in nearly every area, including housing, employment, welfare dependence, medical problems and mental health issues. They also found that women were more positive and open about expressing their needs than men. A higher percentage of women communicated their interest in receiving various in-jail services including mental health, drug and alcohol, parenting, and family counselling.

Scott et al (2014) argue in a literature review that many of these factors are also associated with poor recidivism outcomes among women offenders including lack of access to housing and employment, lack of linkage with community-based treatment and pressures to return to former relationships and neighbourhoods or social networks that have precipitated relapse to drug use or crime. They also refer to lack of pre-release planning that provides referrals to needed services in the community. Freudenberg (2006) found gender differences in self-reported needs upon release in a study of 704 female jail inmates and 536 male jail inmates. Female inmates listed housing, finances, and substance abuse as their most pressing concerns. Male inmates also named accessing housing as one of their top three priorities, but the second and third most commonly cited problems were employment and educational/vocational training. Given the more frequent occurrence of substance abuse and unemployment in the female jail population, it is not surprising that finances and substance abuse issues were two of their top post-release priorities. Women were twice as likely as men to report family problems as a post-release issue.

Similar findings were seen in a study of 90 women exiting prison in Victoria where the women faced issues relating to parenting, housing, income and debt, health and

mental health. Housing post release was the most significant factor associated with return to prison (Sheehan et al 2014).

4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE WITH OFFENDERS IN BOTH INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY BASED SETTINGS

Much has been written about what works and what doesn't in relation to reducing recidivism of offenders who are placed in prison or on community based corrections orders. There have been numerous comprehensive systematic reviews and meta-analysis (e.g. Lipsey & Cullen 2007; Washington State 2007) which have attempted to synthesise the available studies and present general principles of good practice in work with offenders. Most of this work has been undertaken with male samples or with mixed samples including males and females. As mentioned earlier less work has been done on what works with female offenders. Given the lack of research which has been undertaken with female offenders this general research provides a starting point in considering the principles of good practice with women. This section therefore outlines the research about what doesn't and what does work in the delivery of corrections interventions and then considers the extent to which the principles and practices apply specifically to women. Note that the general term 'intervention' is used in this report to describe programs, supervision, therapies and other practices designed to help offenders to change and reduce recidivism.

What doesn't work?

Perhaps what is most clear is what does not work. The evidence seems to be overwhelming that punitive approaches to offenders, regardless of their gender or other characteristics, do not work in achieving positive outcomes. Lipsey and Cullen (2007) undertook an extensive review of systematic reviews and meta-analysis on the effectiveness of corrections interventions. In other words they attempted to review all the work done up until this time on what works and what doesn't in reducing recidivism of offenders. They argue on the basis of the review that surveillance and sanctions in the absence of rehabilitation does not work. They refer to studies on intensive supervision programs on probation and parole which focus largely on increased contact and increased surveillance, generally for high risk

offenders. Overall they tend to have no impact on recidivism or in some cases they see increased levels of offending. In the same category is prison when compared to community based dispositions. Many studies referred to in the review suggest that prison has a negative impact in terms of recidivism. Once offenders are released they commit more offences than similar offenders who have not been imprisoned.

Tough love programs of various types also do badly. For example Scared Straight programs place usually young offenders in prison for a short period of time so they can be exposed to and deterred from prison life. Lipsey and Cullen (2007) found in their review up to 26% increase in recidivism resulting from those programs.

Similar findings for to the Lipsey and Cullen (2007) review were found in an extensive review undertaken by Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2007) with programs focused on sanctions doing badly. This included surveillance oriented parole, boot camps, electronic monitoring, and community case management without a treatment focus.

There continue to be examples of large scale programs and interventions delivered to offenders around the world which are relatively ineffectual. Lipsey and Cullen (2007) found in their review for example that probation and parole supervision overall had only minimal impacts – with 2-8% reductions compared to no supervision in the four meta-analysis they examined. A good example of how expensive and well intentioned criminal justice interventions can be ineffectual is seen in a study by Dawson and Stanko (2013) who undertook a rigorous examination of the effectiveness in reducing recidivism of a two-year £12million integrated offender management scheme overseen by the London Criminal Justice Board. It involved teams of police, probation, and local authority officers helping to resettle offenders back into the community. It found no impact on offending at 2 year follow up compared to a matched control group. The reasons for the apparent failure of this program are unclear. It seems that the evaluation was rigorous but the authors argue that it may be an issue of program integrity. It may have been that the program was not delivered as it had intended to be. The issue of program integrity is discussed later in this review.

What Does Work?

The reviews of the literature suggest that interventions and programs which are generally defined as rehabilitation or treatment are successful in reducing recidivism. Lipsey and Cullen (2007:302) define rehabilitation/treatment as aimed at 'motivating guiding supporting offenders in issues which promote criminal behaviour or subvert pro-social behaviour'. All meta-analyses they considered in their review identified positive outcomes for rehabilitation/treatment interventions with none showing less than 10% reduction in recidivism and the average around 20% reduction with the most effective interventions showing reductions up to 40%. The impacts were strongest for community based interventions. The authors are not specific about gender however the studies appear to be predominantly mixed samples.

The review found the only treatment studies that had negative outcomes were two studies on psychodynamic and behavioural interventions but even then the results were mixed. They argue out that the effective interventions don't necessarily work for everyone but overall they work for most offenders. The authors report reductions in offending of 12% to 46% for sex offender interventions, 8%-32% for cognitive behavioural, 4%-20% for drug and alcohol treatment. The strongest interventions in the review applied to family interventions where 10 meta-analyses found impacts of 20% to 52% on recidivism, however, these have been pretty much exclusively undertaken with juveniles. They also found support for relapse prevention programs, educational, vocational and work programs.

Similar findings were seen in the Washington State (2007) review. This is an extensive review conducted for a corrections department, which like the Lipsey and Cullen (2007) review, attempted to cover all of the available studies on the relationship between correctional interventions and recidivism. The authors found support for general and specific cognitive behavioural programs in prison including programs for sex offenders, education in prison, vocational education in prison, correctional industries in prison and work release programs from prison. They also found support for intensive supervision in the community where it had a treatment (as opposed to surveillance) focus.

Core skills in Program Delivery

In general terms therefore, rehabilitation/treatment programs and interventions have been shown to be effective both in prison and after prison, at least with mixed or

male samples. However, in addition to the nature and content of these programs their effectiveness is dependent on the way in which they are delivered and the skills of the staff who deliver the programs. There is a growing body of research which shows that quite apart from the nature of correctional interventions the effectiveness of the intervention is at least in part dependent on the skills of those delivering the intervention. This is perhaps best illustrated by research which finds that community based supervision is generally only minimally effective. As mentioned earlier Cullen and Lipsey (2007) found only 2% to 8% reduction in recidivism compared to no supervision in four meta-analyses. Yet two reviews of studies, a meta-analysis and a systematic review (Chadwick et al 2015; Trotter 2013) found that when supervising workers were trained in or could demonstrate that they used effective practice skills those offenders had recidivism rates which were on average 28% and 33% lower than the comparison groups.

