RESEARCH

Prisoners of Age: The Women

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Aging men and women are the most rapidly growing group in U.S. prisons. Older women in particular seem to be forgotten in this population. "Prisoners of Age" is a series of photographs and interviews with elderly inmates and corrections personnel conducted in prisons both in the United States and Canada. "Prisoners of Age" offers a microcosmic glimpse of what lies ahead in this new millennium. The photos in the Prisoners of Age_The Women (ages 52–81) serve to capture the complexity of a subject that is seldom contemplated – aging women offenders in the correctional system. The purpose of this article is to put a face to the women aging in prison, share their story, consider the human dimension of doing time while growing old in prison and address issues of social justice and human dignity through the images and interviews.

Keywords: Women aging in prison; social justice; human dignity

Introduction

Prisons are not built for the vulnerable. Aging and older women in particular seem to be forgotten in this population. According to the Human Rights Watch, aging men and women are the most rapidly growing group in U.S. prisons, and prison officials are struggling to provide them appropriate housing and medical care (6). Williams asserts although there is no commonly agreed-upon age at which an incarcerated individual is "old"—definitions range from 50 to 65—medical practitioners and corrections professionals agree that adverse life circumstances both during and prior to incarceration lead to accelerated aging. A 50-year-old inmate is considered elderly in the prison system. Put simply, people who have been incarcerated very often have the physiological attributes of much older people (1477). The Osborne Association reports "by 2030, the population of people aged 50 and older is projected to account for one-third of all incarcerated people in the U.S." (i). The Vera Institute of Justice states the disparate impact on people and communities of color is also part of this disturbing landscape: black youth are 5 times more likely to be incarcerated than white youth; 1 in 3 black men is expected to spend time in prison (compared to one in 17 white men); 2 and close to 2/3 of women in prison are women of color (7). As reported in Cox, "Lee and Wildeman hypothesize mechanisms through which mass imprisonment may increase hypertension, diabetes, and obesity among non-incarcerated African American women. They also highlight the ways through which social bonds to incarcerated men can compromise the health of African American women, and assert that incarceration diminishes socioeconomic status, compromises family functioning, and adversely affects stress levels and mental health" (51–52). According to Patterson, because of higher rates of illness and impairments in older prisoners they have medical costs that are three to nine times as high as those for younger prisoners. Furthermore, they find a negative impact of incarceration on the mortality rates of women (587–588). Today's prisoners are older, sicker, and incarcerated for longer terms than ever before. Complications associated with aging are hastened while in prison. When you reflect on the unhealthy lifestyles, illnesses, and traumas common among aging female prisoners, you can appreciate the special demands of these offenders. They get sick at high rates, in part due to the stresses of imprisonment, and this requires expensive care, at a time of severe budget cuts. Prisons are a microcosm of society: as the general population ages, the prison population ages. The female prisoner population in particular continues to grow at an alarming rate. The number of female prisoners is rising at a faster rate than the number of male prisoners. The percent increase in female prisoners is almost twice that of male prisoners, yet services for female prisoners are not nearly as comparable as those available to the male population.

According to McCray,

though women commit murder far less often than men, they typically receive longer sentences for killing their male partners than do men who kill female partners, according to the American Civil Liberties Union. While these women average 15-year sentences, men's sentences are between two and six years. Roughly 90 percent of women behind bars for killing men were physically abused by their victims, according to the Purple Berets, a California-based organization that advocates for equal justice for women. Part of the disparity in sentence lengths has to do with women being more likely to kill with weapons, bringing harsher sentences than a homicide caused by beating or strangulation might.

"For a lot of women who do ultimately kill their abusive partners, it's a last-gasp effort," Robert Knechtel, chief operating officer of the Arizona-based Sojourner Center, one of the largest domestic violence shelters in the country, told TakePart (1). McCray continues: "Many women at the shelter don't have the financial means to move out of the state and have an either neutral or negative relationship with the police." Not much is known about women serving long prison terms. But as said by Glaze, there is sufficient research that shows women's experiences before, in the course of, and after prison often differ greatly from those of men. Incarcerated women are prone to have experienced abuse before entering prison, and those serving life sentences have reported some of the highest proportion of prior abuse. In line with Goldfarb, some women serving long sentences for drug offenses may have been charged as accomplices in drug conspiracies because of their relationships with men who are engaged in criminal activity. In some sentencing schemes, especially at the federal level, women may be held equally accountable despite having little or no intentional involvement (286). In a special report by Glaze, women are also more susceptible to the challenges that come with being an incarcerated parent (1–25). As the number of women serving long prison terms continues to grow, more research is needed to understand how they are uniquely affected by incarceration.

