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# GENDER-RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES

FOR WOMEN OFFENDERS

## Employment and Female Offenders: An Update of the Empirical Research

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Female offenders are different from male offenders in many ways. Generally speaking, the pathway taken into and along the road of criminal behavior is influenced by life experiences and gendered perspectives (Berman 2005; Daly 1994; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009; Simpson, Yahner, and Dugan 2008). Even among those factors regarded as gender neutral (e.g., mental illness is positively associated with criminal offending for both men and women, and offenders of both sexes engage in high rates of substance abuse), differences remain between men and women on either the type or severity of the factor and/or life experiences (e.g., trauma from sexual and/or physical abuse) that contextualize the offender's perspective and response.<sup>1</sup> Women's engagement in crime also differs from men's in the type of crime (less violent), in risk factors (the importance of relationships, which can override prosocial self-preservation), in societal roles (caring for children while balancing competing priorities), in the need for different types of services (counseling for trauma), and in less overall involvement in crime in terms of frequency, prevalence, and seriousness. Engagement and continued sustainment in crime can be a coping or survival mechanism that is viewed as a necessary or desirable way to meet the many challenges that women offenders face. Importantly, just as the pathways to and uses of crime differ by gender, desistance from crime is likewise contextualized by the circumstances and situations that women face. With respect to offenders generally, one of the key mechanisms for desistance is employment (Sampson and Laub 1993; Uggen 2000), and studies of offender populations have



### FROM THE DIRECTOR

Existing research demonstrates a positive link between employment and desistance from criminal behavior for offender populations. Reentering men and women face many challenges, from the stigma of their criminal record to an individual lack of employment history and relevant skills. For individuals successful in their search for employment, job retention can be complicated by everyday circumstances that compete for attention. Although male and female offenders face many of the same issues, women often face a set of circumstances that add additional barriers, particularly if the women are the sole custodial parent for children. This bulletin is a summary of available literature related to employment and women in the criminal justice system.

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long established a predictive relationship between employment and criminal offending. Those who were employed prior to incarceration were less likely to violate institutional rules while incarcerated (Hardyman and Van Voorhis 2004; Turner and Petersilia 1996) and were less likely to recidivate once released (Sampson and Laub 1993; Uggen 2000; Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998). This relationship reveals greater ambiguity when considering the impact of employment on crime disaggregated by gender. Blanchette and Brown (2006) reported correlations for six studies (including two multiple-study samples) and found mixed results—employment/education was a significant predictor for rearrest and reincarceration for half of the studies, but it was not significant for the multisample studies.

The purpose of this bulletin is to explore the literature and summarize the empirical evidence related to the impact of employment on the criminal behavior of women. This bulletin focuses on three narrowly defined objectives. The first objective is to determine if there is any recent literature (i.e., within the past decade) related to employment and female offenders in various stages of the criminal justice system (detainment, incarceration, transition from prison or jail, and/or community supervision) that clearly shows the barriers to employment for women offenders. This includes a brief summary of the existing literature on the relationship between correctional education, correctional vocational training, and employment on criminal behaviors. The second objective is to summarize the gender-specific outcome studies of correctional education programs, vocational programs, and employment interventions related to female offending.<sup>2</sup> The third objective is to determine if there is a discernible gender-specific pattern to the relationship between employment and crime and, if so, to hypothesize how that pattern may

apply to female offenders and/or differ from that of male offenders.

This review first provides a synopsis of the demographic and criminal history characteristics of women involved in the criminal justice system. Whenever possible, this overview categorizes women in the various stages of the criminal justice system (jail, prison, and community supervision).<sup>3</sup> An exploration of the relevant literature focused on the challenges faced by female offenders and how these challenges affect the ability to find and maintain quality employment. Barriers to employment include economic marginalization, health concerns (including mental health and substance use), lack of education, low employment skills and experience, family and childcare obligations, time management and how time affects goal-setting by women in transition, self-esteem, social (e.g., connections to other individuals within a social network or community) and human (e.g., a person's knowledge, skills, experiences, and personality) capital, and statutory restrictions that bar ex-offenders from numerous occupations in many industries. Woven throughout this discussion, where suitable, are gender-responsive strategies to reduce these barriers to employment. The link between employment and criminal offending is then summarized generally and the correctional, vocational, and educational programs' link to employment and recidivism is examined specifically.

Given the paucity of empirical research that explores the nexus of women, employment, correctional education, and criminal behavior, the author of this bulletin examined studies that included both juvenile and adult offenders. Overall, the evidence suggests that desistance from crime is not gender neutral. It also shows the need for higher levels of educational attainment and employment training for female offenders; a comprehensive, coherent, holistic, and strengths-based

gender-responsive treatment strategy for women suffering from co-occurring mental health, physical, and/or addiction issues; case management services that extend into the community postrelease; problem-solving and time management skills; housing; health care; and supportive functional social networks both within and beyond the family. This type of comprehensive approach would help female offenders obtain and sustain long-term quality employment, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving the consequent desistance from crime.

## Female Offenders

The most recent correctional census indicates that more than 1.3 million women are under the control of the criminal justice system in the United States. Approximately 213,000 women are in correctional institutions and 1.1 million are under community supervision. As of 2007, 114,000 women (7 percent of all those sentenced to state and federal prisons) were in prison (West and Sabol 2009). As of midyear 2008, more than 99,000 women (12 percent of the total jail population) were confined in local jails and detention centers (Minton and Sabol 2009). Women represent 24 percent of the 4.2 million people on probation and 12 percent of the 798,000 people on parole (Glaze and Bonczar 2007). Although the overall growth of prison admissions slowed in 2007 (a 0.2-percent increase versus a 2.6-percent average annual increase from 2000 to 2007) (West and Sabol 2008), the number of women incarcerated and supervised by the criminal justice system has maintained a sharp upward trajectory since 1995, outpacing that of male offenders (Glaze and Bonczar 2007; Harrison and Beck 2005).

In general, demographic profiles of women involved in the criminal justice system indicate they are in their midthirties, are

single mothers with young children, and are disproportionately women of color (Covington 2007). Women incarcerated in state and federal prisons are somewhat older (a median age of 33 to 36 years) than women in jail (a median age of 31 years) or on probation (a median age of 32 years) (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). Criminally involved women are less likely to have been married than those in the general public. Forty-seven percent of women in local and state facilities have never been married, compared with 42 percent of women on probation and 34 percent in federal prison (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). In contrast, 24 percent of women in the United States have never been married (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Most female offenders have minor children (65 to 70 percent of women in state and local facilities, 72 percent of women on probation, and 59 percent of women in federal prisons) and the majority (66 percent of state inmates and 50 percent of federal inmates) were the custodial parent prior to incarceration (Greenfeld and Snell 1999).

Women offenders reflect a disproportionate representation of racial minorities across the criminal justice continuum, particularly among those in custody. As of 1999, more than 44 percent of women in local jails and state prisons were African American, 15 percent were Hispanic, and up to 36 percent were white. In federal institutions, 35 percent of women were African American, 32 percent were Hispanic, and 29 percent were white (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). In contrast, 62 percent of women on probation were white, 27 percent were African American, and 10 percent were Hispanic (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). It is important to note that the racial composition of women incarcerated in state and federal institutions changed from 2000 to 2007—a higher proportion are white (48 percent in 2006 versus 40 percent in 2000) and Hispanic/Latino (17 percent versus 15 percent), and

there has been a 10-percent decline in the number of African-American women (28 percent in 2006 versus 38 percent in 2000) (Sabol, Couture, and Harrison 2007; West and Sabol 2008). Nonetheless, African-American and Hispanic women remain disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system (Covington 2007; McCampbell 2005).

Criminal histories differ between men and women—men have longer careers and more serious behaviors. Although 65 percent of women and 77 percent of men in state institutions have a record of convictions, 43 percent of men (versus 33 percent of women) had three or more prior convictions, and men were twice as likely to have a criminal career that included both a juvenile and an adult record (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). Further, women in jail and prison are less likely to be violent offenders and more likely to be incarcerated for property and drug offenses than men (James 2004; West and Sabol 2008). Thirty-five percent of women in state prisons are committed for violent offenses (compared with 54 percent of men), 29 percent for property offenses (compared with 18 percent of men), and 29 percent for drug-related offenses (compared with 19 percent of men) (West and Sabol 2008). Seventeen percent of women in jails are charged with violent offenses (compared with 27 percent of men), 32 percent with property offenses (compared with 23 percent of men), 21 percent with public order offenses (compared with 25 percent of men), and 29 percent with drug-related offenses (compared with 24 percent of men) (James 2004).