The core practice skills identified in the systematic review by Trotter (2013) included: pro-social modelling and reinforcement (or anti-criminal modelling and reinforcement). This skill involves practitioners modelling pro-social values such as fairness, reliability, and non-criminal lifestyle and reinforcing statements and activities of offenders that reflect those values. It also involves carefully and respectfully challenging pro-criminal comments and actions (e.g., making excuses for offending). Taxman (2007:19) summarizes the concept in terms of “using incentives and sanctions to shape offender behaviours” (p19). Many of the studies in the review found that differential reinforcement of probationers’ pro-social and anti-criminal expressions and the expression of pro-social sentiments was related to low recidivism.

The second practice skill involves addressing the issues which might help offenders to desist from future offending. This involves the use of problem-solving (Bonta et al 2011; Trotter 2013) to identify offense-related problems (e.g. family issues, accommodation, and drugs), setting goals to address the problems and then developing strategies to address the goals. There is some variation in the way problem solving is defined in the various studies particularly in terms of the extent to which the problems and the goals should be determined by the offenders, the worker or by the two in collaboration. Some studies (e.g. Trotter 2013; Robinson et al. (2011) emphasize working with offender definitions of problems. Bonta et al. (2011), on the

other hand, emphasize working with criminogenic needs that are identified through a risk assessment undertaken by the worker. Nevertheless the concept of problem solving is consistently supported as a method of reducing offending.

Many of the studies considering core skills include the use of cognitive techniques. Perhaps the best example of a cognitive technique is the ABC technique referred to by Lowenkamp, Alexander, and Robinson et al (forthcoming) which involves teaching offenders about Antecedents that lead to Behaviours that lead to Consequences. As already mentioned, there is some overlap in the various publications between the definitions of cognitive skills and problem solving and pro-social modelling and reinforcement skills. Bonta et al. (2011), for example, refer to a cognitive technique known as cognitive restructuring as including reinforcement and problem solving. Similarly, pro-social modelling in Trotter (2012) includes helping clients to reframe their pro-criminal comments into pro-social ones and reinforcing client comments that reflect an understanding of the relationship between thoughts and behaviours.

The client/ worker relationship is also identified as an important factor in work with offenders. A number of studies which have examined audio-tapes of interviews between probationers and supervisors identified relationship skills as being related to low recidivism. These are summarised in a systematic review by Trotter (2013). Raynor (forthcoming) in a UK study in probation found verbal and non-verbal communication to be related to low recidivism at one year and two years. Trotter (2012) found a non-blaming attitude by the probation officer to be significantly related to low recidivism. Smith et al. (2012) found that offenders who perceived a trusting relationship with their supervisor were significantly less likely to be arrested for a new crime.

While not specifically a core skill, assessment and targeting of risk is a relevant issue, with much of the literature suggesting that for both men and women it is appropriate to preserve intensive interventions for medium to high risk offenders. Medium- and high-risk offenders generally benefit more from intensive correctional interventions and low-risk offenders benefit less from intensive interventions (e.g., Andrews & Dowden, 2006). There are many studies supporting this principles summarised in Andrews and Bonta (2010).

On the other hand some studies have questioned the risk principle. Robinson et al. (2011) found among a group trained in effective practices that the greater impact on offending was with moderate-risk offenders, with less impact on high-risk offenders. Trotter (1996, 2012) found in two studies that low-medium and high-risk offenders all had lower re-offending when their workers had good skills. Pearson et al (2010) found that medium-to-low- and medium-to-high-risk clients benefited from skilled intervention but that high-risk offenders did not.

Support for the 'risk principle' with women is offered in a study by Lovins et al (2007) who examined intensive residential services for women. When compared to minimal services offered on parole and probation they found that high risk women in the intensive services group had up to half the number of re-arrests, compared to high risk women in the less intensive group. On the other hand low risk women had up 3 times the re-arrest rate compared to low risk women receiving the non-intensive service. The study involved a two year follow up with more than 1300 women. More detail on risk assessment for women is included later in this paper.

Other Factors

A number of other factors were referred to in the various studies but have not been examined often enough to reach any firm conclusions about them. Taxman (2007) found that community support and referral were related to lower recidivism. Pearson et al. (2011) found that contact with other agencies was related to reduced recidivism. Pearson et al. (2010) and Raynor et al. (forthcoming) also found that motivational interviewing training was related to reduced recidivism.

Role clarification has also been included in some of the studies (Bonta, et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Trotter, 1996, 2012) as part of the repertoire of effective practice skills. Bonta also refers to discussions about conditions of probation as being related to higher recidivism (Bonta et al., 2011). There is, however, insufficient data on the direct relationship to recidivism to reach any firm conclusions about these practices.

While these practice skills focus on probation a meta-analysis on 'the importance of staff practice on delivering effective correctional treatment' by Dowden and Andrews (2004) found similar outcomes for correctional interventions in general. They found the strongest impacts from structured learning (define a skill, model a skill, role play

a skill, give feedback), effective modelling, problem solving, relationship (warm, genuine empathic flexible), and effective reinforcement. They also found relationships with recidivism, albeit somewhat weaker, for effective disapproval and use of authority (e.g. focus on behaviour not person, encouraging).

Program Integrity

In addition to the importance of core skills of workers program integrity is also vital in the delivery of effective correctional interventions. The effectiveness of interventions is not only dependent of the skills of the staff delivering them but also on the extent to which they are delivered as they were intended.

Interventions or programs which have worked well under research conditions may not be replicated as they were intended. Lipsey and Cullen (2007) for example argue in their review that even where those delivering the program or the intervention are well qualified and have good skills programs may not be delivered in the way in which they were intended to be delivered. For example Salisbury (2015) reported on a prison based gender responsive CBT program in Minnesota delivered from four different sites. The researchers identified two sites with integrity and two without. In other words two programs which were delivered as intended and two which were not delivered as intended. The re-arrest rates of the more than 2000 prisoners involved in the study were 35% compared to 48% dependent on whether the sites were classified as having integrity compared to not having integrity.

Lipsey and Cullen (2007) and others have argued for organisational structures which can promote both skills and program integrity including, staff training, supervision and management, coaching, staff selection and the use of treatment manuals. The available evidence continues to suggest that even though there is increasing knowledge about what works and what doesn't correctional interventions of all descriptions tend to have minimal impact on re-offending rates (Lipsey and Cullen 2007, Washington State 2006). It is argued that this relates in part to the poor implementation and delivery of interventions that have proved to be effective under research conditions.

