

Violence prevention programs for incarcerated women

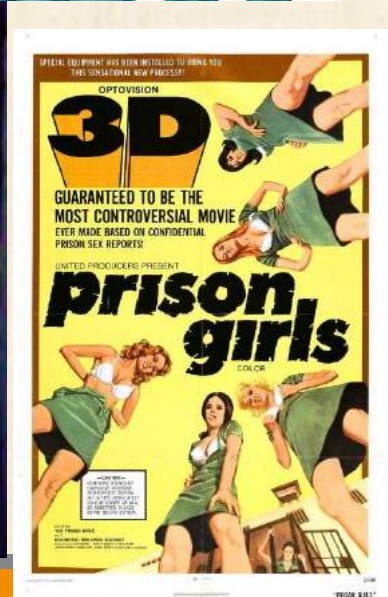
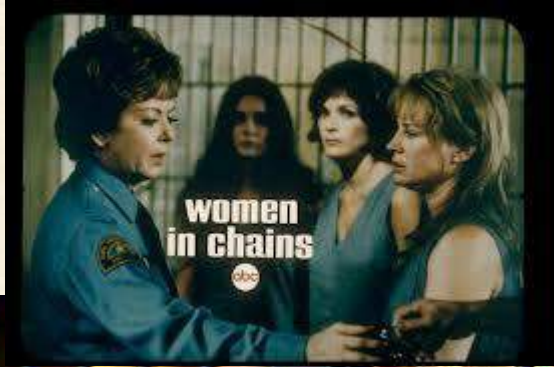
Mandy Wilson (NDRI)

Purpose of presentation

- Female prisoners in Australia;
- What we know about women who use violence; and,
- Prison-based programs for addressing women's violent offending.



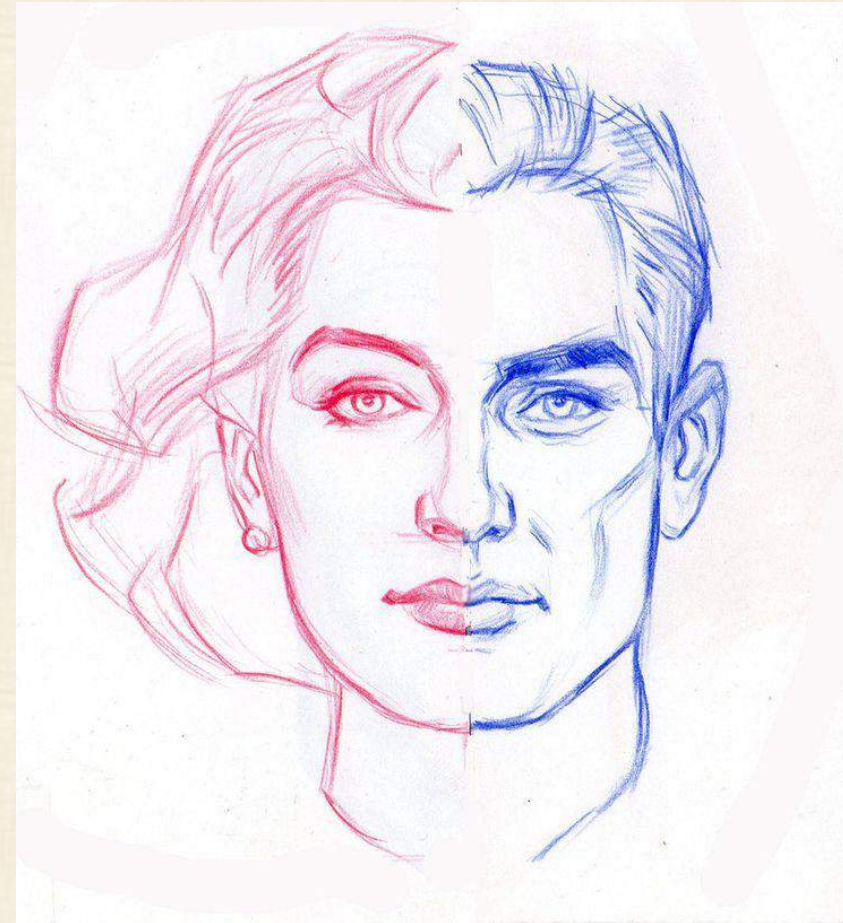
<https://www.nowtolove.com.au/news/real-life/what-life-is-really-like-inside-a-womens-prison-9104>