"Prisoners of Age" is a series of photographs and interviews with elderly inmates and corrections personnel conducted in prisons both in the United States and Canada. "Prisoners of Age" offers a microcosmic glimpse of what lies ahead in this new millennium. The photos in the *Prisoners of Age: The Women* (ages 52–81) serve to capture the complexity of a subject that is seldom contemplated – aging women offenders in the correctional system. After years of photographing men in prisons throughout the US and Eastern Canada, the author/photographer approached contacts at the Correctional Services of Canada in the hopes of gaining access to women's prisons. When the infamous maximum security Kingston Prison for Women [P4W] closed in 2000, the remaining inmates were shipped closer to their homes into six smaller prisons built across Canada. The first opportunity to photograph the women came when he visited the Nova Institute in Truro, Nova Scotia, a small prison of about 50 inmates, where the women were able to wear their own clothes and often worked in gardens. There were residential-style accommodation houses for minimum and medium-security inmates in an open campus design. The population was predominantly under 40 years old, but a few of the older inmates were eager to tell their stories. This contrasted greatly from the largest women's prison in Canada, the Grand Valley Institution in Ontario. They housed about 200 inmates, most of them lifers and many of the country's elderly. At first, the women comically thought that the photo-assistant and photographer were government employees or spies. Once they saw the camera equipment they were using and some of the photos they were taking, many of them became interested in telling their stories and sitting for a photograph. Sentences in Canada are less harsh in general than those in the US and the majority of the women photographed in Canada will be out now. Only the rare case, such as Teresa Anne Glaremin, would still be incarcerated. In 2003, photographs at the author/photographer's first women's prison in the United States—the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla [CCWF]—were taken. The stark differences between this women's prison and the women's prisons in Canada were glaringly blatant. Where the Canadian inmates wore their own clothes, the American women wore their prison uniforms of blue & grey. The prison itself held more than 4000 inmates compared to the 200 in the largest Canadian prison for women. The guards seemed more severe in the US system. Access to many areas was off limits to the inmates in Chowchilla, whereas the entire prison grounds, both inside and outside within the fences, were open for discovery in Ontario. The mood was overwhelmingly desolate at CCWF while that of the Canadian women seemed, if not content, then acquiescent. It was difficult at first in CCWF, but the women were happy to discuss their predicaments with an outsider. They spoke of their endless negotiations in front of unfriendly judges, failed parole hearings, and the situations that brought them to prison in the first place. Many of them, accused of killing their abusive spouses, opened up about years of suffering and cruelty at the hands of their spouses, and the system that punished them a second time with a sentence of decades in prison.

In 2013, the photographer spent a day with the elderly women [Golden Girls] at the California Institute for Women [CIW] in Chino, California. One of the first inmates interviewed, Donna Jelenic, was originally sentenced to life without parole in 1984, a year after she helped hire someone to kill her husband, whom she said had abused her and threatened their daughters.

It was a time when nothing about abuse was really known. It wasn't out in the open. We hid that for years and years and years. And when it finally came out, everyone said, "Oh, c'mon Donna, you had a happy marriage!" We were all good actresses. We did what we had to do. If I knew what I know now and I knew that help was out there, things would have been a lot different. I would have gone to a shelter. I would have gone somewhere that would have helped me ... but that wasn't available at the time.

Jelenic had served 34 years when her sentence was commuted by Governor Jerry Brown in 2017. She hopes to be paroled soon.

In Canada, abused women who took the life of their abuser tended to spend less than a decade in prison for their crime, the abuse taken into consideration during their hearings. In the US, these women were often convicted to life-without-parole. In the case of Ethel Dedmon, she was originally dealt a death sentence in 1999 for killing her abusive police officer husband. Eventually transmuted to life in prison, she was paroled on compassionate grounds in 2013, bed-ridden with cancer and given six months to live. In a contrasting world of incarceration, the women's psychological and social wounds were often clear. Compared with the men, who were on the whole, grudgingly accepting of their crimes and time in prison, the women seemed scarred and emotionally distressed. The prison agenda seemed to play a major role in breaking them down both psychologically and socially. After visits to the men's prisons, this photographer often felt manipulated emotionally by the men and their tales of wrongdoing. After every visit to a women's prison, the author/photographer recalls being emotionally drained. Their stories and life histories had an empathetic effect on both the assistant and author/photographer, no matter what the heinous crimes of which they were convicted. The purpose of this article is to put a face to the women aging in prison, share their story, consider the human dimension of doing time while growing old in prison and address issues of social justice and human dignity through the images and interviews.

