National Institute of Corrections

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Introduction

This study of women’s prisons summarizes results of a written survey conducted by the NIC Information Center at the request of the NIC Prisons Division. Forty-nine state departments of corrections (DOCs) responded to the survey, as did the New York City and District of Columbia DOCs, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the Correctional Service of Canada. Intended to focus primarily on secure facilities housing only adult female offenders, the report provides the following information as of December 31, 1997:

- The names and locations of secure facilities housing adult female offenders;
- The number of women offenders housed at each facility;
- Staffing ratios and the gender breakdown of staff;
- The availability of specialized training for staff working with female inmates; and
- Programs and policies specific to female inmates.

Survey responses were interpreted with some flexibility to allow for the inclusion of data from DOCs that house women offenders primarily or exclusively in co-correctional facilities. Information on female populations in facilities providing special medical care was not included. In addition, some agencies did not provide information in response to all the survey’s questions. Despite these inconsistencies, project findings provide a useful indicator of the ways agencies are working to manage and meet the needs of the women in their custody.

Facilities Housing Female Offenders

The survey identified at least 108 secure facilities housing female state-sentenced offenders in the U.S. as of December 31, 1997.

- Forty (40) state DOCs were operating a total of 92 secure facilities that housed only female inmates.
- Ten (10) state DOCs were operating at least 16 secure facilities housing both males and females.

Table 1, beginning on page 8, summarizes basic information on state facilities and on women’s facilities operated by the New York City Department of Corrections, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, and the Correctional Service of Canada. An appendix provides contact information provided by survey respondents.

Information included in Table 1 covers all women’s prisons identified by survey respondents and, for some jurisdictions as noted, additional female-only institutions identified in the American Correctional Association’s 1998 Directory: Juvenile and Adult Correctional Departments, Institutions, Agencies, and Paroling Authorities (Laurel, Maryland: American Correctional Association, 1998). These facilities were added to the table without verification by the DOCs that they continue to house female offenders, and any errors in this regard are those of project staff.
Use of separate and co-correctional institutions. Corrections agencies house female offenders in both single-sex and co-correctional institutions.

- Among the 50 state DOCs, 21 house women offenders in a single, female-only facility. The New York City DOC also has a single, secure facility for women offenders.
- Nineteen (19) state DOCs house their female population in more than one women’s prison. These states include both those with the largest general inmate populations (e.g., California, Michigan, and Texas) and those with either medium or small general populations (e.g., Indiana, New Mexico, and Virginia).
- Six state DOCs house women offenders only in co-correctional institutions. These agencies include the DOCs in Alaska, Kansas, Maine, North Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.
- Four state DOCs operate one single-sex facility for women plus one or more co-correctional facilities. These states include Hawaii, Illinois, New Hampshire, and Oregon.

Both the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and the Correctional Service of Canada house women in multiple institutions. The Bureau of Prisons houses women offenders primarily at six facilities; the Canadian system has seven main facilities for women. Other facilities in these systems also house women offenders.

Privatization of women’s institutions. Six state DOCs contract with private providers for the operation of women’s facilities.

- The single women’s institution in Arkansas is privately operated.
- Private corporations operate one of the state’s institutions for women in Florida, Kentucky, Nevada, and New Mexico (each with two women’s prisons) and Texas (with a total of 11 facilities for women).

Staffing Issues

Ratio of custody staff to inmates. Sixty-four agencies or individual institutions provided data that made it possible to compute the ratio of custody staff positions to female inmates. These figures are presented in Table 1. Results within the state DOCs range from nearly 1 correctional officer per inmate in one Missouri facility to 1 correctional officer to 10.4 inmates in Vermont. A ratio of 1 to 4.4 was found to be the mean among responding state DOCs.

Although the custody classification of female inmates likely has some bearing on an institution’s custody staff/inmate ratio, the survey did not explore this issue. The data suggest, however, that larger facilities tend to have more inmates per correctional officer.