The issue of program integrity is common throughout correctional settings including Australia in relation to both women and men. Bartels and Gaffney (2011) note that one of the challenges of program development and delivery is women's small numbers in the overall prison system. The Victorian Ombudsman's report (2015) suggests that in a number of areas, due to funding constraints programs may not run frequently or consistently. A number of programs are described as 'good practice' in Victoria. Two of these - the Women's Integrated Support Program (WISP) and the Women 4 Work program, which were both awarded Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards in 2008 – are no longer provided in the format described by Bartels and Gaffney (2011). WISP has seen a number of changes of community provider in recent years with considerable instability in service delivery reported anecdotally, while Women 4 Work is no longer offered (Data in relation to both of these programs was reported by women in the *Women Exiting Prison* study, Sheehan, Flynn, Trotter and Naylor, 2013, an unpublished study commissioned by Corrections Victoria).

5. CORE PRACTICE SKILLS WITH WOMEN

As already mentioned the practice skills referred to in these studies have been undertaken with predominantly mixed samples and have not distinguished the impact of the various skills with men and women (or with other groups for example aboriginal offenders). The only studies we have been able to locate which looks specifically at core practice skills with women were conducted in Victoria. A study by Trotter, McIvor and Sheehan (2012) focused on services offered to a 139 women in prison in Victoria and following their release to the community. It examined the relationship between the women's views about the services, recidivism and characteristics of services. The results are generally consistent with earlier research with mixed and male samples. They favour services which are delivered by workers who are reliable, holistic, and collaborative, understand the women's perspective and focus on strengths. They do not support services which challenge the women, focus on their offences or things they do badly.

In terms of prison based services significant relationships were found between recidivism and relationship factors (my worker has a sense of humour and my worker is a friend) and practical assistance (my worker did practical things for me). In

relation to services following prison those women who did not re-offend reported more often and at statistically significant levels they received services which were: clear about purpose; understanding of their problems; available for maximum use; and holistic. Again there was no support for commenting on the things the women do badly, challenging them or focusing on discussions about offences.

A study of 90 women exiting prison in Victoria (Sheehan et al 2014) also found that women perceived prison programs as helpful if they liked the attitude of the worker, if they were given practical assistance, help with child related issues and with life skills such as dealing with substance use. The key characteristics of helpful community based supports were a non-judgemental relationship with the service provider and the availability of the support.

Dowden and Andrews (1999) conducted a meta-analysis which examined the question – ‘do similar interventions work for women and men’. While the focus is not specifically on skills it is on general effectiveness of correctional interventions part of which relates to the skills of the workers in addition to the nature of the interventions. They found that their Risk/Needs/Responsivity model works better for women than for men. The model involves focusing on medium to high risk offenders, providing services which help offenders deal with criminogenic needs, in other words needs such as family, work, drug use, peers, or other factors which relate to offending, and taking into account offender responsivity so that services are delivered in a way which matches the learning style of offenders. The authors argue that cognitive behavioural approaches work best in this regard.

To sum up it seems clear that regardless of the intervention which is delivered the skills of the workers delivering the intervention are related to its effectiveness. This applies to correctional interventions in general and is particularly evident for the research relating to community based supervision. The differences in the impact of different practice skills with men and women is not clear. Women seem to respond to workers with good relationship skills, who are collaborative, who help them with their problems. The Victorian study identified the importance of holistic approach but again this has also been identified as important in services offered to men. A meta-analysis by Andrews and Bonta (2010) for example found that recidivism rates were lower the more criminogenic needs were addressed in an intervention.

It is clear therefore that whatever interventions are offered the skills of the practitioners who deliver the interventions, along with program integrity, are essential components of their effectiveness. This applies to interventions for both men and women in custody and in the community. This has implications for staff selection and staff development including for training, ongoing clinical supervision, for the use of program manuals and for the rewards offered by corrections organisations.

6. RESEARCH ON SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS WITH WOMEN

In prison programs

A clear understanding of the impact of various prison-based correctional interventions for women offenders is currently limited. We located two rapid-evidence assessments (REA) (Stewart & Gobeil, 2015; Lart, et al 2008) and a meta-analysis (Tripodi et al., 2011) each of which reviewed research on this issue.

Both REAs were commissioned by the UK government to address gaps in the knowledge base about working with women offenders. REAs are generally carried out in a short timeframe typically with a narrow range of data bases. This is not a major limitation with this topic because there is little research published in peer reviewed journals

Lart et al. (2008) identified three meta-analyses and 16 primary studies in their review of research published between 1991 – 2006; with 13 of these were focused on prison-based/transitional or after-care programs (although some material is of questionable value, e.g. Lynch (2000) is largely descriptive of the program, with limited systematic outcome data, while other programs provided little detail in the way of what the program actually provided). The studies were largely conducted in the US, were of small sample size, with non-randomised treatment allocation evident.

On the basis of these data, the authors make cautious claims, indicating that the findings are suggestive rather than prescriptive. They argue that targeting gender-neutral factors such as anti-social behaviour and anti-social peers is useful in reducing women's offending as is education, with cognitive skills programs for AOD argued to be more promising than a therapeutic community approach. In examining

transition-focused programs, they conclude that there is limited some initial evidence that providing support during the transition period, with continuity of services can reduce reconviction rates. The authors indicate that on the basis of the evidence reviewed, any longer term impact of programs (i.e. 2 years and beyond) cannot be commented upon. The authors highlight that understanding, responding to, and then evaluating these responses, to victimisation is a key gap in knowledge.

In work which specifically sought to build on that of Lart et al., (2008) Stewart and Gobeil (2015) sourced and examined research published during the period 2008 – 2014. They found a further 17 unique studies along with one meta-analysis (Tripodi et al. 2011) which will be discussed separately), and see this as some evidence of growing interest and a body of more thoroughly developed knowledge in this area. Unfortunately, a number of the same limitations were again described: a small number of studies were generated; the limited scope/location of these studies (mostly US); and a less rigorous (but perhaps more ethically defensive) approach to research being evident. What was more evident in this research, however, was the limited focus of the interventions being evaluated: of the 17 studies, 11 focused on AOD interventions. This narrowing means that in relation to building knowledge, it is not possible to say anything further about the promising findings re antisocial behaviour/peers noted by Lart et al (2008). Stewart and Gobeil (2105:126) explicitly state: "...no studies were found examining outcomes of programmes that explicitly targeted antisocial attitudes, antisocial associates (including gang affiliation) or impulsivity. These are all areas associated with women's recidivism.

Stewart and Gobeil (2015) concluded that most AOD-focused, in-custody interventions have a positive impact on participants – notably those using a holistic therapeutic community model, although this is in contrast to what was found by Lart et al. (2008). Of interest is the finding that participants in those programs which incorporated in-custody and follow up community-based components showed the lowest recidivism. This seems to provide some support to Lart et al.'s tentative suggestion that a focus on transition and continuity of services was effective; this also fits with a gender-responsive approach as noted above. The use of alternative case management models was thought to be of some value.