The use of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense has dropped for convicted women in jail (from 59 percent in 1996 to 50 percent in 2002); however, the rate of all jail inmates characterized as “alcohol- or drug involved offenders” remains the same (77 percent) (James 2004:8). As of 2004, 60 percent of women

in state facilities and 43 percent of those in federal institutions met the criteria for being dependent on drugs or abusing drugs (Mumola and Karberg 2006). For probationers, 12 percent reported drug use and 26 percent reported alcohol use at the time of their offense, and 53 percent had used both drugs and alcohol (Mumola 1998). Although a substantial number of male and female offenders engage in substance use, studies show that women often use alcohol and drugs as a means of coping with past and present traumatic life circumstances (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003; McCampbell 2005).

Compared with men, women are less likely to recidivate (Deschenes, Owen, and Crow 2007; Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998). Fifty-eight percent of women who were released from state facilities in 1994 were rearrested and 40 percent were reconvicted, whereas 68 percent of men released were rearrested and 48 percent were reconvicted within 3 years of release (Langan and Levin 2002). Women incarcerated for violent offenses were the least likely to be rearrested, while drug and property offenders were not only the most likely to be rearrested for a new crime, but were reincarcerated more quickly than those reincarcerated for a violent crime (Deschenes, Owen, and Crow 2007). Both men and women were most likely to recidivate in the first year postrelease (Deschenes, Owen, and Crow 2007).

Of particular relevance to this topic is that the nature of property crime for women has changed over the past 40 years. Small (2000) examined trends in female offending and found that since 1963, as women have increasingly entered the workplace, they have become more involved in property crimes such as embezzlement, fraud, forgery, and larceny. According to Small (2000:76), women “receive poor pay in unrewarding and insecure work [thus] women are motivated to commit crime as a rational response to poverty

and economic insecurity.” Coupled with the finding that women use alcohol and drugs to “self-medicate” (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2005), “property and drug crimes can be conceptualized as survival crimes and have been tied to economic and emotional struggles”; consequently, correctional and community “resources should be targeted toward the economic and personal survival needs of women” (Deschenes, Owen, and Crow 2007:58).

The challenges that face female offenders, particularly as they relate to employment, are described below.

## Barriers to Employment

In general, the majority of female offenders are economically marginalized and face substantial challenges when they return to the community after a period of incarceration (O’Brien 2002; Zarch and Schneider 2007). These challenges impede efforts to obtain and maintain employment. Women offenders are both underemployed and unemployed, work fewer hours and make less per hour than their male counterparts, and are often employed in nonpermanent, low-level, or entry-level occupations with little chance for advancement (Bullis and Yovanoff 2006; Blitz 2006; Champion 2001; Delveaux, Blanchette, and Wickett 2005; James 2004; McCampbell 2005; Peters et al. 1997; Rose et al. 2008; Small 2000; Tonkin et al. 2004; Zaitzow 2006). For example, a study that compared 435 women with 1,220 men who were admitted to a substance abuse unit in a metropolitan jail found that women were significantly less likely to have a profession, trade, or skill and were more likely to report having no income in the 30 days prior to incarceration (Peters et al. 1997). Although women in state prisons are more likely than men to have a high school diploma (30 percent versus 25 percent) (Harlow 2003), many women

offenders lack the education and vocational skills to compete in the labor market (O’Brien 2002).

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Peters and colleagues (1997:341) also illustrate, using the Addiction Severity Index, the psychosocial challenges that incarcerated women face: They were “significantly more impaired on scales related to drug use, employment, legal status, and psychiatric/psychological functioning” than male offenders. Female offenders suffer from mental health problems (including depression, mania, and psychotic disorders and from trauma due to childhood physical and sexual abuse) more than men (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2005; Covington 2007). Childhood physical and sexual abuse is highly associated with mental and physical health issues as an adult (Lee and Tolman 2006; McLean, Robarge, and Sherman 2006; Messina and Grella 2006; O’Brien 2002). From 77 to 90 percent of incarcerated women report extensive abuse, and those with a greater exposure to childhood trauma experience a younger onset of many behavioral and health problems, including substance abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic, eating disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, poor coping and problem-solving skills, and engagement in prostitution and other criminal behavior (McLean, Robarge, and Sherman 2006; Messina and Grella 2006;

O’Brien 2002). Women offenders also experience high rates of homelessness—from 25 percent (McLean, Robarge, and Sherman 2006) to more than 50 percent (O’Brien 2002)—in the month before incarceration. Housing instability is a risk factor for parole revocation: in a study of female parolees, those who reported having an unstable housing situation “increased their odds of failure on parole by almost 995 percent” (Schram et al. 2006:463). In addition, “most don’t have a car and had to rely on others for transportation ... a third suffered from emotional problems or chronic illness, and three fourths had a high probability of substance abuse or dependence” (Tonkin et al. 2004:68).

Women offenders often have poor health outcomes, in part because they lack the means to access health services in the community. They are “typically impoverished, with inadequate transportation and resources, which limits access to community-based health systems” (Messina and Grella 2006:1842). Because the challenges that female offenders face frequently co-occur (e.g., mental health issues, poor health, trauma from a history of abuse, and/or substance abuse (James and Glaze 2006)), the failure to diagnose and treat these issues in a comprehensive and coherent fashion contributes to the challenge of finding stable employment for this population (Peters et al. 1997).<sup>4</sup> In a prison survey of women, Blitz (2006) found that women who were treated for addiction or mental health issues were more likely to experience employment stability prior to incarceration. Blitz (2006) also contends that those who needed treatment but did not receive it had less successful employment outcomes. The author hypothesizes that because access to treatment is a key barrier to employment prior to incarceration, it will remain relevant postrelease.

Those who are criminally involved often lack high educational attainment and functional literacy skills (Harlow 2003; Holley and Brewster 1997; LoBuglio 2001), thus impeding employment opportunities (Blitz 2006). Offenders are significantly less educated (51 percent had a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) compared with 76 percent of the general population), and 70 percent of offenders (versus 50 percent of the general public) were unable to read and do math at levels functionally adequate to “interpret a train schedule or ... resolve a billing dispute” (LoBuglio 2001:7). Inmates with a disability fare worse—66 percent of state prison inmates with a disability have not finished high school or obtained a GED (Harlow 2003).

Foley’s (2001) review of the literature on youthful offenders finds that approximately 40 percent of incarcerated youth never return to school following release and that, overall, delinquent youth have significant deficits in reading, math, and written and oral skills when compared with nondelinquent peers. Juvenile offenders have lower intellectual and academic functioning (reading skills are between fifth and seventh grade levels, generally 2 years below those of non-delinquent peers, and writing skills are between fifth and sixth grade levels). In addition, both male and female delinquents have significantly lower math achievement scores than nondelinquents and significantly inferior oral skills (as shown by a higher percentage of grammatical errors in their speech); 38 percent of boys and 14 percent of girls qualified for speech and language services (Foley 2001). Many inmates also have cognitive deficits in the form of learning disabilities, mental retardation, and limited problem-solving and creative-thinking skills (Holley and Brewster 1997). Both youth and adults with disabilities and/or emotional and behavioral disorders have

difficulty transitioning to the community postrelease (Foley 2001) and often fail to keep a job (Bullis and Nishioka-Evans 1993). This is likely due, at least in part, to the lack of social skills needed to interact appropriately with supervisors and coworkers.

The existence of a criminal record also affects opportunities for employment (American Bar Association 2007; Dietrich 2006; O’Brien 2002).<sup>5</sup> Employers are often reluctant to hire ex-offenders due to a perceived risk of continued engagement in criminal behavior (Harris and Keller 2005), concerns about the trustworthiness of the individual (Stoll and Bushway 2008), or fear of negligent tort claims in

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the event an employer failed to conduct a background check and the individual’s behavior harmed another during the course of work or through an opportunity provided by the job (Clark 2004). Although Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from refusing to hire an individual *solely* because of a criminal record,<sup>6</sup> many exceptions exist (Harris and Keller 2005). Both state legislatures and Congress have passed laws restricting ex-offenders from obtaining employment through licensure and certification restrictions in “approximately 350 occupations” (Clark 2004:196; Harris

and Keller 2005). These industries and occupations include financial institutions (accounting and real estate), the medical field (dentists, optometrists, pharmacists, home health care, and nursing), transportation, some unionized trade occupations (plumbers), and the personal service industry (cosmetology, barbering, and child care) (Lucken and Ponte 2008; Petersilia 2003). The situation has notably worsened since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001: “a heightened concern for internal security has translated into a spate of new laws requiring records checks upon application for various professional occupations and employments ... such as transportation, and with vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly, without regard to the nature of the conviction, how long ago it occurred, or what the people have since made of their lives” (American Bar Association 2007:3). These employment restrictions are limiting for all ex-offenders, but pose particular concerns for women. Because female offenders generally have minimal skills and little experience, several of the restricted occupations would be well suited for them, including the caregiving and service industries of home health care, child care, and cosmetology. Further, these positions are likely to have more flexible hours and allow women to work part time, providing more time to care for children or to seek training to improve long-term employment opportunities. However, because of prohibitions against higher skilled positions such as nursing, accounting, and skilled trades (e.g., electrical or plumbing), women cannot advance from caregiving and service positions into professions that are more likely to provide a living wage and benefits. It is ironic that vocational programs in correctional institutions usually focus on industries such as cosmetology and barbering, although in some states ex-offenders are statutorily prohibited from these fields.