An overlooked population

The specific needs of **female prisoners** have historically been neglected in policy initiatives and research or assumed to be the **same as those of male prisoners**, impeding the development of evidence-based responses to female offending (Jeglic, 2011; Kubiak, 2014).

“Women in minority groups are likely to be particularly badly affected by weaknesses in the provision of specialist, gender-specific, culturally appropriate, local services” (Covington, in-press).



Women in Australian prisons

- Women comprise approximately 8% of the *total* Australian prisoner population (ABS, 2017);
- Between 2004-2014, female incarceration rates increased by 35% (compared to 28% among males) (ABS, 2014);
- In WA, between June 2007 and June 2016, the number of females in prison increased by 87% compared to 60% among males (OICS, 2017).



Women are one of the fastest growing group in Australian prisons (behind remand and Indigenous prisoners).

Aboriginal women in Australian prisons

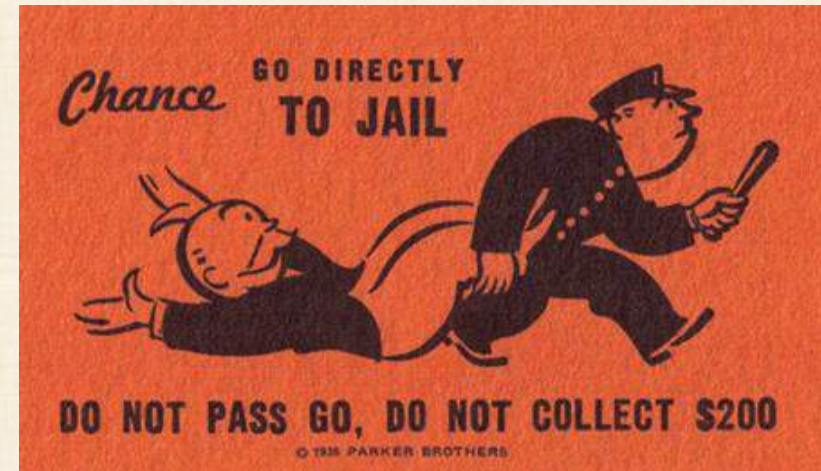
- Aboriginal women comprise **2%** of the adult female population in Australia and **34%** of the adult female prison population (ABS, 2017);
- In Western Australia, Aboriginal women make up approximately **3%** of the adult female population, but **46%** of women in prison (ABS, 2017).