- Among 21 small women’s institutions (defined as those with fewer than 300 inmates), the custody staff/inmate ratio is 1 to 3.8.
- Among 24 medium-sized institutions (defined as those with total inmate populations between 300 and 800), the mean custody staff/inmate ratio is 1 to 4.7.
- For 13 large prisons (those with an inmate population more than 800, the ratio also is 1 officer to 4.6 inmates.

This analysis excludes the data reported for the Texas system as a whole, which has a variety of institutions and a total female inmate population of 10,303. The system’s average custody staff/inmate ratio is 1 to 4.7.

Proportion of female staff in women’s institutions. The survey collected information on the number of female staff in custody, program, and administrative positions in institutions that house female inmates. Data were requested on the gender breakdown of both DOC staff and contract staff in these three staffing categories.

In most women’s institutions, women constitute a significant portion of DOC staff in custody, program, and administrative positions. In all three areas women fill an average of more than 50 percent of the positions. While some women’s institutions are staffed
entirely by women in the areas of program and administration, none has a custody staff made up entirely of women.

- **Custody positions**—Female staff hold the majority of custody positions in women’s prisons. In state-operated facilities, female staff fill on average 55 percent of custody positions. Among custody positions in individual DOCs, the range is from 18 to 97 percent female staff. Two state DOCs have fewer than 30 percent female staff in custody positions in women’s prisons; 30 states have from 30 to 70 percent women in these positions; and in 10 state systems, 70 percent or more of custody staff are women.

In the three privately operated prisons for women for which data were provided, an average of 69 percent of the contract custody staff are women.

- **Program positions**—Female staff also fill a majority of program positions in women’s prisons. In state-operated facilities for women, women fill an average of 69 percent of the program positions. DOCs reported a range from 21 to 100 percent of program positions as being held by women staff.

The use of contract staff in program positions was reported by 40 institutions. These staff are predominantly women—on average, women constitute about 72 percent of contracted program positions.

- **Administrative positions**—Women also hold a significant proportion of administrative positions in women’s prisons. In state-operated facilities for women, the percentage of women administrators ranges from 25 percent to 100 percent and averages 66 percent.

Twelve institutions reported data on contract staff in administrative positions within women’s prisons. The number of women in these positions ranges from 0 to 100 percent. The average is about 79 percent.

In general, across all three categories, smaller institutions are likely to have a higher percentage of women staff than larger institutions.

In state systems with more than one women’s prison, the data show considerable variation from institution to institution in the percentage of women filling custody, program, and administrative positions. While one DOC facility may have a custody staff that is less than one-third women, for example, a second facility in the same state may employ over two-thirds women in custody positions. Similarly, where one institution may have less than 20 percent women in program positions, another facility in the same state may have 75 percent women in this category.

Overall in-state variations are least marked in the category of administrative staff. In nearly all instances women occupy at least half of all administrative positions in women’s prisons.

Variations within agencies that have more than one women’s prison suggest that staffing is generally governed by particular institutional circumstances rather than a systematic preference for female staff. However, some DOCs (e.g., North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina) report a consistently high percentage of women in all categories, which may reflect an agency-wide preference for placing women in these positions. On the other hand, the Vermont respondent noted that a labor union contract specifically forbids assignments on the basis of gender.

**Staff training on women offender issues.** Correctional agencies vary widely in their approach to training on issues specific to women offenders. Individual agencies are equally likely to emphasize either preservice, annual inservice, or ad hoc training for this purpose, and most use a combination of approaches. Some cover women offender issues principally during preservice orientation, while other agencies have a more or less equal balance between preservice and annual training on women offender issues.

In terms of specialized, ad hoc training on women offender issues, agencies also report wide variation. DOC respondents in Florida and Kentucky indicated that staff receive 16 hours of such training, and Minnesota reported 37 hours. Most agencies report smaller numbers of hours for ad hoc training than for annual training on issues related to women offenders, but a few indicated that the specialized training they provide on women offender issues is done only on an ad hoc basis.
Approaches to providing specialized training include the following:

- Idaho’s 40 hours of preservice training are comprised of a self-study module developed with funding from NIC, which the employee is required to complete during his/her probationary period.
- The North Dakota DOC sends staff who work with women offenders to seminars offered outside the agency.