Although these restrictions might keep an ex-offender from seeking employment in particular occupations and industries, there is another barrier to employment in unrestricted occupations and industries. Often, employers ask about criminal history during the job application process. This practice has led to a movement to “ban the box” (which seeks to eliminate questions related to criminal convictions on initial job applications) so that ex-offenders will not immediately be deemed ineligible for hire based on that factor alone (Stoll and Bushway 2008). As a result, new policies to promote fair hiring practices have been enacted at the state, county, and city levels (Safer Foundation 2009). Stoll and Bushway (2008:373) assert that this movement may not have the desired impact because of insufficient information about “how employers use criminal history information or what its effect on hiring ex-offenders might be.” Further, Stoll and Bushway (2008) studied 619 firms in California and found that some employers were willing to hire ex-offenders based on the type of crime committed (e.g., a drug offense versus a violent crime); this shows that employers are making informed decisions based on the substance of a person’s entire history rather than simply the existence of a criminal record. Although this is encouraging, the existence of a criminal record is often a barrier to fruitful employment.

Employment prospects for most female offenders typically consist of low-wage jobs; even those who have the skills and experience to obtain a better job are often challenged by responsibilities as the primary caretaker of minor children. Demands include “family court, child protective services, and school systems on behalf of their children” (Flavin 2004:213) and the lack of adequate and affordable childcare (Berman 2005; Harm and Phillips 2001; Travis and Waul 2003). Childcare issues are particularly

problematic for parents of infants or children with disabilities. An additional logistical challenge is that daycare providers usually operate only during regular business hours, yet many jobs require alternative shifts. Further, public transportation for alternative shifts may not be available or women may feel unsafe taking public transportation late at night or in more risky neighborhoods (Berman 2005). Historically, public welfare was a “safety net” to stabilize families during this reentry process, but this has changed in recent years (Travis and Waul 2003:24). In many states, offenders with a felony drug conviction or who are in violation of probation or parole are ineligible to receive public assistance benefits, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, Social Security, and public housing (Holtfreter, Reisig, and Morash 2004; Travis and Waul 2003). This is an unfortunate trend, particularly given that a study of impoverished female offenders convicted of felony offenses and under community supervision showed that women were psychologically empowered through the provision of services (e.g., education, health care, housing, and job training), which significantly decreased recidivism by 83 percent (Holtfreter, Reisig, and Morash 2004; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). Women who are not financially independent are more likely to continue the cycle of recidivism (Berman 2005).

### **The Role of the Family and the Community**

Another challenge for offenders is returning home to family. The family and other positive supportive relationships (either in the family of origin or in families of formation) can be critical components of success after incarceration because these relationships provide both social control and social support that inhibit criminal activity (Cullen, Wright, and Chamlin 1999; Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel

2004; Mills and Codd 2008). Conversely, individuals who do not have positive supportive relationships are more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Travis, Solomon, and Waul 2001). However, not all families provide positive or functional environments. Mills and Codd (2008:10) caution that families of offenders who are returning from incarceration “may themselves engage in criminal activity or be the cause of the initial offending, and in such cases are unlikely to promote a reduction in re-offending” [and that this is particularly important with respect to female offenders, where] “relationships with men were at the core of their offending behavior.” This conclusion is supported by Daly (1994), who finds that the pathway to crime for many girls and women included dealing drugs for boyfriends or with family members and/or a childhood history of victimization and/or neglect. More recently, Alarid and colleagues (2000) found that a marital or partner relationship with criminal others was the strongest predictor of women’s engagement in crime. Clearly, although families provide crucial support to those who have been released from confinement, these “relationships are complicated and made more complicated by the prisoner’s return” due to past harms and “fear of recurrence” (Travis 2005:222) and can be “both the best and most difficult part of returning” home (Harm and Phillips 2001:10).

The role of family is also important in the reentry process to “facilitate *informal* social controls—those interpersonal bonds which link ex-inmates to churches, law-abiding neighbors, families and communities” (Petersilia 2003:19). This process of expansion to a larger social network allows one to build the social capital needed to succeed in the long term (Broidy and Cauffman 2006; Flavin 2004; Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash 2002; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). Many offenders find jobs through these social networks

(e.g., family and friends) because they are not successful in obtaining employment otherwise (Bullis and Yovanoff 2006; Visser and Travis 2003). Additional social capital available through these social networks includes “access to training and education, as well as instrumental, social and emotional support” (Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash 2002:168), which then can be leveraged to increase an individual’s human capital (“acquire new skills or knowledge”) (Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash 2002:168). Women offenders generally have less social and human capital (which can also be “viewed as self-efficacy, or personal confidence to act in the best interest of achieving specific goals”) (Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009:545) than others. This is particularly true when offenders return to communities where a disproportionate percentage of the population have come under criminal justice control, thus disrupting kinship ties and reducing social capital overall (Rose and Clear 1998). In essence, those who have little rely on others who have little or less; this is true even more for those who are socially isolated.

Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash (2002) explored the availability of social capital among 402 women under community supervision; they looked at self-reported size of social networks (including measures of emotional, instrumental, and overall support) as well as characteristics of social networks, social support, and demographics. They found that women with lower levels of educational attainment had smaller networks and received less support. Also, younger offenders (although with similar-sized networks as older offenders) received less social and instrumental support. Overall, women who earned less than \$8,000 per year had less social support than women who earned more than \$8,000 annually. In addition, Reisig and colleagues (2002:181) state that those who attempt to move beyond an existing social network “in

conventional ways” (e.g., legitimate employment in lieu of criminal involvement) may experience ridicule or resistance because their actions are viewed as undermining group cohesion. Thus, social networks can both foster success by nurturing social and human capital or discourage those who engage in activities or ideas that are perceived as different.

Both social and human capital are needed to comprehensively address the challenges of female offenders.

Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009:547) advanced this area of research when they tested a “social and human capital model” with 313 felony female probationers and found that both social and human capital are needed to comprehensively address the challenges of female offenders. Specifically, the authors observed that both family support scales (assessing conflict in the family of origin and communicating with those who provided encouragement and assistance) and self-efficacy are related to an employment and financial needs scale. (Employment was measured by whether the individual had a job at the time of her arrest and the presence of employment challenges over the previous 3 years. Financial needs included whether the respondent had a car, had a bank account, was ever unable to pay bills without assistance, and was ever homeless.) The results indicate that women with “lower self-confidence and little to no support from family ... had greater problems keeping and maintaining a job and financial independence” (Salisbury and

Van Voorhis 2009:559) and these factors were significantly related to readmission to prison.

Further, the findings support those who call for the use of holistic approaches (Richie 2001), which serve not only the totality of the individual’s needs (e.g., housing, education, relationship counseling, family support, substance abuse and mental health treatment) but also respond to gender-specific needs and risk factors (e.g., trauma informed (understanding the cultural, social, and psychological context of those who were mentally, physically, and/or sexually abused) and relational (the desire or need to be connected to others)) (Berman 2005; Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003; McCampbell 2005; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). Because the problems are multiplicative, complex, and comprehensive, the solutions should be likewise.

### **Time-Management Skills**

Successfully navigating the numerous family and personal responsibilities and competing priorities is often contingent on time-management skills. A recent study by the Women’s Prison Association explores how women in transition manage time and how this influences reentry priorities and goals (Rose et al. 2008). In general, people struggle to meet day-to-day responsibilities, but for those who have recently left an institution where choice and freedom are in short supply, the task of returning to the community can be difficult (Rose et al. 2008). There are many transitional objectives (which the authors call “manifest” goals), including obtaining identification, applying for social service benefits, acquiring stable housing, meeting criminal justice release requirements (including substance abuse recovery meetings and regular contact with supervision officers), and reuniting with family. The study analyzed self-reported time diaries and conducted in-depth interviews of 34 women who

returned to the community from prison ( $n = 18$ ) and jail ( $n = 16$ )<sup>7</sup> and found that although employment was an important goal, it was not the most important priority for these women.