Image via sbs.com.au/nitv

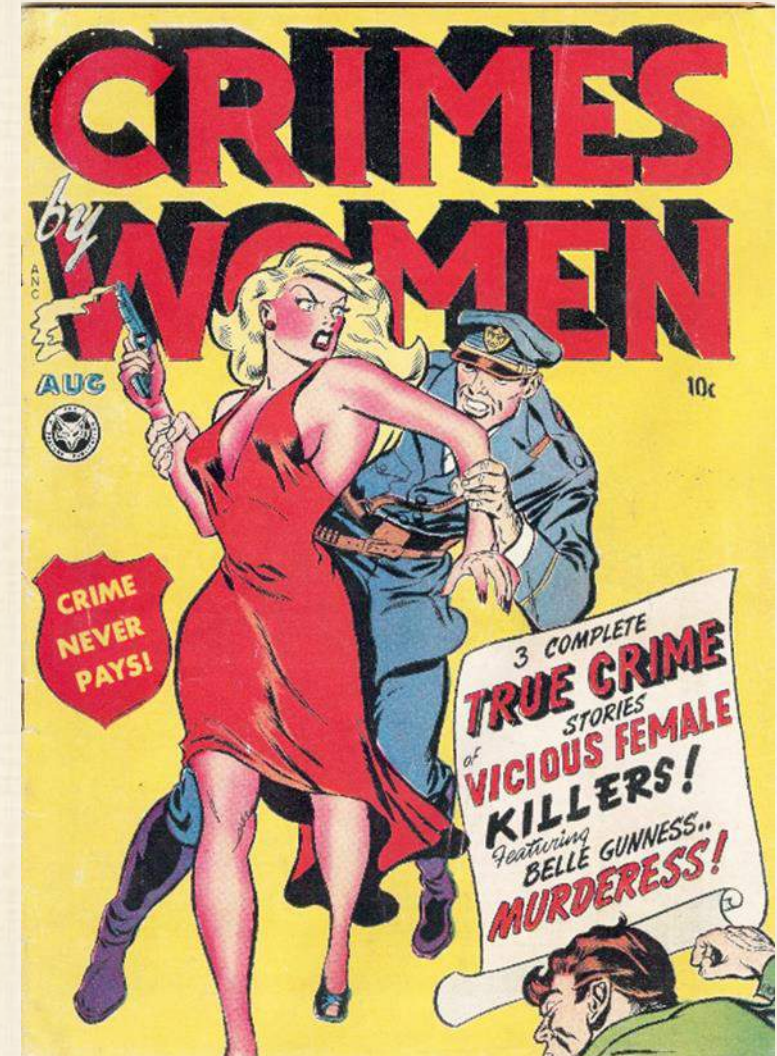
Characteristics of female offenders

- Female prisoners comprise a vulnerable population characterised by high rates of:
 - previous childhood neglect;
 - poverty and under-employment;
 - family dysfunction;
 - trauma;
 - substance use;
 - sexual and physical abuse; and,
 - victimisation as adults (including interpersonal and intimate partner violence in particular).



Women convicted of or awaiting sentencing for violent offences

- Over the decade 2006-2016 in Australia the number of women sentenced for a violent offence has increased by more than 50%.
- In 2017, 40% of women in Australian prisons were convicted of, or awaiting sentencing for, violent offences.
- Aboriginal women overrepresented in these statistics – 52% incarcerated for violent offences compared to 33% among non-Aboriginal women (ABS, 2017).



Women's use of violence

- Likely to have experienced childhood abuse, to suffer from a range of mental health issues, to have past experiences of trauma and been witness to violence, and to have substance use problems (Swan, et al. 2008);
- Often qualitatively different from the violence perpetrated by men (less likely to cause injury, less likely to be used to control/dominate);
- More likely to know their victim and frequently, but not always, to be in response to their partner's on-going and sustained abuse (Swan, et al. 2008; Miller 2008);
- Women's involvement in physical violence may also be for reasons such as self-defence, resistance, survival, power, pleasure, respect and status (Carrington, 2013).

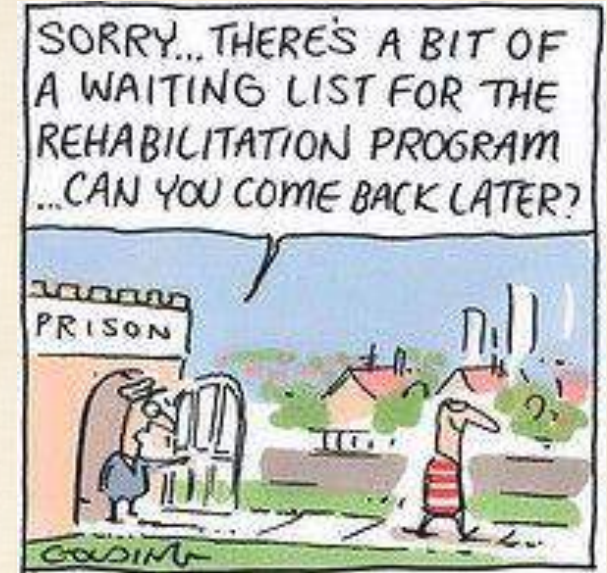
Programs for addressing women's violence?