Given the ongoing questions about the role/value of gender-responsive interventions and the gap noted by Lart et al. (2008) with regard to knowledge about responding to victimisation, Stewart and Gobeil (2015) also sought to examine whether those programs deemed to be 'gender-responsive' had any different impacts. The authors made this assessment themselves based on available program information and the use of terms such as 'trauma informed', 'unique needs of women etc. When they compared those studies labelled as neutral with those seen to be responsive, outcome data showed that outcomes were either equivocal or the outcomes for the gender-responsive intervention were better; this provides some good initial evidence for this approach. Although there are clear limitations to this study, largely its restricted scope (geographical and program focus), findings do suggest some avenues for further exploration. Clearly there is an urgent need to evaluate specific interventions provided to women – with particular attention to the location, intervention strategy/ies and focus (beyond AOD) along with the gender-responsiveness.

The meta-analysis by Tripodi et al (2011) is a commonly cited and well-respected analysis of the existing research into the impact of correctional programs for women. These authors are very clear in stating the parameters of their study and the application of their findings. They confined their review to studies of programs in the US with the view to this providing "clear implications for rehabilitating women involved with US justice system" (Tripodi et al., 2011:8). Results should therefore be read with caution, particularly with regard to any application to a broader, including Australian, context. This analysis sought to build on an earlier review by other researchers which had focused on juvenile offenders. Using similar parameters to both REAs discussed above, these researchers located studies published in the 10 years between 1998 – 2008, which focused either on reducing recidivism by addressing criminogenic needs (N=6; all AOD programs) or which aimed to enhance women's functioning (e.g. improved mental health, self-esteem etc.) (N=20). Again, similar to the REAs noted, only studies which met the experimental/quasi-experimental or pre/post-test designs were included, however this review focused more specifically on peer reviewed publications; only prison-based programs were included. They sought to broaden the discussion about program effectiveness by looking at a range of outcomes beyond recidivism; these included: psychological

well-being, AOD use, parenting and HIV prevention (however, only recidivism and psychological well-being had sufficient studies to calculate effect sizes).

Overall, the findings indicated that those who participate in AOD programs show less offending compared to those who do not participate; similar to Stewart and Gobeil's (2015) findings, therapeutic communities were seen to be most effective. It is important to acknowledge that the strength of support for AOD programs does not should not be taken to mean that other programs are not valuable, they have simply been subject to less evaluation. Psychological well-being was seen to improve as a result of correctional interventions. These authors argue the importance for correctional programs to assist women to improve their overall well-being, with the general view that emotional and psychological stability may reduce risk of re-offending. The results for HIV prevention and parenting were less convincing (as well as being less studied). Despite these findings, the authors still conclude that what works for women offenders remains unclear, and that more rigorous research is needed.

Risk

As discussed earlier, much has been written about the importance of risk assessment and most criminal justice organisations routinely use risk assessment instruments. It is a key aspect of practice in this field. There has been much criticism of risk assessment processes, in particular that they occupy too much of the time and energy of practitioners, the actuarial risk assessment instruments are often completed inaccurately and they may not be relevant to women who have different needs. A number of authors have argued that the LSI-R and other risk assessment instruments have been developed with predominantly male samples and that the risk factors and criminogenic needs identified in the LSI-R may not apply to women who tend to have needs which are different to men. Some research has examined the relevance of various risk prediction instruments for women.

Research by Van Voorhis et al (2010) sought to move the debate in this area away from opposing paradigms (risk based on evidence/gender-neutral tools versus feminist critique of risk-need/gender-responsiveness). They investigated the impact of incorporating gender-responsive factors into an existing gender-neutral tool (Level

of Service Inventory – revised [LSI-R]), by testing this with a total of 1626 participants drawn from across prison and community settings in four US states. What they found was that although the LSI-R was predictive of women’s reoffending, the addition of gender-responsive factors (such as parenting stress etc.) created a more powerful prediction. These findings indicate “different treatment priorities [are needed for women] ... Specifically there is little in these findings to suggest that attitudes and associate should be the main treatment target for women offenders to the exclusion of other needs” (Van Voorhis et al 2010: 281). Focusing on the prison cohort, the targets include: mental health – notably depression and psychosis, abuse, anger and unhealthy relationships, while at pre-release, added to these factors are housing safety and parental stress. Van Voorhis (2011) argues subsequently that the four central issues for women are: employment/financial; substance abuse; parenting issues and anger.

Some support for the view that women is found in a study by Kreis, Schwannauer and Gillings, (2014). The authors undertook a systematic review of relational factors as predictors of offending which included 8 studies although they did assess these as having variable quality. The review evaluated the evidence for an association between interpersonal relationships, especially with family and intimate partners, and recidivism in women, Findings were inconsistent but suggested that relational factors may be relevant to reoffending in women in interaction with other factors. They argue that there is a need for more research in this area

On the other hand research by Yesberg et al (2015) suggests that one gender neutral tool works well for women – the Dynamic Risk Assessment for Offender Re-entry [DRAOR]). This study, based on an archival data set of all prisoners released in New Zealand between April 2010 and August 2012, sought to assess the effectiveness of the DRAOR with men and women. The findings show that the tool predicted women’s recidivism better than men’s. The authors point out, however, that this may be at least partially explained by methodological features, notably that recidivism was measured at one time point only - the first offence leading to conviction. For the majority of women (60%) this offence was a breach of the conditions of their parole and may not have involved offending.

The authors also examined the tool's three subscales (measuring stable, acute and protective factors) and how they contributed to recidivism prediction. Of interest is that the acute subscale was found to be highly predictive of women's offending. What is interesting is that this subscale is framed as measuring 'acute' or largely situational factors: mood, employment, interpersonal relationships. The authors themselves acknowledge that these items are noted in the literature as being significant for women, although they do not consider these factors as being gender-responsive, despite their similarity to those presented by Van Voorhis et al (2010).

Holistic Services and Transition Support

There is support for holistic interventions, in other words interventions which address a number of issues, whether this be through services from multiple agencies or generic services from a single provider. This is consistent with research on men and mixed samples where meta-analysis by Andrews and Bonta (2010) have found a direct correlation between the number of criminogenic needs addressed in interventions and the recidivism rates of offenders. Cobbina (2010) presents the results of a 2-year pilot study designed to test the efficacy of the Women's Integrated Treatment program, a drug abuse initiative for female inmates comprising self, relationship, sexuality, and spirituality modules. The program was compared to a standard prison therapeutic community treatment program. Taken together, results support the beneficial effects of including components oriented toward meeting women's needs (e.g., gender responsiveness, trauma-informed services, parenting training, self-esteem and assertiveness training, and sexuality and family planning) within corrections-based substance abuse treatment. These elements added value to the anticipated effects of the program, particularly with regard to increasing time in aftercare following parole, and reducing time to recidivism.

Women's centres UK provide holistic services to women in the community. They have had positive evaluations in terms of responses from women however rigorous evaluation has proved difficult due to wide type of services as the services often include non-offenders (Northern Ireland Office 2009).

Burgess, Malloch and McIvor (2011) examined Women in Focus, a Scottish project which provided support, engagement with other agencies, life skills, group work, employment guidance and practical assistance to women. Outcomes for 60 women were considered for women on community based orders and the authors argue that 'women in focus may have contributed to a reduction in breach rates in 3 of 4 local authorities' (p6). However they acknowledge shortcomings in the evaluation.