Although the majority of the women in the study were unemployed, most were not actively seeking employment at the time of the study and “the way they organized their schedules generally prevented them from becoming employed” (Rose et al. 2008:116). The women were often focused on meeting “latent” goals of minimizing stress (by allowing enough time to travel to appointments to avoid being late or not making too many appointments in a single day), staying out of trouble (by maintaining various obligations), and taking care of themselves<sup>8</sup> (taking time to relax or meet with prosocial friends). Consequently, their day-to-day schedule often contained a degree of free time and flexibility. This was often an accommodation to the lack of control the women experienced when appointments were scheduled by others (e.g., a service provider) to meet the timetable of a provider or government agency. Nonetheless, although the women had pockets of time available, these periods were generally not long enough to accommodate a work schedule or occurred at varying intervals that did not permit a work schedule.

Further, the study sample was divided into three groups (least scheduled, semischeduled, and most scheduled) and researchers determined that the capacity to reorganize schedules to accommodate work was most likely among the least-scheduled and semischeduled groups. Those who fell into the most-scheduled group were “highly programmed (much like prison is) ... [which] doesn’t leave time for work” (Rose et al. 2008:139). Interestingly, this highly programmed group had been home for the longest period; therefore, this group may be well

served by exploring alternatives to programming to allow more time for employment.

Rose and colleagues (2008) compared the respondents’ daily schedules to their stated goal of obtaining work (although the respondents exhibited little effort toward that goal) and explored this contradiction with the participants. They found that although the respondents generally felt work is important, the women were also realistic about their potential for employment. They realized that it would be difficult to find a job and that they would not be likely to obtain a job with a living wage, benefits, or the possibility for career advancement. For those who “had aspirations of doing work that extended beyond the paycheck, this was an insurmountable disincentive. They gave up hope and effectively stopped looking for work” (Rose et al. 2008:120). The researchers also note that although the lack of job opportunities was a barrier, improving both problem-solving and time-management skills might increase the women’s self-esteem (having a sense of worth) and self-efficacy (the knowledge that it is possible to succeed), leading to better overall outcomes. Case and Fasenfest (2004) also found that poor self-esteem was perceived as the most difficult challenge in regard to reentry and suggested that women receive training in the area of life skills. Without intervention, feelings of worthlessness and helplessness can erode a person’s confidence and undermine efforts to overcome difficult circumstances, thus making successful reentry more difficult.

### **The Role of Agency**

The task of effective intervention and behavioral change is complicated by the role of “personal agency” (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002). Personal agency is the ability to act on opportunities (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph

2002; Laub and Sampson 2003), and people need a “minimum level of resources to draw on in order to begin such a transformation process” (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002:1056). Further, the degree of personal agency differs among individuals. “Individuals vary in what they bring to the change process, including differences in preferences and level of motivation” (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002:1055). The ability to change is affected by the level of difficulty one experiences, such that the role of agency is less pivotal for those with greater advantages (or social capital) overall. For those “at an exceedingly high level of disadvantage, cognitive transformations and associated agenic moves are unlikely to be nearly enough” to engender long-term change despite opportunities provided (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002:1054; Broidy and Cauffman 2006). It is important to note that most of the individuals in the study by Giordano and colleagues were not at the extremes of the continuum of structural disadvantage (exceedingly high versus exceedingly low), and these are the individuals for whom targeted interventions may be most effective.

These barriers to employment are not only economically challenging to women returning to the community; they may be emotionally draining as well. Although there is a prosocial emphasis on the value of work and an expectation that ex-offenders will seek and obtain employment, these women are faced with limited opportunities and multiple complex challenges; this can be a recipe for depression, self-doubt, and continued reliance on institutional and social services for support. However, there are opportunities for women to address some of these challenges while they are under the custodial control of criminal justice agencies.

The following section provides an overview of correctional education and vocational programs for offenders.<sup>9</sup>

## Correctional Education and Vocational Programs

### Education Programs

Blitz (2006) surveyed 900 women in a state correctional facility to determine the factors that predict stability in employment prior to incarceration (measured by full-time employment and employment for at least 1 year) and found that educational achievement was the strongest predictor. There is a positive relationship between an increased level of educational achievement and an increased probability of employment (Alemagno and Dickie 2005) by “providing job skills, life skills and increased self-esteem” (Case and Fassenfest 2004:25). Blitz (2006:16) recommends that correctional education should focus on women with low levels of education and asserts that the institution is the best place for education because inmates are a “captive audience ... and can be easily motivated to make productive use of their time.” However, for correctional education to be effective, standardized programs must be developed to ensure greater parity in both access to and quality of inmate programming.

All federal prisons, 90 percent of state prisons, and 60 percent of jails provide educational programs (Harlow 2003), which generally focus on GED preparation and adult basic education. A few prison institutions have postsecondary educational programs; however, a survey of five exclusively female jails in 1995 revealed that none of the jails provided college courses to inmates (Gray, Mays, and Stohr 1995).<sup>10</sup> Further, although women in this survey rated college courses as a top program priority, only 7 percent were either in GED preparation or high school

classes (Gray, Mays, and Stohr 1995). A national survey of 100 jails conducted in 1981 indicated that 35 percent of women in “mixed population jails” were involved in educational classes, compared with 11 percent in exclusively women’s jails (Neto 1981, as cited by Gray, Mays, and Stohr 1995:195).

For correctional education to be effective, standardized programs must be developed to ensure greater parity in both access to and quality of inmate programming.

Participation in postsecondary education programs in correctional institutions declined after 1994, when inmates became ineligible to receive a Pell grant and other student financial aid (Contardo and Tolbert 2008). Although less than 5 percent of inmates participated in postsecondary programs in 2003, the number of individuals in these programs is on par with 1994, given the increased prison population. About 7 in 10 postsecondary programs are conducted through the local community college, and course equivalence is sought for those in the institution and those in the community. In addition, degrees are issued without distinguishing between the correctional institution and the community campus (Contardo and Tolbert 2008). However, inmates often withdraw from or drop out of courses, so completion rates are a challenge for these programs. A study by the Urban Institute that included inmate focus groups in

several correctional institutions provided insight on the challenge to coursework completion—a “potential barrier” existed whenever inmates had to choose between classwork and paid work assignments (Winterfield et al. 2009:7). This study also includes a recidivism analysis that found that inmates who participated in postsecondary education were less likely to recidivate within 1 year of release compared with those who did not participate (Winterfield et al. 2009). Two sites (Massachusetts and New Mexico) measured recidivism by rearrest and Indiana measured recidivism by return to prison. Although the results are statistically significant, they should be viewed as “promising” due to the marginal significance of the findings (Winterfield et al. 2009).

### Vocational/Technical Programs

Vocational training includes trade skills (e.g., auto mechanics, carpentry, electrical work), computer and other occupational skills (e.g., culinary arts, warehousing), and time management, ethics, and basic math skills required on the job (Bouffard, MacKenzie, and Hickman 2000; Finn 1997). Some vocational programs also provide “hands-on industrial experience” (MacKenzie 2002:363). Fifty-six percent of state prisons, 94 percent of federal prisons, and 7 percent of local jails report that they provide vocational training and other “special programs designed to train participants for a job” (Harlow 2003:4). Unfortunately, more inmates would like to participate in vocational training, but the availability is limited—more inmates were on waiting lists than were enrolled in training programs (Contardo and Tolbert 2008). For example, in a survey of jail inmates, women indicated that work and vocational training were among their program priorities, but only 14 to 28 percent of them were enrolled in vocational programs (Gray, Mays, and Stohr 1995). Barriers to enrollment in programs include

not only availability of programming, but participants' failure to meet enrollment eligibility criteria. For example, a 14-week business skills class in a New Hampshire women's facility in the 1990s was underutilized because inmates did not have the "educational proficiency required by the course content" (North and Annis 1994:38).

Unfortunately, employment training in correctional facilities is not only limited, it is inferior for women (Zaitzow 2006) and is less than salient once the women are released (Case and Fassenfest 2004; Mann 1997). Traditionally, vocational programs for women have focused on careers that "lead to low-level, low-pay positions in the work force" (Tonkin et al. 2004:53) such as "cosmetology, food service, laundry, sewing, clerical work, and keypunch" (Zaitzow 2006:15). Vocational programs should move toward more technology-based enterprises to keep up with current employment demands (Blitz 2006; Case and Fassenfest 2004).

Meeting the basic needs of women in jail, along with providing employment services and training in social skills, will result in better outcomes overall.