In general:

- Few studies have investigated the efficacy of prison-based violence intervention prevention programs;
- Few empirically tested interventions have been specifically designed for the population of women convicted of violent offences (Kubiak et al., 2012);
- Growing evidence of the need for treatment programs that are gender-responsive, trauma-informed and multi-model that focus on the identified gender-specific responsivity and treatment needs of female offenders (Blanchette and Brown, 2006; Bottos, 2007).

In prisons in Australia – GAP IDENTIFIED:

- Few programs for women in the prisons, long waiting lists;
- Programs that do exist are often designed for and available to men/gender neutral; and,
- No intensive programs targeting women's use of violence.

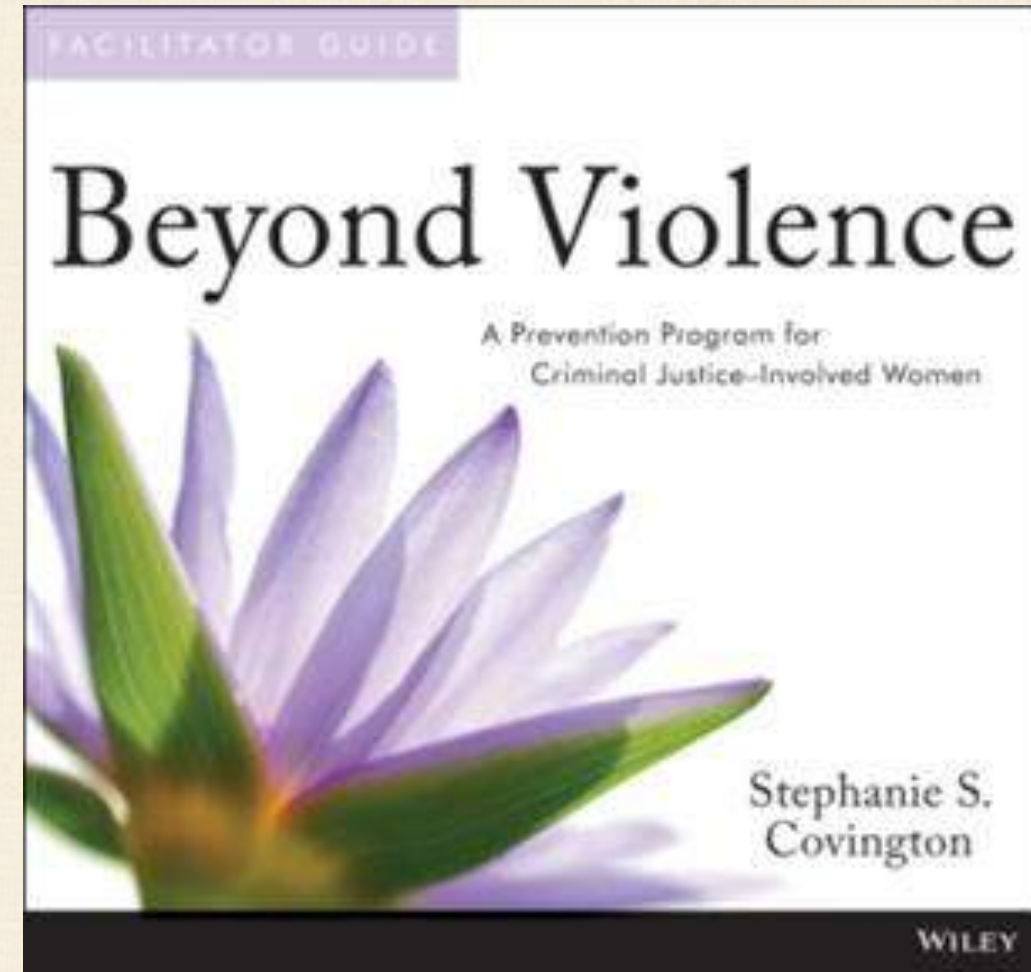