A study in Kentucky (McDonald & Arlinghaus 2014) provided intensive holistic services to women both in and after prison. They review the research on intensive case management and suggest that the results tend to be mixed; reflecting the findings referred to earlier in this paper that intensive case management with a rehabilitation focus shows more positive outcomes than case management with a surveillance focus. Their study of 108 women differentially offered intensive case management targeted at many of the women's needs found that those who had intensive case management both in and after prison did better in terms of re-convictions and wellbeing factors. They had high levels of breach of parole however, a common problem with intensive programs as the offenders may have difficulty meeting the requirements.

Locally, in Australia, Bartels and Gaffney (2011) engaged in a desk-top review of both Australian and international documents from 2005 onwards to describe and analyse good practice in women's prisons in Australia. The authors are clear that this was not a comprehensive audit and was reliant on annual reports and other publically available documents. They argue the importance of the link between life in incarceration and life in the community and that good practice includes holistic approaches which are gender sensitive, provide cottage style accommodation, skill development, meaningful activity, transition support and support for mental health needs, parenting and relationships with family.

The Victorian studies referred to earlier (Sheehan et al 2014; Trotter et al 2012) also pointed to the importance of holistic transition support. Women found the most helpful programs to be those that established connections with the women pre-release and continued to provide direct support post release. Both studies also found that the women valued parole support and Trotter et al (2012) also found that women

who were released on parole had more access to services before and after release and had lower recidivism than those released direct to the community.

Family Focused Interventions

The evidence in relation to the importance of families and family support among women offenders is somewhat inconsistent. Taylor (2015) summarises the evidence in this area. She reviews research which found that marital status did not significantly predict recidivism among a sample of women (unlike men) and that partners may be more criminogenic for females than for males. She refers to a study by De Li and MacKenzie (2003) which found that male probationers who resided with a spouse were less likely to engage in crime, but female probationers who resided with a spouse were more likely to commit crime. Similarly a study by Alarid et al (2000) of boot camp participants, found that women who were married or living with a boyfriend were more likely to be involved in crime, but there was no significant effect for male participants. In contrast, Cobbina et al (2012) found that quality intimate partner relationships significantly reduced the time to recidivism for female parolees but not for male parolees.

Taylor (2015) examined the relationship between family support and recidivism in a large sample of men and women released from prison across the USA. The sample included interviews with 1700 men and 350 women. It considered support from relatives and family members (as distinct from partners). The author considered emotional (feeling close and loved) and instrumental family support (e.g. assistance with housing finance) and found that higher levels of family emotional support significantly reduced self-reported recidivism for both genders but had a greater effect for females. Whereas higher levels of instrumental family support reduced recidivism for females, higher levels increased the likelihood of recidivism for males in some time periods. The authors speculate that men may be enabled in criminal activity by practical support. The authors acknowledge limitations of the study in terms of follow up of participants (although 80% responded to at least one interview in the two year follow up period) but argue that intervention which support family connections may be particularly important for women.

Stalans and Lurigio (2015) in a US study examined the impact of intimate relationships and parenting on women probationers' compliance. A sample of 257 women who had experienced domestic violence or child abuse was analysed. It was found that women with nonconforming partners and unstable residence missed more probation appointments and treatment appointments and had a higher chance of a new arrest for substance abuse or misdemeanour crimes during a 3-year follow-up period. Women parenting children had fewer missed probation appointments. Tests of significance and regression analysis were used. The study also found that missed probation appointments increased the risk of recidivism.

A study by Cobbina et al (2012) with 570 offenders, including 169 females paroled from prisons in the US found that family ties served as a protective factor against recidivism. The authors argue that this is consistent with prior studies indicating that females often have strong familial attachment and are typically reluctant to bring shame on their family therefore, they are more responsive to informal, familial social controls. This is consistent with Barrick et al (2014) who argue based on their study of women after prison that in-prison family contact and post-release family support are protective factors for women.

Dowden and Andrews (1999) in their meta-analysis regarding the effectiveness of programs for women argue that the strongest associations with recidivism focused on family and peers, family process and anti-social associates. They found that interventions focusing on school, work, vocational skills and substance abuse (treatment and information) actually had negative impacts. Family interventions were clearly the most effective and they also found the most studies in this area (over 30 different studies). They also found that non focused or vague forms of family intervention were less successful than those which directly targeted criminogenic needs. It should be noted however that the Dowden and Andrews (1999) somewhat dated paper does not distinguish adult from juvenile interventions and many of the family interventions appear to have been undertaken with juvenile.

To sum up, the literature suggests that family relationships are important factors in the recidivism of women and that good quality relationships with on-criminal partners

or family members are protective factors. It seems that interventions which promote quality family relationships are helpful.

Parent Education

There is also some support for parent education programs. A study by Gonzales (2010) for example evaluated the Parenting from Prison curriculum which was implemented across Colorado correctional institutions. Parenting from Prison is a skills-based program that aims to strengthen family relationships and promote positive behaviours by increasing parental knowledge about risks, resiliency and developmental assets. A pre-test/post-test design was utilized to assess short-term changes in communication with children, parental knowledge and parental attitudes among incarcerated parents (N = 150). Improvements in parenting knowledge and parenting attitudes among female and male incarcerated parents were found.

Mentoring

The nature and purpose of mentoring in criminal justice is described in different ways by different authors. Bouffard and Bergseth (2008), for example, suggest that while aftercare programs focus on surveillance and services with a goal of reducing recidivism, mentoring programs focus more on role-modelling, support and the general wellbeing of offenders.

Jolliffe and Farrington (2007:1) undertook 'a rapid evidence assessment of mentoring on re-offending'. They examined 18 studies which included both mentoring and control or comparison groups. The review found that the research on impact on re-offending was limited but that overall mentoring reduced re-offending by 4 to 11% (although they point out that the more rigorous studies found no significant impact). They found that while longer programs were not more successful, mentoring was more successful if the mentor and mentee met at least once per week and for considerable periods. The more successful programs involved four to eight hours per week contact between mentor and mentee. The programs were also more successful if they were one of a number of interventions such as behaviour

modification, employment or education programs, a finding consistent with other studies referred to earlier suggesting that holistic interventions work best (Andrews and Bonta, 2006). Jolliffe and Farrington (2007) conclude by saying that while mentoring shows some promise there is a need for more thorough research to determine its effectiveness.

A Victorian study (Trotter 2010) examined mentoring offered by four organisations - two of the organisations offering the mentoring were low-budget organisations relying largely on volunteers and two were larger non-government organisations. Two of the organisations offer services exclusively to female offenders, the third to young women and men and the fourth offers mentoring to men. In all 48 clients involved in the programs were interviewed - 29 women and 19 men. The offenders responses to the programs were very positive and the evaluators found that the programs were generally delivered in a manner consistent with the core practice skills referred to earlier in this paper - they offered intensive contact, to high risk offenders, focused on strengths, were clear about roles, addressed a wide range of needs and developed goals and strategies to address them.