Policy Issues

The survey also explored differences in agency policies affecting male and female inmates. Table 2, page 12, identifies the DOCs that have developed different formal policies for male and female inmates in several areas of facility operation.

General operations. Different formal policies exist for male and female inmates in several areas of operation, affecting inmate management and offenders’ daily lives.

Most of the DOCs have different policies in two specific areas:

- The range of health and beauty items inmates may purchase from the commissary; and
- Allowed lists of personal property.

In other areas, policies affecting men and women offenders are more often the same:

- Policies on visitation and telephone use are overwhelmingly the same for male and female inmates.
- Nearly 80 percent of the reporting agencies provide the same diets for men and women offenders. Differences in the remaining 20 percent are usually accounted for by special diets for pregnant women.
- About 80 percent of agencies have the same transportation policies for men and women offenders, with the exception of policies specifically related to pregnant women. Some agencies specify that the transport team for women offenders must include a female officer.
- Approximately 80 percent of agencies provide the same activities for the visiting children of either men or women offenders.
- Roughly 80 percent of agencies have a single policy addressing pat searches of men and women offenders. Among the five DOCs that provided copies of their pat search policies, three specify that pat searches should be performed by staff of the same sex as the inmate when possible (Texas) or except in an emergency (Wisconsin and Washington). In Washington, an emergency is defined as a situation involving potential loss of contraband, escape, or the need for emergency movement in which “there is no ability to keep the inmate under observation until a same gender search can be performed.” Policy language in Florida and Nebraska is less restrictive; the Florida DOC, for example, permits searches “by appropriate staff who may be of the opposite sex from the inmates.”
- Approximately one-third of responding agencies report different policies for men and women offenders with regard to hair length and grooming.
- About one-third of responding agencies (18 DOCs) have different policies regarding parenting programs available to men and women offenders.

Differences in operating men’s and women’s prisons may also be observed without being made a part of formal agency policy, or policies may be established or implemented at the institutional level, making comparison difficult in the context of this study. For example, the Oregon respondent noted that women may order cosmetics, blow dryers, and curling irons from the canteen and are given smaller servings of food than men, but the DOC’s formal rules and procedures are the same for men and women offenders. Other respondents also noted latitude at the facility level in interpreting and applying departmental regulations.

Control and transport of pregnant inmates.

Twenty-one (21) responding DOCs have developed specific policies or procedures addressing the physical control and transportation of pregnant inmates. These agencies are the DOCs in Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, New York City, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington,
and Wisconsin and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and the Correctional Service of Canada.

Some agency policies on pregnant inmates specify different approaches to restraint depending on the trimester of pregnancy.

- **Missouri DOC** policy specifies that full security measures, in accordance with the inmate’s custody level and the type of transportation, should be in effect for pregnant inmates in their first trimester. Women beyond the first trimester are restrained only with handcuffs. Strip searches may be conducted, but no squat procedures are used. A woman who has begun labor is transported by ambulance without restraints; however, an officer/staff member with a full set of restraints accompanies her.

- **Utah DOC** policy states that during the first trimester, restraining is in the normal fashion; for the second trimester, staff may use side cuffs or two pairs of handcuffs secured to the back of the waist chain plus leg restraints. For the third trimester, officers are directed to use only side cuffs and no leg restraints.

More general policies include:

- The **Bedford Hills Correctional Facility** in New York permits “only hand restraints for pregnant women unless security review indicates that leg restraints are necessary and only if medical approval is obtained for leg restraints.”

