

OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 focuses on the problems created by a wave of mass incarceration in our society. It sets the stage for understanding the problems chaplains, staff, and volunteers will face in their ministry work. We learn that justice-involved women are more likely to be incarcerated for non-violent drug and property offenses. More than incarcerated men, women are less likely to receive opportunities to earn time off sentences by following the rules or have access to programming resources. Justice-involved women will face more disciplinary actions (as well as more severe sanctions) as compared to male inmates with similar behavior. After release, women may become victims of mandatory arrests, and remain longer on probation and parole.

Chapter 2 paints a portrait of justice-involved women by looking at the unique challenges they face. Apart from the larger issues of mass incarceration, women face different problems than their male counterparts, and their tenure in correctional facilities make these problems worse. Most of these women have a history of abuse, trauma, and mental health issues before incarceration. Many are mothers who were primary caregivers before incarceration, so the welfare of her children is a high concern and motivating factor. They have different health needs, involving reproductive healthcare and treatment for substance use that facilities designed for men frequently fail to offer. Influential to their future is the number and quality of programs accessed, mental and physical health care received, amount of family support, length of time spent in custody, and spiritual care.

Chapter 3 introduces a basic understanding of how the criminal justice system works, with relevant legal terminology. It gives a comprehensive, but easy-to-read overview from initial arrest to sentencing to release. It explains the incarceration process in order to understand what jail

residents are facing as well as what women within prison systems have already endured. It is important to point out that this chapter is solely informational. It reminds us that jail and prison ministry workers stand outside the legal system. Lacking confidentiality privileges, they must not ask justice-involved women about their case and they do not give legal advice.

Chapter 4 looks at different issues involved in the correctional control of female prisoners by introducing five approaches currently used in jails and prisons. We learn that correctional control of women affects their vulnerabilities regardless of age, crime, or treatment services needed. Few correctional settings have programmatic resources or specially trained staff to address these issues, and necessary rules and regulations at correctional facilities place these women at greater risk. Safety, operating costs, administrative leadership, and employee training will always be important guideposts, but this chapter raises hopeful signs of change in a new era of gender-responsive correctional control.

Chapter 5 introduces correctional institutions as distinctive cultures, and sets up the process of social interaction that teaches newcomers the values and standards of their new environment. Justice-involved women focus on how to become members of a new group. It enables newly incarcerated women to fit in and interact appropriately as they are accepted by other residents. The collective narrative of representative justice-involved women underscores the fact that whether correctional facilities adapt policies and practices that are more punishment-based or strive to create therapeutic communities, incarceration is both dehumanizing and difficult.

Chapter 6 conveys the experience of female incarceration through the words of justice-involved women who discuss the prison code. These are the norms of the group and rules for behavior in the personal and public spaces of the correctional facility. The development of relationships, reference groups, “families” and cliques are noted. The phenomenon of same-sex engagement during incarceration (“gay for the stay, straight at the gate”) and distinctive patterns of working through conflicts provide a helpful context for ministry workers who want to understand institutional life.

Chapter 7 examines lingering reactions to correctional culture and reverse culture shock experienced as women transition from incarceration to release. “Doing time” adds the voices of correctional leadership, volunteer staff, and recent research in order to identify three emotional themes that will impact positive change after release. We look at ways to minimize the effects of reverse culture shock before women transition to freedom. Most newly incarcerated women adapt to their new “normal” through the help of insiders who show them the ropes and will need this same help in readjustment after doing time.

Chapter 8 revisits earlier data in order to construct a new portrait of those women who are coming home. Moving from emotional responses to incarceration culture shock, the practical problems of reintegration into communities are addressed. Financial issues, including economic marginalization, and relational aspects of identity (e.g., gender norms, trauma, dysfunctional partnerships, family reunification, spiritual growth, mental health, and substance use) are used as realistic markers for success.

Chapter 9 focuses discussion on the challenges of parole and probation as women transition from jails and prisons. Constructing plans for reentry addresses the risks and needs in each stage. The transition stage (prior to release) looks at the practical needs of housing, employment, food and clothing. The community stage (following release) examines issues of accountability and support. The collateral consequences of a felony conviction are discussed. Finally, three dominant reentry perspectives drawn from our interviews and surveys express why some justice-involved women are reluctant to leave the structured world of prison, anxiety about being able to have what it takes to make it, and their desire to be ‘normal’.