On the other hand Brown and Ross (2010) reported less positive results in and evaluation of a mentoring program run by an NGO in Victoria. The authors conducted interviews with 25 pairs of mentees and mentors as well as five interviews with women who returned to prison, as well as with various NGO and institutional staff. The main conclusion was that there was insufficient consistency of contact with between the offenders and their mentors. They argue that there needs to be a level of stability for mentoring to work. The issue seems to have been one of program integrity rather than mentoring itself.

Housing

As discussed earlier in this paper, housing, particularly for women leaving prison, is a problem for many women offenders (e.g. Sheehan 2014). Ellison et al (2013) report on a UK study of 329 males and 70 females given housing assistance. The project was often able to provide accommodation to offenders on the day of release through a large network of landlords across London. The project offered direct,

same-day payments to landlords and carried out monthly property inspections. The NGO would then work with a range of other third sector providers to offer support services tailored to the needs of individual clients. The project saw an 11 per cent reduction in one-year re-offending rates (for those housed) and a 26 per cent reduction in one-year re-offending rates for women. A key limitation of this study is that the evaluation methodology does not have a comparison group. Instead, predicted proven re-offending rates were compared to actual proven re-offending rates. Nevertheless it is consistent with other research which suggests that the availability of housing is important in the rehabilitation of women.

Mindfulness

There is some support for mindfulness or interventions which include mindfulness as part of the interventions. For example Cheryl Grills et al (2015) reviewed mindfulness interventions with women and found research suggesting that that they can help women become less reactive to intense emotional states and have improved inmate hostility, self-esteem, and mood when applied in correctional settings. The authors describe a program based on Choice Theory CT in a US prison offered to 96 women which helped women make better choices in prison and significantly improved perceived stress, mindfulness, emotion regulation, impulsivity, and well-being on completion the intervention incarcerated women's well-being pre-release which they argue a strong predictor of recidivism post-release.

This corroborates the findings from earlier work by Samuelson et al (2007) on mindfulness based stress reduction. She study was based on self-report data from 1992-96 in 6 US prisons with 1350 participants (300 women) based on. While all showed improvements across all scales (hostility, self-esteem and mood) women typically showed the highest change – compared to men.

Addressing trauma

A growing body of research examines both trauma informed services (those based on an understanding of the impact of trauma on individual functioning) and trauma specific services (those designed to treat trauma) in prison systems. As discussed

above, there is a clear awareness that trauma is an almost universal feature of women entering prison (Roe-Sepowitz et al 2014). It is an important issue to consider, given both its links to issues/behaviours which are closely linked to offending behaviour and that the consequences of trauma make it more difficult for women to meaningfully engage with and benefit from programs and services. Studies examined here largely focus on measuring outcomes in terms of well-being, or symptom reduction, rather than recidivism.

King (2015) argues that her review of prison-based trauma-informed interventions builds on Tripodi et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis, which although it looked at programs which were measured by wellbeing, not just recidivism, did not have a focus on trauma informed interventions. This review is based on nine studies, with the same methodological inclusion/exclusion criteria as the systematic reviews presented earlier. All programs were US based manualised programs; all sought to reduce symptoms and improve coping, though there is some variation in the criteria for program participation (i.e. some required a diagnosis of PTSD, while others measured PTSD symptoms); severity of symptoms is not taken into account when examining impact. Overall King (2015) concludes that these programs result in decreased PTSD symptoms in participants, compared to those who had treatment as usual or were on a waiting list. Although the rigour of studies is less than gold standard, the author determines the initial evidence to be positive, although suggesting the need for more rigorous research with longer follow up periods.

Ford, et al (2013) sought to evaluate a specific program targeting affect regulation for women with victimisation-related PTSD. Seventy two women with full or partial PTSD in one US prison setting were allocated to either the treatment group or a comparison group (supportive group therapy [SGT]). Those in the treatment group, whilst they did not demonstrate any greater affect regulation than those engaged in SGT, did show increased forgiveness, which the authors deem affective resolution – and a sign of adaptive resilience. The authors postulate that the reduced impact of the treatment group may have been influenced by the attendance rate at the program (approximately 67%), and recommend further study. There is no capacity to comment on long term impact of this program.

Roe-Sepowitz et al (2014) conducted a larger study, involving 320 women in 34 treatment groups (Esuba program) run in five prisons in Florida. They used a pre/post-test methodology, measuring trauma symptoms. The general aim of the program was to reduce trauma symptoms by engaging women in a process of learning about trauma, narrating stories and listening to others; the final two weeks of the 12 week program are focused on planning for the future. Although there was no comparison group, the authors conclude that the findings (small reductions on all measurement sub-scales in the post-test phase) provide initial support for group psychoeducation to address traumatic stress symptoms. They suggest that key features of the program may be the 'listening' to others – normalising their experience, and learning about PTSD – addressing their lack of knowledge. Again, these outcomes were measured in the short term and any impact on post-release functioning is unknown.

Two qualitative studies, one with staff and one with inmates provides some additional data with regard to this topic. Belknap, Lynch and DeHart's (2015) recent qualitative research with jail staff provides some supplementary support to the need to consider prison-based trauma treatment. In that study the views of 37 correctional staff both (clinical and correctional) from nine jails across four US regions were sought with regard to women's mental health, trauma and community re-entry. The data were consistent with the broader literature in identifying trauma as a primary risk factor for offending, with a range of associated and complicating problems. Participants identified complex treatment needs, which were often not met in jails; they notably also identified poor post-release support as problematic.

Matheson et al (2015) gathered qualitative data from 31 women from two regions of Canada as part of a broader study on reintegration. Although trauma was not the focus of the original research the researchers report these as serendipitous findings, noting that this was an issue initiated by women; it is unclear from the account of the study, however, if this was an issue explored with all participants. The authors claim that the findings are clear that women want trauma treatment whilst in prison, incorporating a direct approach with screening and links to appropriate treatment at both entry and exit from the prison system.

This desire for overt trauma focused services is in contrast to the comments of Liebman et al (2014) who claimed that women did not want to attend a group labelled as 'trauma-based'; therefore in their program, they framed the focus of intervention more broadly, and in a strengths-based format, as an exploration of what they have survived and how that can make them stronger. Matheson et al. (2015) do not provide any data with regard to any questions asked about how women envisaged such treatment could be managed in a security oriented and coercive environment, and if such an environment could provide the necessary safety and stabilisation.

This growing research provides an interesting and valuable starting point. It appears that there is acceptance of the extent and role of trauma in the women's prison population, and its connection to offending. What remains to be seen more clearly is how this is best addressed in the prison setting. While some initial US research indicates the value of specific intervention with regard to reduction in symptoms and problematic behaviours, there is no Australian research and any longer term impact of programs is unknown. It is an area which needs attention, with program development and evaluation as key.