- The **Kansas DOC**’s policy specifies that from the fifth month of pregnancy an inmate “shall not have leg irons applied until seated in the transportation vehicle” and that such restraints shall be removed prior to her exiting the vehicle. Electronic control devices are also expressly prohibited in the Kansas policy.

- The **Louisiana DOC** policy states that “in all cases where pregnancy is visually obvious, the resident will be assisted by escorting security personnel in negotiating steps, entering and exiting vans, or any other precarious footing, by keeping a hand on the resident’s arm at a minimum, or any other assistance that appears to be needed.”

- The privately operated women’s facility in Florida is prohibited from housing pregnant inmates, according to a state Health Services Bulletin. If a pregnancy is discovered, medical personnel are directed to initiate a transfer to the Florida Correctional Institution.

**Involvement of medical personnel in transportation/restraint decisions.** In 39 responding agencies, medical personnel are involved in evaluating individual cases prior to the restraint of pregnant women.

- The **Oregon DOC** noted that such evaluation takes place only when the woman is being transported on a medical trip.

- The **Maine DOC** respondent commented that a medical evaluation is the result of common practice rather than specific policy.

- In the **Pennsylvania DOC**, medical personnel are involved prior to the restraint of any offender, regardless of gender.

- In the **Correctional Service of Canada**, medical personnel are involved only on a case-by-case basis.

**Gender-Specific Programs for Women Offenders**

The survey sought information on programs developed specifically to meet women offenders’ needs. Such women-focused programs may be considered to fall into two general categories:

1. Programs offered solely or primarily to women offenders and addressing issues common among female offender populations. Examples include programs dealing with victimization through domestic violence or sexual abuse and programs addressing low self-esteem or the need for mentoring.

2. Programs on issues common to both men and women offenders, in which the specific program content has been modified to deal with the different treatment needs of or “survival skills” important to women. Examples include life skills training and substance abuse treatment.
Forty-nine (49) DOCs reported that they provide programs developed specifically for women offenders. Such programs most often address parenting (31 institutions), substance abuse (27 institutions), domestic violence (20 institutions), and life skills (18 institutions). Material describing some of these programs was provided with survey responses and is available from the NIC Information Center.

**Programs addressing issues specific to women offenders**

- **Nursery programs**—Programs that allow inmate mothers to keep their babies near them while they are incarcerated are available in several DOCs. Facilities including the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women, New York State’s Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and the Rose Singer Center in New York City have nursery programs in which women offenders and their infants are housed together. Care of the infant is the primary responsibility of the inmate mother, who must take courses in child development.

- **Mentoring/self-esteem**—Eight DOCs report that they offer a mentoring program for women offenders, and three agencies provide programs targeted to improving female inmates’ self-esteem. A Colorado program examines the roles that women play in one another’s lives. The program provides women the opportunity to work toward becoming a mentor for other women offenders, to share what has made it possible for them to change since their incarceration. Women wishing to accept the role of mentor are required to complete a 16-week program on concepts such as self-esteem, relationships, communication, leadership, and value systems.

- **Survivors’ groups**—Twenty (20) institutions offer programs for women who have experienced domestic violence, and 10 offer programs addressing survivor issues for victims of sexual abuse. Abused Living Females is a support group that meets weekly in the Oregon Women’s Correctional Center and has a special focus on women who have killed or attempted to kill their abusers. The program addresses alternatives to violence, self-esteem, recognition of abusers, the cycle of abuse, and positive choices.

The Correctional Service of Canada has established a program for survivors of abuse and trauma, designated a core program for women offenders in recognition that the impact of victimization is severe enough to affect many other areas of a person’s life.

- **Health education**—Nine DOCs provide special programs addressing women’s health education.

- **Other**—Wellspring, a program provided by the Salvation Army to Nebraska inmates, offers support and advocacy for women wanting to get out of prostitution.

**Programs addressing issues common to men and women offenders**

- **Parenting**—In June 1991, 67 percent of women in state prisons were mothers of children under age 18, as compared with 56 percent of men. (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991,” March 1993) The high proportion of women offenders who are mothers has lent emphasis to the need for parenting programs in women’s prisons.