Even with adequate and relevant vocational programs, there remains a growing need to address both "job-related social skills" (Alemagno and Dickie 2005:72) and "soft skills"—the "core personal competencies and beliefs that hinder" an offender's probability of success

in a work environment (Tonkin et al. 2004:53). Soft skills include problem-solving and interpersonal skills needed to increase the likelihood that an individual will interact well with supervisors and coworkers. They include conflict management techniques, socially appropriate behavior, and the development of attitudes and behaviors that reflect integrity, honesty, and a sense of personal responsibility (Tonkin et al. 2004). Further, there is a need to provide opportunities to "practice modeling the behavior and skills needed to obtain and retain employment" (LoBuglio 2001:23). One way to build these social, business, and relational skills is for offenders to seek out entrepreneurial opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

A study by Alemagno and Dickie (2005) provides additional information about women's programmatic needs in jail. In this project, researchers interviewed 110 women in 2 county jails in the Midwest. Respondents were asked about their personal, criminal, and health histories, and a comprehensive employment history, training, and placement needs assessment was conducted (Alemagno and Dickie 2005). Of the 108 women who provided employment information, approximately half (52 women) were employed prior to detainment; 56 women had not been employed. Those who had been employed were significantly more likely to be a parent, to have a high school diploma, to have an employment skill, to have a driver's license and a vehicle, and to have no prior convictions (significant at  $p < .10$ ) as compared with the unemployed women. The 56 women who were not employed were significantly more impaired than the employed sample—they were more likely to be physically ill and receiving mental health services, to be preoccupied with alcohol and/or drugs, and to perceive they had a drug problem. The women in the study were grouped by stated need for

employment services. Of the 110 women in the study, 96 (or 87 percent) stated they needed employment assistance; the remaining 14 respondents did not need assistance. Among those who expressed a need for assistance, 81 percent also had a need for housing and 62 percent needed family assistance. This was a significant difference from those who declared they had no need for employment services. The two groups were similar in their need for medical care, mental health treatment, and/or drug treatment.

These data and those from another study by the same group (Tonkin et al. 2004) indicate that meeting the basic needs of women in jail, along with providing employment services and training in social skills, will result in better outcomes overall. A holistic and publicly funded approach will be necessary to provide offenders with basic necessities such as food, housing, child care, clothing, and transportation until employment and earnings have stabilized. In addition, Tonkin and colleagues (2004) state that co-occurring mental health and drug addiction issues must be addressed so an offender can find and maintain employment (particularly as employers routinely test for drug use as part of their screening process).<sup>12</sup> Alemagno and Dickie (2005:73) also call for social skills interventions that are sufficiently brief to be useful for a transient jail population, along with routine employment assessments that are comprehensive and include "evaluation of basic skills and technology/computer skills, a review of past job and employment success, identification of current barriers to employment, an assessment of substance use and abuse, and exploration of realistic and attainable goals." These combined efforts, coupled with social skills programs and access to services postrelease, are needed to increase opportunities for sustained employment.

## **Overall Effectiveness of Educational and Vocational Programs**

Much of the research in this area is hindered by the limitation that studies have been unable to control for an individual's motivation to succeed. This is particularly true regarding studies in which subjects volunteered for the program and thus may have been more likely to do well regardless of the intervention.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that educational and vocational programs may be effective in reducing criminal behavior (Bouffard, MacKenzie, and Hickman 2000; LoBuglio 2001; MacKenzie 2002; Western 2006; Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie 2000; Winterfield et al. 2009). Notably, MacKenzie (2002) found that inmates who participated in vocational and educational programs while incarcerated were less likely to recidivate. The Urban Institute study discussed above found that inmates who participated in postsecondary education were less likely to recidivate within 1 year of release (Winterfield et al. 2009). Further, juvenile delinquents who earned a GED or completed a vocational program while incarcerated were twice as likely to be employed 6 months postrelease and recidivated less compared with those who did not participate (Foley 2001). The few adult studies that examine prison industry programs suggest that those that combine work along with "vocational education and/or job search assistance" have a greater likelihood of reducing recidivism, although the evidence is weak (Bouffard, MacKenzie, and Hickman 2000:22; Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie 2000) and is most likely a result of the more direct relationship of program participation, thus increasing the chances of finding employment postrelease (Richardson 2005).

The value of correctional education appears to vary by race. Case and Fasenfest (2004) conducted focus groups with

29 offenders postrelease. Half the participants were African American, and the other half were white. The African-American males viewed vocational training as more valuable because skills could be translated directly into employment, whereas college education focused on less practical critical thinking skills. However, this view may be due to perceptions of barriers to employment. Although both whites and African Americans perceive barriers to employment, white participants more often felt that failure to obtain a job was because of "a personal characteristic, rather than systemic discrimination" (Case and Fasenfest 2004:32). The authors assert that regardless of race, adjustment postrelease largely depends on social skills; those who were "well adjusted to their social situations" were in sharp contrast to the group of respondents who believed that the prison industrial complex was more concerned about the survival of its system and that programs therefore were "designed for failure rather than success" and who were "angry at the system and believed the job search was futile" (p. 35). Although training in social skills may facilitate greater personal responsibility, many who felt this way would likely decide not to participate in such a program (Case and Fasenfest 2004).

### **Outcomes for Female Offenders in Educational and Vocational Programs**

The Urban Institute's study of postsecondary education included a women's prison in New Mexico; although the recidivism results were not disaggregated by gender, the results from the focus group showed that participation in postsecondary education increased self-esteem (Winterfield et al. 2009). Further, focus group participants stated that engagement in college classes helped

offenders adjust to the institution because classes "overshadowed the fact that they were incarcerated and kept them from thinking about 'doing time'" (Winterfield et al. 2009:6). Brewster and Sharp (2002) examined the impact completing a GED in a correctional setting has on recidivism. They found that, of 5,572 Oklahoma prisoners (548 of whom were women) who did not have a high school diploma when they entered prison, 1,044 completed a GED. This group had a longer survival time postrelease before returning to prison compared with those who did not complete a GED. Further, women who completed a GED took longer to recidivate than men who completed a GED (Brewster and Sharp 2002).

Brewster and Sharp (2002) also examined the impact of vocational education on recidivism. They found that in a sample of more than 11,800 inmates (including 1,178 women) in Oklahoma who participated in vocational technical programs while in custody, participants returned to prison in less time than those who did not participate (Brewster and Sharp 2002). The authors concluded that "current vocational programs in Oklahoma appear to be ineffective or even harmful in some situations" (Brewster and Sharp 2002:328). However, these data reflect the impact of vocational education overall and do not address specific curriculums in the Oklahoma prison. An alternative explanation is that engaging offenders in vocational education may raise "expectations that are ultimately unmet" if they do not find a job postrelease, leading to "[becoming] disillusioned and feeling even more trapped in the system ... [leading] to a return to crime" (Brewster and Sharp 2002:330).

The following section contains a review of the empirical evidence related to employment and crime.

## Employment and Crime

Having a job can inhibit crime because prosocial values increase as “‘proper’ work habits” are developed (Scull 1984:26); in this way, workers have an opportunity to practice the day-to-day discipline generally required by employers. This also improves the employee’s sense of worth and self-esteem (Doeren and Hageman 1982; Rose et al. 2008). In addition to reducing the risk of recidivism, employment helps establish a daily routine, a sense of satisfaction in a job well done, and the ability to provide for loved ones. Thus, employment plays a vital role in an individual’s ability to conform to “familial and communal roles” (Piven and Cloward 1993:7) and enhances the development of prosocial community ties (Doeren and Hageman 1982). This is important because offenders who are influenced by informal social control established through bonds to family, work, and/or community members are more likely to desist from crime (Petersilia 2003).

### The Role of Employment and Desistance From Crime

Work can be a vital turning point away from a criminal path (Sampson and Laub 1993; Uggen 2000).<sup>14</sup> Employment can impact the desistance process by the establishment of informal social bonds through the development of strong attachments to prosocial others<sup>15</sup> (e.g., employers and/or fellow employees) and thereby engender behavioral change. This is referred to as “age-graded informal social control” (Sampson and Laub 1993); it is a cumulative process in which the greater levels of commitment one feels to conventional others, the more constrained one is in engaging in antisocial and criminal behaviors. However, Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) posit that it is not simply the existence of a prosocial relationship that drives change,

but there is an intermediate step in the desistance process where individuals begin to think of themselves in a new way and form an identity that is inconsistent with continued engagement in criminal behaviors. Giordano and colleagues (2002:999–1000) further assert that while turning points (e.g., employment) can be “hooks for change,” the process of “cognitive transformation” toward a new self-identity is a necessary step toward long-term desistance.

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Offenders who are influenced by informal social control established through bonds to family, work, and/or community members are more likely to desist from crime.

It is important to note that Sampson and Laub’s (1993) theory of age-graded informal social control was based on the life events of 500 white male delinquents from the 1920s; therefore, the role of race and gender in this process is unknown. The longitudinal study by Giordano and colleagues (2002) provides a gender and race perspective on the role of social bonds in desistance by analyzing a contemporary sample of previously institutionalized adolescent male and female offenders, a third of whom were non-white. Although these researchers found that their results were “generally compatible” with those of Sampson and Laub, job stability was not a strong predictor of desistance. This may be due in part to changes in the marketplace (e.g., the loss of manufacturing jobs), with more limited

employment opportunities for low-skilled workers in recent decades (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002).