Finances and Debt

It would also seem important to acknowledge gaps in knowledge and practice. One area which is raised regularly in the literature as a specific concern to women with regard to reoffending is that of finances and debt; yet there appears little in the way of programmatic responses to this or understanding of effective practice. Specifically, Van Voorhis et al. (2010) describe poverty as a considerable risk/need for women, yet they also note that in the most recent version of the LSI, that finances are not included as a risk factor. This is despite Manchak et al (2009, cited in Yesberg, et al., 2015) finding that the financial scale in the LSI-R predicted recidivism for women. 'Finance, benefit and debt' was also identified more than 10 years ago by the UK National Offender Management Service as one of the seven key pathways to crime (along with other criminogenic needs), yet it appears that no specific action has sought to focus on this area since that time (Bath & Edgar, 2010).

Debt specifically was indicated as an issue of concern in unpublished research commissioned by the then Department of Justice (Sheehan et al., 2013). Both the

pre and post release data from this study indicate that debt (typically fines or money owed to Centrelink) is a significant challenge to women's resettlement in the community, yet women's understanding of and access to both prison-based and community services seems poor. It is a challenging task in a prison environment to identify and prioritise responding to a range of competing problems with which women present. Such a focus, however, would aim to ensure that women return to the community better equipped, and less likely to engage in offending due to financial pressures. UK research (Bath & Edgar, 2010) also supports these trends, highlighting that prison may have unintended worsening effects on prisoner debts (perhaps through accumulation or non-payment), which in turn increases their likelihood of reoffending. Housing debts were key, particularly for women. They argue that addressing financial exclusion can have a positive impact on reducing reoffending. Given the extent of debt identified by women pre-release, the apparent carrying of this debt into the community and women's self-reports of the difficulties of managing their finances after release, it would seem relevant to prioritise debt management as core area of intervention for imprisoned women, with evaluation of relevant interventions.

Women with disabilities:

No substantive research was located which examines effective practice with imprisoned women with disabilities. It is commented on in the literature that little research has investigated this issue, particularly with regard to intellectual disability (Lindsay et al 2004), cognitive or learning disabilities.

The Victorian Ombudsman's (2015) recently released report pays specific attention to prisoners with particular needs, including those with cognitive disability (this includes those with intellectual disability and acquired brain injury ABI). This report presents Corrections Victoria data (no source is provided) which indicates that individuals with a registered intellectual disability are over-represented in the prison system (3% of the prison population compared to 1% in the general population). It is estimated, however, that women comprise only 4% of this group. Over-representation is noted to also be the case internationally (Baldry et al 2013), although considerable variance is noted and the difficulties of making such estimates is clear, due in part to lack of a standardised approach to defining the issue. Much

higher figures are presented by Baldry et al. (2013); they estimate that up to 12% of the prison population have an IQ of less than 70 and that up to a further 18% fall in the 70-80 range. This study provided a longitudinal view of how such individuals interact frequently with other systems. Although there is a basic division of data by gender (women are seen to comprise about 11% of this group), there is no discussion of any gendered patterns of interactions or trajectories, and no evaluation of any input. A 2007 study conducted in Victoria, which sought to describe the characteristics of offenders with intellectual disabilities excluded women from the study “ due to the statistically insignificant number of female prisoners with an intellectual disability released from prison during the study period” (Holland, Persson, McClelland & Berends, 2007: 6). With regard to provision for this group of women, the report noted that women with intellectual disabilities are held at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, described as a multi-security setting, but that there is not dedicated unit/accommodation due to small numbers.

It is evident that this group of women are small in number, largely invisible, with an unknown set of needs. A descriptive study conducted in the UK (Lindsay et al., 2004) sought to present some initial data on this group, by describing a group of women who accessed a community-based service in the UK for offenders with ID, between 1990 – 2001 (N=18). What they reported was the co-occurrence of high levels of mental health problems and sexual abuse alongside intellectual disability. These authors posited mental health as an intervening variable affecting offending behaviour, arguing that low rates of re-offending for this group indicate that once their mental illness is treated, offending is minimised. They also present an alternative hypothesis, that combined treatment – for mental illness and the index problem (e.g. aggression) – is what is most effective in addressing problems. This concept of a holistic approach to treatment and the need to address mental health to address offending reflects broader research findings presented above.

The issue of ABI would seem to be one which perhaps needs some attention. Department of Justice data from 2011 (cited in Victorian Ombudsman, 2015) indicates much higher levels of ABI than intellectual disability in the prison system; ABI is estimated to affect some 33% of women prisoners in Victoria. Currently, however, there is no screening or recording of ABI. Current research seems predominantly focused on estimating prevalence.

Indigenous women:

As noted above, the number of women in prison has increased dramatically over the last decade. It is important to note, however, that this figure masks important trends, with Baldry and Cunneen (2015) arguing that this increase has been largely driven by the increase in the imprisonment of Indigenous women. There is considerable variation in the rates of imprisonment, however, for Indigenous women between the states and territories. Whilst Victorian rates are certainly not the highest, this group of women has been the subject of considerable discussion and concern both with regard to complex needs and patterns of cycling through the prison system and to parenting (with links to increasing numbers of children in Out of Home Care). A range of differences are noted in this population (Baldry & Cunneen, 2015): they are more often held on remand, they do shorter prison sentences, but more frequently, and around 80% are mothers of dependent children.

Descriptors of Indigenous women in prison are clear and their specific needs seem reasonably well established. A recent Queensland cross-sectional study sought to identify post-traumatic stress disorder in this sub-population of imprisoned women. Data were collected from 116 women in face to face interviews with Indigenous research staff, of whom 60 screened positive for PTSD. PTSD is seen to be related to early trauma, notably early sexual assault and the unexpected death of someone close. The results indicate a high prevalence of PTSD, which is of a long standing and typically untreated nature. Poor service utilisation is of concern, and is noted more widely, for example in relation to access to AOD programs.

Goulding (2011) outlines an arts based education and training program (*Breaking the Cycle*) provided to a group of Aboriginal women in Perth, Western Australia. This pilot program, which 30 women attended, placed culture as central; it was developed and run by Aboriginal women, and sought to establish relationships of trust with participants with the aim of keeping them connected to the training organisation in the post-release period. Although the full evaluation of the program was not readily accessible, this chapter provides a summary of the core issues as perceived by the author. The program focused on cultural knowledge, communication, planning, teamwork, literacy and numeracy and was preceded by two yarning sessions. The program was deemed successful by participants who indicated that it enabled them

to connect in a positive way to their culture as well as providing them with a positive outlet for negative emotions. Goulding (2011) also describes the program as successful, citing engagement with a group of women who often do not engage with services, high attendance (80% completed the program), enthusiasm, the development of skills and the meaningful involvement of Aboriginal people. Although the aim of the program was to foster connection with the community-based training organisation who facilitated the program, this was noted to have occurred in just three instances; other women have moved out of the area, or had returned to or remained in prison.