'Our ability to design appropriate treatment and prevention programming is limited by our inadequate knowledge of the aetiology of female aggression' (Dowd 2013)

The search for evidence-based programs ...

Beyond Violence (Covington, 2013):

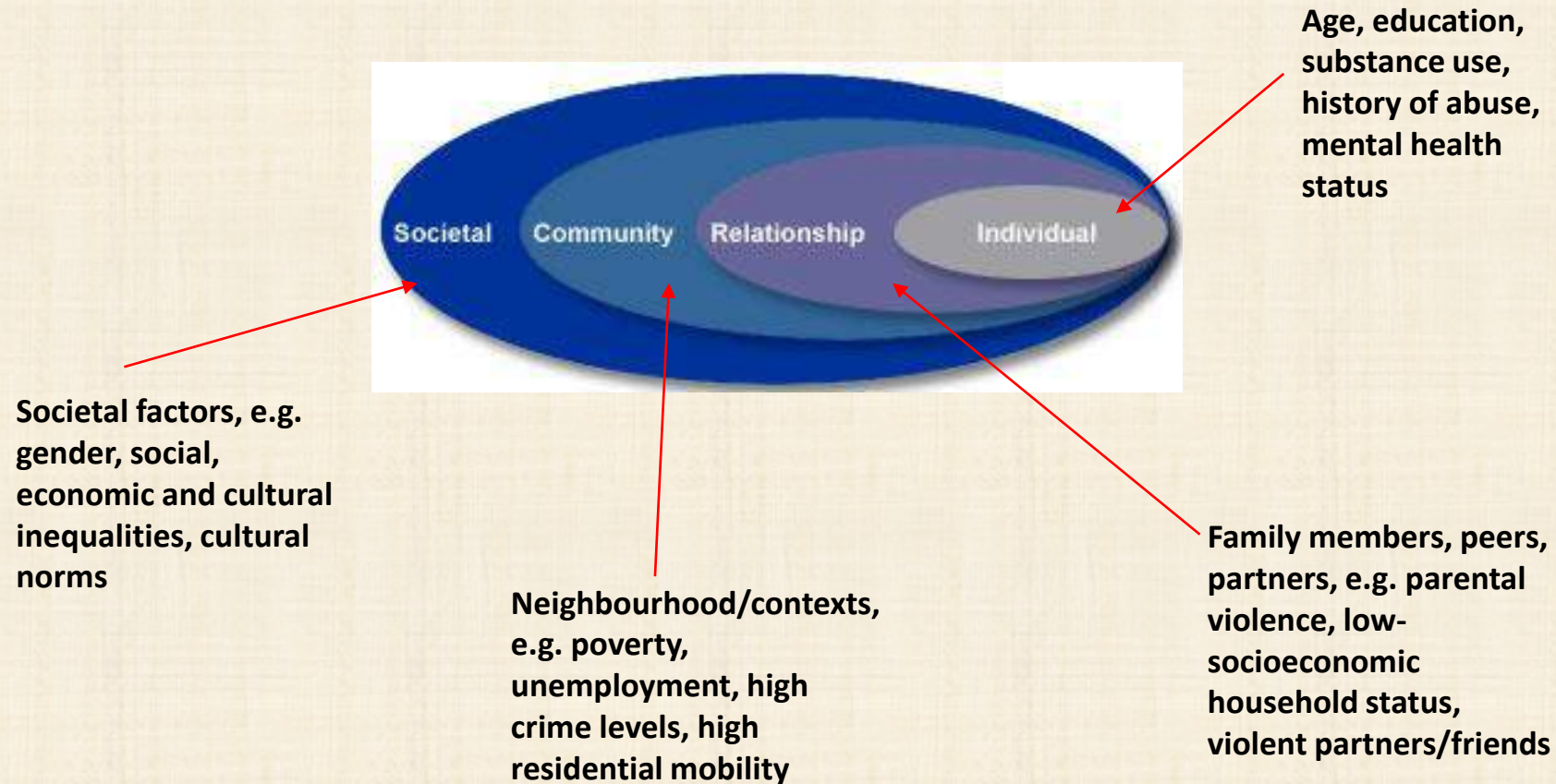
- Intensive 40 hour **violence prevention, mental health and substance use** intervention for incarcerated female offenders;
- Trauma informed, gender-specific;
- Privileges women's experiences of **victimisation**, their social roles as **women** in their communities, **substance use** and/or **mental health** issues;
- Uses evidence-based therapeutic strategies (i.e., psycho-education, role playing, mindfulness activities, cognitive-behavioral restructuring and grounding skills for trauma triggers).