The next section discusses employment and female offenders.

### Employment Outcomes and Female Offenders

Generally, female offenders are underemployed and unemployed, work fewer hours than men, make less per hour than men, and are often employed in temporary low-level occupations or entry-level positions with little chance for advancement. Many of them also lack the education and vocational skills required to be competitive in the labor market (O’Brien 2002).

Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) conducted the only gender-specific study of employment-based interventions (e.g., training, placement, skill building) with an adult female offender sample that includes recidivism as the outcome. Six other studies explore employment and female offending but do not evaluate programmatic effectiveness. Rather, they incorporate employment as an outcome of interest among a criminal justice population. One study examines a jail diversion program (Pollard et al. 2007), one examines women released from jail (Freudenberg et al. 2005), and four explore women on parole (O’Brien 2006; Schram et al. 2006; Hall et al. 2004; and LaLonde and Cho 2008). No studies were identified for probationers. Given the lack of available studies on adult women, a gender-disaggregated study of the transitional experiences of female and male adolescents concludes this section.

Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998:347) used data from the National Supported Work Demonstration (NSWD) program in the 1970s, which was a rigorous study of employment and crime that included a “population of serious and high-risk

offenders.” The NSW program drew from three groups of disadvantaged men and women, including ex-offenders, substance abusers, and youth who had dropped out of school. Individuals were referred to the program by criminal justice, social service, and drug treatment facilities and were randomly assigned to either a supported work program or a control group. Those in the treatment group were “offered subsidized jobs for up to 18 months in work crews with six to eight other participants” (Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998:347). Both the treatment and control group participants provided information about their criminal and employment status every 9 months for 3 years.

In this study, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) selected only those in the sample who admitted they had earned money through illegal means or had a prior arrest. Of the 3,093 participants who reported illegal earnings, 302 were women; of the 3,764 participants who had a prior arrest, 340 were women. The results indicated that for women, employment was not a significant factor in predicting involvement in illegal earnings. However, employment in a “regular” job reduced the risk of arrest by 83 percent. An analysis of women who were employed in subsidized jobs, while less rigorously significant at  $p < .10$ , likewise indicated a reduction in criminal activity. Although there is little information about the type or quality of work for women in “regular” jobs, the description of a program job (i.e., a work crew) may indicate that these jobs were somewhat less significant, in part because they are of a lower quality than other types of jobs.

A jail diversion program (the Women’s Support Program in Connecticut) provides preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of a gender-specific case management model that includes treatment for substance abuse and trauma

(Pollard et al. 2007). This program incorporates a “gender sensitive approach [that] is strength-based, empowering and nurturing with attention to the importance of women’s relationships and connectedness with others” (Pollard et al. 2007:54).<sup>16</sup> Outcomes 12 months after program initiation indicate overall improved functioning, including higher levels of employment, higher wages, lower engagement in illegal earnings, reductions in substance use, and “significantly fewer arrests in the 12 months after enrollment in the program than the 12 months prior to enrollment” (Pollard et al. 2007:61). The authors note that this is a small sample (109 participants), only 69 participants (63 percent) reported at 12 months, and the study does not use a comparison group.

One of the few studies that focus on the nexus of employment, women, and recidivism was conducted by Freudenberg and colleagues (2005) on individuals who were transitioning to the community from jail. This study compared outcomes between adult women and adolescent males 1 year postrelease and found gender- and age-related differences. For example, for adult women, income generated from employment was “associated with a lower likelihood of rearrest, such that each \$100 increase in weekly salary (up to \$500) was associated with a 24-percent reduction in the likelihood of rearrest” (Freudenberg et al. 2005:1729), but weekly salary was not a significant factor on rearrest for adolescent males. Likewise, any type of employment (formal or informal) was not a significant factor on rearrest for women, but having a job significantly reduced the likelihood that adolescent males would be rearrested. The authors assert that these differences indicate “there is no single, gender-neutral pathway home from jail” (Freudenberg et al. 2005:1733), thus illustrating the need for a gender-responsive approach for programs and services “beyond the

walls” in helping offenders return to the community.

Four studies explored employment outcomes for women postrelease:

- A qualitative examination of reentry in an economically distressed, “under-resourced” community (O’Brien 2006:101). The study explored employment outcomes for 13 female offenders and found that 6 months after returning home, almost half of the women were employed part time or were engaged in vocational programming. The women reported a consequent increase in self-efficacy and more successful outcomes overall (O’Brien 2006).
- A study of 546 female parolees in California (Schram et al. 2006). This study found that the majority of parolees were sporadically employed and those who “experienced frequent unemployment during their supervision increased their odds of [parole] failure by 250 percent” (Schram et al. 2006:463). In the 12 months following release from prison, unemployed parolees were significantly more likely than those who had steady employment to be reincarcerated because of a new arrest or technical violation.
- A study that explored employment outcomes of the Forever Free program, a prison-based, cognitive-behavioral substance abuse treatment program followed by residential aftercare treatment in the community (Hall et al. 2004). The study found that women who participated in Forever Free were more likely to be employed 1 year postrelease than a comparison group. However, once the analysis controlled for differences in background characteristics, it was determined that length of stay in community aftercare residential treatment and the level of prior academic achievement were significant

factors in employment outcomes, rather than participation in the prison treatment program.

- A study related to employment outcomes of inmates postrelease (LaLonde and Cho 2008). These researchers analyzed data from 6,991 first-time female offenders who were released from a state prison in the 1990s and matched to a social welfare database so that economically disadvantaged offenders would be included. Therefore, the sample excludes women who did not have “a social or welfare history between 1990 and 2001,” those who are not economically disadvantaged, and recidivists (LaLonde and Cho 2008:245). Because the sample included first-time sentenced offenders, the average prison stay was 283 days, half of the sample was incarcerated for 6 months, and 99 percent were imprisoned for less than 4 years. LaLonde and Cho (2008) then estimated the impact of incarceration on employment rates before and after incarceration. This study revealed that for the first two to three quarters postrelease, employment rates increased beyond preincarceration levels, indicating that “prison does not harm Illinois women’s employment prospects ... in the short-term it is associated with modestly improved chances of employment” (LaLonde and Cho 2008:251). However, this improvement appears to be temporary, particularly for those women who “fall out of employment ... their chances of becoming employed again may be no larger, and may even be a little less, than they were during the pre-prison period” (LaLonde and Cho 2008:255). When the researchers examined these results according to number of children and type of offense, they found that women who had four or more children, who were incarcerated for person-related

crimes, and who had been incarcerated for a longer period of time had better employment outcomes for longer periods. These results showing that prison improves employment opportunities, at least in the short term, are counter-intuitive; however, many factors are not accounted for in the data. For example, there are no measures of parole conditions or the rate of employment once parole was completed. Second, there are no indicators that the women took part in vocational, educational, mental health, and/or substance abuse programs while incarcerated. These programs and services may have had a beneficial impact on overall outcomes, including employment, that were not sustained over the long term. Third, women who were convicted of person offenses are the least likely to recidivate compared with those convicted of property or drug offenses (Deschenes, Owen, and Crow 2007).

Because there are very few studies on the outcomes of employment programs for adult women, this review concludes with a descriptive study of 531 formerly incarcerated boys and girls in Oregon (Bullis and Yovanoff 2006). The study captures transition experiences for these youth in their return to the community after release from the Oregon Youth Authority. Study participants were interviewed in person while they were detained in facilities, and then by telephone every 6 months for up to 4 years. Although only 30 percent of the sample was working at either 6 months or 12 months postrelease, girls were almost three times less likely to be employed than boys at 6 months postrelease—they worked significantly fewer hours per week than boys and earned less per hour. Those with special education disabilities (defined as learning disabilities or emotional problems) were two times less likely to be employed than those without such disabilities. Outcomes for the entire sample also indicate

a strong positive association between vocational education, substance abuse treatment, and employment—those who participated in vocational training while detained or who received substance abuse treatment prior to detainment were more likely to be employed 12 months postrelease. The differences in employment outcomes for boys and girls, and for those with special education disabilities, indicate that there is a need to contextualize employment efforts to account for specialized needs or potential stigmas that may differ among groups (e.g., those affiliated with a gang may have different employment outcomes than those who are not involved with a gang) and for individual circumstances that may impact job placement and long-term employment (Bullis and Yovanoff 2006). In essence, the researchers conclude, “it is a grave error to oversimplify the way employment placement and supports are offered” (Bullis and Yovanoff 2006:83). This is particularly true in regard to employment assistance for youth—it must be viewed not in terms of a single job placement, but as a long-term investment that provides ongoing support that addresses the individual’s inevitably changing needs and interests as he/she gains more employment experience.

