WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Policy Issues and Practice Strategies

VOLUME II

Edited by
Russ Immargeon

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About the Editor

Russ Immarigeon, M.S.W., received his master’s degree from the School of Social Welfare at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He is the co-editor of Offender Programs Report and a regular contributor to Corrections Managers’ Report. He is also editor of Corrections & Mental Health: An Update From the National Institute of Corrections. He is coeditor, with Meda Chesney-Lind, of the book series Women, Crime and Criminology, published by the State University of New York Press. Mr. Immarigeon is also co-author, with Meda Chesney-Lind, of Women’s Prisons: Overcrowded and Overused (National Council on Crime & Delinquency, 1991) and co-editor, with Shadd Maruna, of After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration (Willan Publishing, 2004). He has contributed articles and book reviews to the major criminal justice journals, including Contemporary Justice Review, Federal Probation, Prison Journal, and Punishment & Society. Previously, Mr. Immarigeon also edited Volume I of Women and Girls in the Criminal Justice System: Policy Issues and Practice Strategies (Civic Research Institute, 2006) and served for 10 years as editor of Women, Girls & Criminal Justice.
Introduction

INCREASING POPULATION; INCREASED VISIBILITY

Women and girls have long been invisible components of the criminal justice system. In recent years, however, women and girls have been given greater visibility. For a decade, the bi-monthly *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice* consistently focused on issues relevant to women and girls in the criminal justice system. Other journals, too, have focused on this topic, although often with an even broader range of inquiries that include the work of women police officers, attorneys, other professional groups, and volunteers. In this fashion, publications such as *Women and Criminal Justice*, a quarterly journal which has been in print for over 20 years, and the more recent *Feminist Criminology*, a quarterly publication of the American Society of Criminology’s Division of Women and Crime section, have added valuably to our understanding of, and actions on behalf of, women and girls in the criminal justice system.

Still, this new visibility is surprising to witness. Several years ago, for example, the Women’s Prison Association issued a report that specifically examined the “dramatic” growth in women’s imprisonment in recent decades. Typically, figures on women’s imprisonment are missing from, or buried within, overviews of the American prison population, but this report recognized the plight of incarcerated women, whose number had “ballooned” 757%—from 11,212 in 1997 to 96,125 in 2004 (Jacobs & From, 2006). In this report, the Women’s Prison Association ably built upon statistics routinely delivered through the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), which usually stands alone in providing a rough quantitative overview of women’s imprisonment (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009).

But incarcerated women’s hard-fought visibility can slip too easily out of sight. More recently, to cite one example, a much publicized report from the Pew Center on the States reported that “one in a 100” American adults were incarcerated, but women were not much in evidence. Beyond an odd chart that seemed concerned only with women between the ages of 35 and 39, women in the nation’s prisons were left unreported and unnoticed (Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project, 2008).

In a 2007 report on prison population projections for the United States, the Pew Center on the States, not always absent on these issues, acknowledged recent BJS statistics showing a disproportionate increase in the women’s prison population (57% for women, and 34% for men, since 1995) and added that in 25 states (and likely others) the women’s prison population would continue to grow faster than the men’s prison population (16% versus 12%) (Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project, 2007).

In recent years, other organizations have also missed opportunities to report on the state of women’s imprisonment. In 2009, for instance, the American Society of Criminology, which should certainly know better by now, issued a 406-page collection of articles (Frost, Freilich, & Clear, 2010) on a wide range of contemporary criminal justice policy issues, including criminal history records, offender disenfranchisement, economic sanctions, information technology, minimum drinking
ages, marijuana regulation, counterterrorism, immigration and crime, social exclusion, crime hot spots, prostitution, correctional healthcare, prison safety, community sentencing, and reentry programming. Nowhere in this volume, however, is there reference to, not to mention an assessment or serious examination of, the growing level of women’s imprisonment.

As another example, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Information Center website contains nicely laid out data on overall state prison, jail, probation and parole populations and rates, as well as on the cost of corrections, but no data is given on either the number of women incarcerated or on probation or parole, or the rate at which they are confined or supervised (this shortcoming is especially surprising because the NIC is actually very good at raising and addressing issues related to women and girls in the criminal justice system).

OVERVIEW

For 10 years, *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*, which was published by Civic Research Institute, offered practitioners and policymakers, as well as academics and advocates, a broad range of articles delving into the operation and management, empirical outcomes, and organizational development of policy and program interventions affecting women and girls in the criminal and juvenile justice systems of the United States.