Beyond Violence - key theoretical underpinnings

- **Pathways Theory:** a life-course perspective which recognises the gender differences in life experiences between women and men, the dynamics of these experiences, and resulting outcomes;
- **Relational-Cultural Theory:** acknowledges the cultural context, and the power of connection and the pain of disconnection, particularly for women;
- **Gender-responsive programming:** includes the creation of an environment – through site selection, staff selection, program development, and program content and materials – that reflects an understanding of the realities of females' lives and that addresses and responds to their challenges and strengths
- **Addiction Theory:** understanding that addiction is always a part of a larger portrait that includes a woman's individual history, and the social, economic, and cultural factors that create the context of her life; and,
- **Trauma Theory:** is grounded on the understanding that exposure to trauma impacts on understandings of and responses to life events. Exposure to trauma, particularly that which occurs early in life, or is ongoing, can result in suppressed anger and/or the use of alcohol and other drugs

The social ecological model of violence (World Health Organization)



Overview of Beyond Violence Program

Opening session	Orientation: introduction and overview of program
Module A: Self (6 sessions)	Thinking Our Thoughts; Feeling Our Feelings; Violence and Trauma in Our Lives; The Effects of Trauma; Women and Anger; Understanding Ourselves
Module B: Relationships (5 sessions)	Families; Communication; Power and Control; Conflict Resolution; Relationships
Module C: Community (4 sessions)	Communities; Safety; Creating Community; Power of Community
Module D: Society (4 sessions)	Society and Violence; Creating Change; Transforming Our Lives; Honouring Ourselves and Our Communities

Beyond Violence RCT trial outcomes in the United States

Comparison between groups: 12 month recidivism data

Group	Number	Return to prison	Any arrest	Any jail	Total
Treatment as usual	16	0	6 (37.5%)	8 (50%)	14
Beyond Violence	19	0	2 (10.5%)	3 (15.8%)	5

- The odds of women in the BV condition recidivating decreased by 79% compared to the rate for women in the TAU condition (Kubiak et al., 2016).
- Those in the BV group experienced significant reductions in anxiety and anger, compared to the TAU group (Kubiak, et al. 2014).
- 83% completed BV with an average attendance of 97% (high) (Kubiak, et al. 2012).

Conclusions

- Female incarceration rates have sky-rocketed;
- Female prisoners are a neglected population in policy initiatives and research which has impeded the development of evidence-based responses to female offending;
- Women and men's violence is qualitatively different and programs designed for men are not appropriate for use with women;
- Evidence of what works for women convicted of violent crimes is in its infancy but points to the need for:
 - gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches which acknowledge women's specific pathways to prison (including histories of victimisation and abuse, substance use and mental health issues).

QUESTIONS?



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