### **Exploring Gender Differences in Employment and Crime**

Several important studies address gender differences in employment and crime. Giordano and colleagues (2002) found that although employment stability was not a significant factor for recidivism in the multivariate analysis, distinctions are revealed when the data are examined contextually. The researchers categorized the sample by gender and according to whether the individuals were employed, married, or both; they found that women who were both unmarried and unemployed were more likely to remain criminally involved (measured as self-report

and arrest in the 2-year period prior to the study interview). In contrast, women who were married and unemployed were less likely to engage in criminal behavior than unmarried employed women, and women who had what the researchers termed the “complete package” (married and employed) or “complete ‘high-quality’ package” (in a good marriage and in a stable job) were the most likely to desist (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002:1014). This pattern also held for men—those who were unmarried and unemployed were much more likely to continue offending, while those who reported a “high-quality marital and employment package” were more likely to desist compared with men who were married and employed (but who did not have a quality marriage or job), married and unemployed, or employed but not married.

Giordano and colleagues (2002) also examined these descriptive categories by race and gender and found that of those who were African American (male and female) or white, women who were unemployed and unmarried were the most likely to continue their involvement in crime. The sample included 39 African-American women (67 percent were unmarried and unemployed, and 23 percent desisted) and 65 white women (44 percent were unmarried and unemployed, and 24 percent desisted). Of the 26 African-American men in the sample, 7.7 percent were both married and employed (although none were in the high-quality marriage/employment group). Of these individuals, 49 percent desisted. The pattern also differed somewhat with respect to white males. Of the 67 white men in the sample, 23.9 percent were unmarried and unemployed; in this group, 6 percent desisted. In contrast, 7.5 percent of the white men were married and unemployed, and none of them desisted. The authors conclude that overall, the study participants who were both economically advantaged (measured by job stability

and income above the poverty line) and expressed higher marital satisfaction were more likely to desist from crime. Social bonds formed through quality involvement in more than one prosocial institution at a time may make it easier for an individual to turn away from antisocial and criminal behaviors.

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Social bonds formed through quality involvement in more than one prosocial institution at a time may make it easier for an individual to turn away from antisocial and criminal behaviors.

Uggen and Kruttschnitt’s 1998 study of the NSW program (discussed above in the “Employment Outcomes and Female Offenders” section) explores gender differences in the impact of employment on recidivism and found that women were significantly more likely to desist than men. There was a statistically significant gap between men and women on two measures of criminal activity—illegal earnings and rearrest. Within 3 years of participation in the NSW program, among this sample of 252 women and 2,415 men, 75 percent of the women and 59 percent of the men did not report illegal earnings. Similarly, 76 percent of the women and 58 percent of the men had not been rearrested.<sup>17</sup> The researchers also examined these outcomes while accounting for a number of relevant factors (including age, race, educational attainment, criminal history, employment, and social

variables) and found that for women, employment in either the NSW program job or in another job was not a significant predictor of participation in illegal earnings, but both types of employment were significant factors that predicted a reduction in arrests. In contrast, for men in the sample, employment in an NSW program job was statistically significant for reducing both illegal earnings and arrest, while having a “regular” job significantly reduced the chances for rearrest but was not a significant factor for involvement in illegal earnings.

In a separate analysis of male offenders in the NSW program data, Uggen (2000) observed that offenders age 26 or older were significantly less likely to recidivate after 3 years, but that employment was not an effective deterrent for younger offenders. This difference in effectiveness may be less salient for women because they are usually older (e.g., an average age in the mid-thirties) than male offenders, and because of gendered criminal pathways.

Other studies assert that the relationship between employment and crime differs for men and women. For example, Li and MacKenzie (2003) found that in a sample of 125 probationers, being employed had a deterrent effect for male offenders but it increased women’s involvement in crime. However, only a small number of women (31 of 125) were included in this study, and employment was measured solely by whether or not the individual had a job; there were no indicators of the job’s quality. This is important because the impact of work on criminal behavior is generally within the context of permanent, full-time, quality jobs that pay a living wage and provide benefits (Broidy and Cauffman 2006; Sampson and Laub 1993). For example, being employed full time was found to increase the time between release and measures of recidivism in a 5-year study of male and female

boot camp graduates (Benda, Harm, and Toombs 2005).

A study by Olson, Lurigio, and Alderden (2003) provides information on gender differences in factors predicting recidivism among 2,636 male and 689 female probationers released from probation in November 2000. A comparison between the samples indicated that 63 percent of male probationers were employed versus 51 percent of female probationers, but there were no differences in age, education level, or substance abuse history. However, men had a more extensive criminal history—53 percent had one or more prior convictions compared with 40 percent of women. Men were also more likely than women to recidivate (as measured by rearrest). In this sample, employment (a dichotomous variable of 1 = employed and 0 = not employed) did not significantly predict rearrest or technical violations for either men or women. As noted by Li and MacKenzie (2003), the measure of employment is crude and fails to distinguish those with quality jobs. However, for men, income was negatively and significantly associated with recidivism, in that those with higher levels of income were less likely to recidivate (either rearrest or technical violations). Income was not significant for women.

For women, the key factor for rearrest was whether or not treatment was completed. Those who completed substance abuse treatment were 75 percent less likely to get arrested than those who dropped out of treatment, but women who “failed at treatment (relative to successful completers) were nearly 300 percent more likely to get arrested” (Olson, Lurigio, and Alderden 2003:44). These findings show that women who succeed at substance abuse treatment do very well; women who do not succeed become more severely at risk for rearrest and technical violations. In contrast, men who

completed treatment were 45 percent less likely to recidivate, compared with “only” 80 percent of men who dropped out of treatment (Olson, Lurigio, and Alderden 2003:44). It is important to consider these differences between men and women regarding saliency of employment and the impact of treatment for probationers, especially because little is known about probationers.

Overall, the evidence suggests that desistance from crime is not gender neutral; however, the reasons why women desist, particularly with respect to employment, are a subject for empirical research. Patterns of desistance for women appear contextualized by their roles, the importance of relationships, and life experiences (including poverty and trauma). However, there are no definitive answers about the relationship between employment and crime for female offenders. With the identification of only one gender-specific study of the impact of an employment intervention on recidivism (although methodologically rigorous, it was based on data from the 1970s) and a handful of studies incorporating employment descriptively or as an outcome, there is an obvious lack of clarity on the topic. It would be premature to posit how this relationship differs for women and men beyond acknowledging the gendered nature of crime and barriers that affect women differently than men. Clearly, the field is ripe for additional studies of female offenders and work, with particular attention to evaluations of employment assistance and vocational education for women along the entire continuum of criminal justice involvement (detainment, incarceration, reentry, probation, and parole). Further, observations of the work-crime relationship for men (e.g., older male offenders are more likely to desist than younger offenders) should be explored to ascertain saliency for women. Research into the area of pathways might be called for, including differences that

exist for women who became criminally involved as children or adolescents versus those who engaged in crime for the first time as adults. Additional insight into these areas would allow policymakers and correctional administrators to respond to the many barriers faced by women who are under the control of the criminal justice system.

## Conclusion

Recent studies of women offenders, although few in number, support the contention that pathways out of crime are complex and require a gender-responsive holistic approach. Further, these studies confirm that it may be more difficult for women to overcome many complex challenges to obtain, and then maintain, employment that is both rewarding and sustainable. To make it more likely that women will have quality long-term employment, they should have access to the following:

- Correctional education and vocational training.
- Employment assistance programs.
- The opportunity to learn problem-solving and time-management skills.
- Supportive functional social networks both within and beyond the family.
- The opportunity to engage in a comprehensive, coherent, and holistic gender-responsive strategy for treatment and case management services that extend beyond institutional walls.
- Public capital (child care, cash assistance, housing, and health care).
- Fewer structural barriers, such as reliance on criminal history records.

Women who have the opportunity to take advantage of these services and supports are less likely to be involved in criminal activities. In addition, access to these

services and supports can help women increase their personal, social, and human capital as well as enhance the overall quality of life for the ex-offender, her children, her family, and her community.