Chapter 10 approaches the impact of abuse and trauma experienced by many justice-involved women from the perspective of clinical psychologists and counselors. Strategies that helpers use when working with abused women are introduced, such as nonverbal acceptance and reflective listening. The relationship between stress, trauma, self-efficacy, and resilience is illustrated. Rethinking weaknesses as strengths can enhance the impact of a faith community to care and help make sense of what these women have experienced, providing a practical “ministry of presence”.

Chapter 11 looks at the experiences of chaplains and program directors that use principles of spiritual formation in their work with justice-involved women during and after incarceration. The Christian idea of spiritual formation very simply is the forming, conforming, and transforming of the human personality—body, mind, and spirit—into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This chapter draws information from interviews and surveys that focus on the challenges of creating life change, as well as well-known theologians who have discussed these ideas.

Chapter 12 focuses on the experiences of over 500 people who faithfully volunteer to work with justice-involved women. The United States correctional system relies heavily on religious volunteers to meet the spiritual needs of those in custody or reentry. However, there is little research about these volunteers, and existing studies are often facility or ministry specific. We incorporate illustrations from the volunteer’s point of view to highlight the nature of their work, the tensions created by their service, and strategies they find effective in working with justice-involved women. The manner in which the volunteer responds to these tensions determines whether her work experience will be a positive or negative one.

Chapter 13 revisits adaptations of the five approaches to correctional control (criminogenic risks, strengths-based, trauma-informed, evidence-based, gender-responsive care) to ministry applications with incarcerated women. The challenges each presents to administrators and leaders, as well as the ability to measure “success” within correctional ministries is raised.

Chapter 14 focuses on institutional and reentry programs for women. We talk about ways to engage life behind bars and build effective reentry programs. Best practices for maximizing volunteer time within prisons and communities, working with correctional staff, and turning the odds of reintegration in their favor are raised. However, effective programs for justice-involved women must do more than give volunteers the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfill the organizational mission. They must offer encouragement and reframe “success” in order to understand how spiritual transformation affects moral formation to create change. We highlight what one state has done by way of prison reform. Their changes

bring hope for the future of incarcerated females and those who work toward their success.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Karen K. Swanson has been involved in correctional ministries for 21 years. She has been the Director of the Institute for Prison Ministries in the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center since 2005. In this role, Dr. Swanson has been engaged in teaching courses in correctional ministries, training volunteers and program directors, developing a certification program for chaplains, and hosting yearly professional conferences. As both leader and volunteer, she has been a strong advocate for those affected by mass incarceration.

Dr. Swanson's vision was for a data-driven book for a varied audience who shared a willingness to learn more about the problems, process, and people affected by mass incarceration. The immediate purpose is to train the next generation of workers in healing premises, providers, and programs that encourage Christian formation. This is the daily work of the Institute for Prison Ministries.

Dr. Swanson also wanted a volume that would allow justice-involved women to tell their own stories, in their own words. She wanted a comprehensive text that would speak of the large number of experienced volunteers, ministry workers, correctional officers, and prison administrators who have given generously of their time and energy over time. This validates the importance of their work and underscores their creation of a place that allows spiritual change to take place every day.

While Dr. Swanson brings the practitioner's perspective, Dr. Lynn O. Cooper applies social science research from her areas of expertise: organizational communication, group dynamics, and social influence. Dr. Cooper is Professor Emerita of Communication at Wheaton College, where she taught graduate and undergraduate courses for over four decades. For this text, she interviewed and surveyed over 550 justice-involved women, chaplains, volunteers, ministry leaders, psychologists, and prison administrators from 38 states in order to provide a data-driven foundation for this work.

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We conclude with a word of appreciation for all who serve justice-involved women and their families. Many working within the criminal system daily provide sacrificial efforts that advance mercy and justice. Those on the front lines—the chaplains, volunteers, and reentry staff—are vital in creating real change. Special thanks go to those working in small faith-based non-profits who are investing in these women and helping them transition back into society.

We know this ministry can be financially challenging and hard to measure in terms of success. It is discouraging at those times when a woman relapses or returns to illegal activity. This is a ministry that is never completed because it is a mercy ministry. However, growth occurs, and you have elevated both the individual who is served as well as the name of Christ.

Most importantly, to those of you who have been justice-involved women and been transformed, your stories give us all hope. Your courage and faith in the face of incredible odds gives us the encouragement to continue in this important work. Together, we all rise.