Although there is information that an Indigenous women's mentoring program (Rumbalara) was provided in Victoria in recent years, and an evaluation conducted in 2003, there is no publically available documentation. The following is drawn from Bartels' (2010) summary of that program. The program was a pilot targeting women on parole and other community based orders. A preliminary evaluation (Atkinson & Kerr 2003, cited in Bartels, 2010) noted positive aspects of the program to be the encouraging approach of the project officer and mentors; a reduction in offending for some participants (no further details are provided beyond a statement that by 2005, 19/27 had successfully completed the program). Some limitations were noted: issues with staff training and administration; challenges with a lack of organisation and the location were also indicated. No explanation of these is provided. "Atkinson and Kerr (2003) concluded that the program was a valuable and supportive service, and that mentoring provided a meaningful level of intervention that was instrumental in reducing recidivism and diverting Koori women from the criminal justice system" (Bartels, 2010: 9). The content of the program, its approach and how it was evaluated are unknown. A conference paper (Mohamed, 2001) describes how the program was established, noting the vital role played by community consultation in framing the program to ensure relevance.

A Koori Cognitive Skills program, modified from the mainstream program, was provided in Victoria. The program is offered as 30 two hour sessions. The program was evaluated in a pre-test post-test by Atkinson and Jones (2005), gathering data from participants, facilitators, the program reference group, prisoner support staff and prison administration. Considerable evaluation data is provided with regard to process issues and program integrity; this is extremely valuable when considering

how or if mainstream/western/male programs can be amended to suit other groups of participants. Some outcome data are presented, with women showing better ability than the male participants than men at applying skills learned to real-life situations. There are clear limitations with this data; it is based on self-report, with no measurement of application in the 'real world'; the sample size of women participants was just five. There is no information available which indicates that this program has been run subsequently.

Five cultural programs are described in the Victorian Ombudsman's (2015) report as being offered in the prison system currently; however, it is also noted that programs may often not run for significant periods of time. In relation to programs for women, the Ombudsman's report (2015:83) indicates that in the 2014-15 financial year, the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre had "seen the Aboriginal Cultural Immersion program and two sessions of the Koorie Faces". Any evaluation, conducted or planned of these programs is not commented upon.

Overall, limited research has examined effective programs for Indigenous women; indeed it is argued by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, in their submission to the Victorian Ombudsman's (2015) enquiry, that there are no post-release support services for these women which are both culture and gender appropriate.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper examines literature on best practice with women offenders. It attempts to use the principle of systematic review although the general scarcity of material on the topic makes this difficult and we have had to source many studies with less than rigorous methodology. The review focuses on general principles of effective practice with women including, Aboriginal programs, transition and reintegration programs, offending behaviour programs, personal development programs, programs and services for young women, women with a disability and programs and services for women from culturally diverse backgrounds. In some cases, however we were unable able to locate relevant studies which addressed good practice with these groups.

Excluded from the study are drug and alcohol programs (AOD), sex offender programs, mental health services, education, employment and industries, mother and child programs and programs for women under 17 years of age. However often the literature addresses these issues along with other issues and in some cases these studies are included because they inform practice in the areas under consideration in the review.

It seems clear that women have specific needs which are often different to those of men. In particular the research refers to relationship and family issues including parenting, mental health, housing and drug use. There is also some evidence that addressing the specific needs of women may help to reduce their recidivism and improve their well-being.

The research is clear that, surveillance-oriented, punitive and blaming interventions, whether in prison or in the community, are ineffective and have the potential to increase recidivism. On the other hand the evidence also seems clear that rehabilitation interventions are generally effective and on average reduce recidivism by around 20%. The reductions are greater in community based than prison based interventions.

One of the important factors in the effectiveness of interventions with women (and with men) relates to the way the interventions are delivered. The evidence suggests that worker skills make a difference to recidivism of around 30% in community based settings and that they also make a significant difference in institutional settings. Interventions are likely to be more effective if those delivering them are supported in the development of their practice skills through training, supervision, coaching, program manuals and other methods. Worker skills, such as problem solving skills and a strengths focus appear to be at least as important if not more important than the nature of the intervention and are a vital part of effective interventions with women (and men).

Similarly program integrity, in other words the extent to which interventions or programs are delivered as intended. This can also relate to ineffectiveness. Similar

support mechanisms can help to ensure that specific structured programs are delivered as intended.

It cannot be assumed that an intervention which has worked elsewhere or one that has worked with men will work in a new setting. Ongoing audits and evaluations of interventions may also help to maintain program integrity and to determine whether interventions are successful in different settings.

Risk assessment, including actuarial instruments such as the Level of Supervision Inventory (Andrews and Bonta 2010), are widely used in criminal justice agencies both in prison and in the community. There is some evidence that these instruments, which have been developed with mixed or male samples, may work better if they are adapted to include or emphasise gender sensitive items such as family and children. This is important if the instruments are used to inform case planning or to refer to other services.

Services to women should be holistic. In other words they should address the multiple issues which most female offenders face. This means that assessments and interventions should not be single issue focused. In other words effective treatment of any one issue is likely to involve treatment of other issues. A women with a housing problem for example may not progress unless issues relating to drug use, an abusive partner and relationships with her children are also addressed. Services which work collaboratively with offenders to identify issues seem to work best.

Prison based services should be linked to community based services particularly at the time of transition and there is some evidence that strong transition support services are helpful. .

Family focused interventions may be particularly helpful for women - in particular services which focus on quality relationships with non-criminal family members and with children.

Mentoring programs can be beneficial so long as they are delivered correctly and women receive sufficient contact with mentors.

Housing interventions particularly those which can actually supply or facilitate housing for women when they are released are beneficial.

There is some support for mindfulness programs in prison.

It is acknowledged that many women in prison and on corrections orders have experienced trauma. Interventions which focus on trauma have some support in the research.

Finances and debt seem to be a serious problem for many women and while there is no research examining interventions to address this issue it seems likely that interventions in this area would be helpful.

The research on women offenders and disability is limited and we were not able to locate specific interventions to address issues for this group.

Similarly we were no able to locate specific material on best practice with Indigenous women although there are some projects which seem to be helpful.

Worrall and Gelsthorpe (2009) examined 30 years of issues of the *Probation Journal* and found only 30 articles of around 600 which were focused on women. They argue on the basis of the articles that we have learn certain lessons about supervision of women in the community. Services should be for women only, integrated with non-offenders, empower women to address their own problems, meet the learning styles of women, holistic, address offence related problems, link women with mainstream agencies, provide ongoing assistance where required, provide mentors for personal support and provide practical help. Programs should address women's needs including transportation, protection from abuse child care and relationships.

The research as a whole tends to support these views as they apply to women in prison or in the community. However, as the authors point out the research is limited and of variable quality. Nevertheless the overwhelming message from the research about best practice for the delivery of services for women (and no doubt for men) is

that rehabilitation interventions work. They work particularly well if they are delivered by skilled practitioners, as they were intended and focused on the individual needs of the offenders.

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