## Endnotes

1. The degree to which predictive factors such as employment, peers, and education are gender neutral is the subject of debate (Manchak et al. 2009). Researchers raise concerns about the accuracy of predicting level of risk and the appropriateness of using classification schemas for women based on tools normed on male samples (Farr 2000). The Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), a widely used prediction tool in criminal justice that is a “dynamic risk or needs assessment” (Salisbury, Van Voorhis, and Spiropoulos 2009:553, emphasis in original), has been the center of this debate. Research conducted on the LSI-R strongly supports the “predictive utility of the LSI-R for male offender’s general recidivism” (Manchak et al. 2009:427), and the LSI-R has been validated with both institutional and community populations of female offenders (Andrews, Bonta, and Wormith 2006; Holsinger, Lowenkamp, and Latessa 2003). However, the evidence is mixed. Some studies find that the LSI-R predicts female offending overall equally well to male offending (e.g., Coulson et al. 1996; Manchak et al. 2009), while other studies find that certain risk factors have a differential impact on prediction, contingent on gender (e.g., Heilbrun et al. 2008). For example, Manchak and colleagues (2009) found that financial problems were a better predictor of time to failure for women than for men, and Heilbrun and colleagues (2008) found that financial problems were significantly higher for women than for men. Holtfreter and Morash (2003) state that “the *specific* needs [of offenders] are certainly gender related, although the

focus on the general area ... is similar” (p. 141). This plays out in how risk factors influence outcomes; for example, marital relationships can inhibit crime in men but can be a risk factor for female offending (Heilbrun et al. 2008). Recent advances to the field on this topic are provided in the work of Van Voorhis and colleagues at the University of Cincinnati in collaboration with the National Institute of Corrections; their work involves validation of gender-specific risk factors that predicted continued engagement in the criminal justice system (Van Voorhis 2009). These factors include housing safety, parental stress, trauma and abuse, depression, unhealthy relationships, and personal strengths (Van Voorhis et al. 2009).

2. This review excludes studies that do not focus on employment and correctional education as the primary intervention on criminal behavior. Studies that incorporate employment or correctional education as a way to describe the sample and/or are included solely as a control variable in an overall analysis were generally omitted.

3. The most recent comprehensive review across the continuum of women offenders is a publication by Greenfeld and Snell (1999). Although this bulletin relies on more recent statistical reports with respect to gender descriptives, these reports did not provide information according to the intersection of both gender and race.

4. Likewise, in terms of economic disadvantage (albeit without the stigma of a criminal record), welfare recipients moving from welfare to work face many of the same challenges as female offenders. These barriers include a lack of job skills, illiteracy, physical and mental health problems, and lack of adequate child care (Danziger et al. 2002). For welfare recipients, having one barrier makes independence a difficult goal to achieve, but

having more than one has a multiplicative effect and problems compound accordingly; having multiple barriers “is strongly associated with employment, so that the greater the number of barriers, the less likely the woman is to work” (Danziger et al. 2002:19).

5. See Dietrich (2006) for a detailed discussion on issues of availability and use of criminal records by non-law-enforcement personnel and the accuracy and completeness of criminal history records, including the prevalence of “false positives” (“a criminal record attributed to someone who is not the person charged with the offenses” (p. 9)) and identity theft.

6. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1987, 1990) policy statements indicate that employers are prohibited from using arrest and conviction records in hiring and firing decisions unless there is a “business necessity” to do so. To establish business necessity, the employer must show that three factors were considered as part of the hiring decision: the nature and gravity of the offense(s), the time that has elapsed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence, and the nature of the job held or sought.

7. This study was limited because it included a small sample, those in the study had attained higher levels of education than general offender populations, and white women were underrepresented. In addition, participants were selected from a convenience sample of women who were receiving services, which does not allow the results to be generalized to women who return to the community without accessing any services.

8. This does not imply that these latent goals are unworthy; ultimately, they may be important factors in the offender’s successful transition to the community. A recently evaluated gender-responsive program incorporating relational theory,

motivational interviewing, and cognitive-behavioral interventions included similar topics in the curriculum. In a sample of 380 probationers, program participants had significantly lower recidivism rates at 30 months postrelease compared with a control group (Gehring, Van Voorhis, and Bell, in press).

9. The author appreciates an anonymous reviewer's suggestion that while women are under community supervision, they could take advantage of opportunities for vocational training and/or seek sustainable employment.

10. A key barrier to providing a long-term program (such as a college course) in a jail is the relatively short stay (e.g., typically no more than 12 to 18 months for sentenced offenders and often shorter periods for detainees due to pretrial release and/or bail). Nonetheless, "women were eager for programming ... [and they] were very receptive to learning, improvement and a variety of programming opportunities" (Gray, Mays, and Stohr 1995:192).

11. Entrepreneurial efforts are likely a response to the lack of legitimate opportunities because of statutory, social, and stigmatic barriers against employing individuals who have a criminal record. This is particularly true during an economic downturn, when the available labor market talent exceeds the demand, thus further limiting opportunities for offenders, who are generally less educated, less experienced, and less skilled than non-criminal populations.

12. Tonkin and colleagues (2004) recommend the "working model" outlined by Mann (1997) as an optimal program plan. The working model incorporates pre-release job training and postrelease case management and job placement.

13. Studies of criminal behavior are often limited by this feature (referred to as

"selection bias"), which may be obviated by random assignment of the study participants to a treatment or control group or by recent use of statistical techniques that involve matching study subjects based on "propensity scores" such as one's tendency to commit crime.

14. Visher and Travis (2003) note that recent studies do not consider recidivism in the context of an offender's period of incarceration (the "temporal dimensions of the experience of imprisonment" (p. 106)) and hypothesize that with a longer time in confinement, it is more difficult to transition to employment and other types of prosocial support.

15. Quality marital relationships to prosocial partners are also considered as a path to normative values and a subsequent reduction in criminal activity. One of the primary sources of information about criminal behavior over the life course is data originally gathered by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950). These researchers gathered data on delinquents (beginning in the 1920s) through their adulthood. Sampson and Laub (1993) studied 500 male delinquents from the Glueck data and incorporated followup information through interviews and arrest records conducted until the subjects were 70 years old. They found that men in high-quality conventional marriages were more likely to refrain from criminal activity (Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993). Broidy and Cauffman (2006) analyzed the 5-year followup data of the 500 women in the Glueck study who were released from a reformatory in the 1920s and also found that marriage was a predictor of crime cessation. Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) studied a more contemporary sample (data originally collected in the 1980s and followup data in the mid-1990s) of male and female offenders. Although they did not find a strong relationship between marital attachment and desistance from crime

in their overall sample, the data support Sampson and Laub's findings in a small subsample of white women and white men who "report an average or better level of marital happiness, stable employment and household income above the poverty level" and were more likely to desist (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002:1014). It is important to note, however, that the "centrality of marriage to the desistance process may be historically contingent, such that as marriage becomes less accessible, its role in the desistance process becomes less prominent" (Broidy and Cauffman 2006:29). This is particularly relevant in urban communities that experience disproportionate rates of incarceration and subsequent reentry, which create more social disorganization along with commensurate lower levels of social cohesion and fewer potential marital partners who are not involved in crime (Rose and Clear 1998). There is also evidence showing that relationships other than spouse/employer may lead an offender to desist. A study of the National Supported Work Demonstration program in the 1970s found that women with children, higher levels of educational attainment, and a conventional ("straight") best friend reported lower illegal earnings, although these factors were not significant for arrest (Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998:355). Likewise, men with a conventional best friend reported lower illegal earnings; however, level of educational attainment and parental status were not significant factors for either illegal earnings or arrest for male offenders. In addition, fostering strong attachments to prosocial others is the theoretical basis of mentoring programs for both at-risk juveniles and adults by providing encouragement, support, and a model for normative behaviors and problem-solving skills.

16. This type of strengths-based approach is in sharp contrast with the traditional medical model, which "suggests that

offenders are 'sick' and must be 'cured' and that things must be done *to* or *for* offenders rather than *with* them ... [which] does little to develop a sense of responsibility" (Gray, Mays, and Stohr 1995:200, emphasis in original).

17. These estimates are based on Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998, p. 354, figures 1 and 2.

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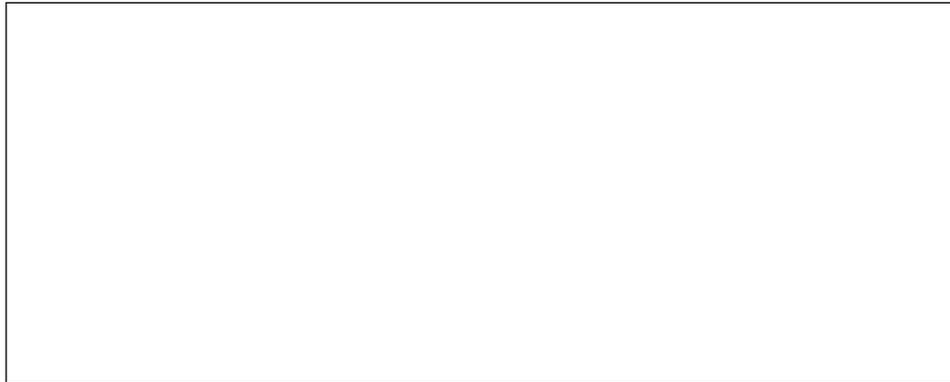
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