In the Illinois DOC’s Dwight Correctional Center, the Family Services Program focuses in part on protecting incarcerated mothers’ parental rights. Among its many initiatives are an overnight weekend visitation program in a camp setting designed to encourage quality visitation; a Mother Love Parenting Class; specialized counseling focused on the issue of parenting; and MECCA, an organization of inmate mothers with focus on positive support for families and children.

Minnesota’s Shakopee facility has a parenting/family program designed to help mothers keep contact with their children, maintain their families when possible, and provide opportunities for inmate mothers to improve their parenting skills. In addition to providing for extended visitation and specific groups, the program acts as liaison with county agencies and others involved with the inmates’ children. Phone calls and professional visits may be arranged as part of this function.

“Girl Scouts Behind Bars” allows daughters, who are Girl Scouts, of women offenders the opportunity to have two meetings per month in the prison.
Meetings are held with the inmate mothers to encourage bonding.

The Correctional Service of Canada has established national guidelines for parenting programs provided for women offenders.

- Reintegration-Specialized reintegration programs were identified by several DOCs and may include short-term assistance and training in making the transition to the community. MCI-Framingham’s Project AWARE (Assisting Women Achieve Reintegration and Employment) program is designed to teach women offenders in Massachusetts the skills necessary for reintegration planning. It provides comprehensive discharge planning, referrals, and direct links to services in the community.

- Substance abuse- The Hawaii DOC’s Ho’omana program is a therapeutic community for women. It has somewhat different goals, structure, and activities from the men’s program, because it is based on a recognition that substance dependence in women is complicated by dysfunctional relationships including histories of domestic and sexual abuse. The Ho’omana program addresses these stressors from an empowerment approach to change.

- Life skills-The life skills curriculum used in the Michigan DOC is based on a needs assessment of women prisoners. The assessment identified nine areas of program needs and was the foundation for the DOC’s Life Skills Education program. The program was subsequently funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is the basis for pre-release programming for women offenders.

- Mental health-The Correctional Service of Canada has established two Intensive Healing Programs to assist women to address behaviors associated with borderline personality disorder. Treatment focuses on cognitive-behavioral therapy.

- Other-Five DOCs report the availability of training in anger management and alternatives to violence. Ten agencies report that they offer programs for female sex offenders. A few agencies offer programs focused on employment of women in such areas as computer skills, cosmetology, and general vo-tech. One program teaches active listening skills.

Looking Ahead

As the number of women in prison continues to grow, correctional agencies will experience more pressure to provide an appropriate operational response. Some DOC respondents described ways their agencies are undertaking a comprehensive approach to the special issues surrounding women offenders.

- The Correctional Service of Canada has developed a Correctional Program Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women, which defines the core programs for women offenders. The core programs are similar to those for men, with the exception of the Survivors of Abuse and Trauma Programs. Other core programs for women are Living Skills, Substance Abuse, Literacy and Continuous Learning, and Survivors of Abuse and Trauma.

- The U.S. Bureau of Prisons has a national policy requiring that any new or revised policy or programs consider gender.

- The Vermont DOC currently has a major initiative focusing on female offenders. It includes hiring a Director for Women Offenders (covering women in institutions, on parole, on furlough, etc.), developing specific policies on women, opening a free-standing women’s facility and two community-based residential programs for women and children, and continued use of treatment beds specifically for women.
Table 1. Secure Facilities Housing Women Inmates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Name and Location</th>
<th>Women Inmate Population, 12/31/97</th>
<th>Custody Staff Positions</th>
<th>No. of Inmates per Custody Position</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women, Wetumpka</td>
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<td>Idaho</td>
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<td>** Dismas House of Owensboro</td>
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Table 1, continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Facility Name and Location</th>
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Table 2. Existence of Different Policies for Male and Female Prison Inmates

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Operation of Women’s Prisons
September 1998