In this volume, 50 of those articles have been updated and are presented in six sections. In Part 1, eight chapters provide national, international, and local information that describes the extent and policy context of women’s imprisonment. As it happens, particular chapters in this section focus on the states of California, New Hampshire, and New York, as well as Canada. Several decades ago, I remember hearing prison historian David Rothman speculate, to his surprise I think, that prisons might soon be abolished. Historical developments, particularly in American penology, have demonstrated otherwise, but this may be all the more reason to carefully read British scholar Pat Carlen’s thoughts on political, program, and policy barriers to the abolition of women’s prisons. In Part 2, a handful of chapters take timely glances at gender- and culture-specific practices. Parts 3 and 4 each provide nine chapters, respectively, about women and girls in the criminal justice system, including excursions into justice systems in California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Utah, and other places, including Canada and England. In Part 5, 10 articles provide a major emphasis on health care, an often-marginalized topic of significant concern for women and girls in the criminal justice system. Lastly, Part 6 offers 10 chapters covering topics related to community corrections, prisoner reentry, and restorative justice.

TRANSITION

*Women, Girls & Criminal Justice* recently ceased publication. In its time this periodical built a small but significant audience for the information it communicated to its readers. As it happens, I believe that this reflects the field of practice and policy regarding women and girls in the criminal justice system. Whereas there are important pockets of interest—witness the rise of gender-specific planning, a movement against the shackling of pregnant prisoners, the development of central office staff assigned
tasks related to the management and care of female offenders, the continued presence of state-based female offender commissions or task forces, and expanding concern about incarcerated women and their children—women and girls in the criminal justice system remain either an abstraction, an afterthought, or a secondary concern. I do not believe that women and girls are as ignored or as neglected as they once were, as recently as a few decades ago. Academic researchers, community activists, and corrections practitioners and policymakers have not given them too much attention in recent years. But the present often passes too quickly into the past, and I strongly suspect that this can happen in the case of women and girls in the criminal justice system—unless well-motivated and properly financed efforts continue to pursue the conditions and consequences of the criminal justice system’s treatment of women and girls.

APPRECIATION

*Women, Girls & Criminal Justice* has benefited from more than a hundred authors of articles that have given attention to, or raised concerns about, a broad range of issues relevant to women and girls in the criminal justice system. While I like to think the publication provided comprehensive coverage, I know that many areas of policy and practice were given only cursory treatment, and some no treatment at all. Such is the depth and diversity of the issues confronting women and girls in the criminal justice system, as well as those practitioners who work with them in one capacity or another. It is impressive that, should the publication have continued, there would have been many more authors who would have contributed their observations and thoughts. As I edited this publication, I always made an effort to thank each contributor for his or her contribution. Writing is a time consuming process, and even the “simplest” assignment takes on larger consequences and commitments than anticipated. Accordingly, I want to repeat my appreciation and gratitude to the women and men who contributed their time and efforts to producing valuable chapters in the larger “book” that was *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*. I would also like to give thanks to those who have lent their articles to this volume, because many of them have had to suffer our requests to further edit this, or update that.

CONCLUSION

In the inaugural issue of *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*, Tracy Huling, who initially served as co-editor, and I wrote the following:

*It is acknowledged by professionals in all disciplines that working with women and girls in the criminal justice system is different than working with men and boys. Advocates, practitioners, scholars, and administrators conclude that many women and girls would be ideal candidates for community-based programs designed to address their specific needs. But there is often disagreement and uncertainty about how to implement alternatives. For those incarcerated, corrections professionals face many issues unique to women and girls that affect all aspects of institutional and program management. . . . Academic and other professional journals often fail to cross the divide between those studying the issues and those working directly with women and girls. While more*
has been done in recent years to address the concerns, needs, and challenges of women and girls in the criminal justice and corrections systems, much more is required, and what is done needs to be more widely disseminated and discussed. (Huling & Immarigeon, 2000, p. 1)

*Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*, I believe, has done a good job of disseminating information. Hopefully it has sparked conversation within those circles wherein programs, policies, and research projects are developed to address the conditions and consequences of women’s and girl’s involvement in the criminal justice system. Certainly, however, the need for “disseminated and discussed” information remains, as does continued, focused attention on women and girls.

—Russ Immarigeon
January 22, 2011

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*by Heidi Strupp, J.D., and Donna Willmott, M.P.H.*

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*by Lorraine Kenny, Ph.D.*

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*by James A. Swartz, Ph.D.*

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