Prisoners of Age_The Women

Figure 1: Levine, Ron. *Tereza-Anne, 53 Second degree murder*. Grand Valley, Ontario. 1999. JPEG file.

"I'm a survivor of severe abuse, I'm one of 22 siblings, from an isolated seaport in Newfoundland. I'm part Viking, Irish and Eskimo."

"I'm a teenage runaway. I was raised without electricity, basically was in culture shock when I came into progress and I raised myself up without parental guidance. I never had a juvenile record, I never had an adult record until I came into conflict with the law when I was married for the 3rd time. I did 10 years in prison for a crime that I did not commit. I've been professing my innocence ever since."

Singing...

When I was young
My Papa said..
No!

When I was young
My Mama said,
You be a good girl
Or you'll end up dead

But my Mama wasn't right
So I fled in the night
And when i got caught
They put me in prison

Chorus:

Oh, the system sucks
It takes away your dreams
It destroys your hope
And it makes you turn so mean

Yeah, the system sucks, sucks, sucks
The system sucks, sucks, sucks
The system sucks, sucks, sucks
The big one

It turns your heart to stone

When i was young
My Papa told me
Don't take any shit
And speak with Jubilee
But my Papa wasn't right
Cause when I took his advice
They put me in prison
For the rest of my life

Chorus

I'm doing life
Here at G.V.I.
And if I wasn't so damn crazy
Yeah, I'd break right down and cry

One thing I remember,
And that I'll never forget
Is what my family taught me
So long long ago
That ... took the straw
And to stay alive

The system made me a victim
My family taught me to survive

Chorus

“That’s my life in a nutshell.”

Figure 2: Levine, Ron. *Ethel, 65 Murder CCWF*, 2003. JPEG file.

“I was accused of murdering my husband ... forty years to life for the murder...”

“My husband was an ex-cop... We were married 43 years... He had been beating me around... When he was drinking he got really abusive but the only thing is, you call 911 doesn’t do any good when their ‘bro’ show up to help him out...a lot of my jurors were law enforcement or retired law enforcement. I just feel that I didn’t have much of a chance when I walked into the courtroom... All I know is when I came to, the gun was laying there and he was in the chair with a bullet hole in the back of his head.”

Figure 3: Levine, Ron. *Margery, 57 CCWF*, 2003. JPEG file.

“My husband was killed and we had an attorney who collected the insurance so I got 187 years for financial gain. They found his body in his pick-up truck. It was in San Francisco, he was going down that mountain and the truck went over the cliff. They said that it was murder. So, I’m in here for 187. I had threatened him in public shortly before.”

"I threatened him because we were at a party and he was insulting me and saying bad things and I said 'If you keep insulting me, I'll kill you.' People around, you know how people do, they take the information and they put it in a way they want. During my trial, I found out that he had been married twice before and he had abused his wives. So now I'm going for battered women. Battered women are taking my case."

"My kids were abused terribly during our marriage. I was married to him for almost 12 years. He abused the kids really bad. They weren't allowed to have friends over, they weren't allowed to talk during the meal times, they weren't allowed to go out, they weren't allowed to have a childhood. They had to watch what he wanted to watch on TV. He was just very abusive. I worked and when I got ready to go to work, he'd check the mileage on the car. He'd time me coming home and if I was late he'd be on the driveway when I got home, he'd jerk me out of the car and start beating on me. He was just a very jealous man."

Figure 4: Levine, Ron. *Theda*, 77 CIW. 2013. JPEG file.

"It's hard. It's hard in here, because after so long you lose support of your family. I have children, but the last I've heard from them was in 2005."

"I'm in here for 'helping my family.' I learnt my lesson. That won't happen again ... but y'see they don't help me..."

"I just take care of myself the best that I can..."

Figure 5: Levine, Ron. *Lucille*, 87 CIW. 2013. JPEG file.

“It’s something in my life that happened and I took the law into my own hands.”

Figure 6: Levine, Ron. *Donna*, 68 Murder CIW. 2013. JPEG file.

“It was a time when nothing about this was really known. It wasn’t out in the open. And we hid that for years and years and years and when it came out, people said, ‘Oh, come on Donna, you had a happy marriage’. We were all good actresses. We did what we had to do.”

“If I knew what I know now and I knew that the help was out there. Yes, things would have been a lot different. I would have gone to a shelter. I would have gone somewhere that would’ve helped me or my kids. But that wasn’t available at that time. And all I knew is that he pointed a gun at my kids

almost every night and he said, 'Leave. Go ahead and try to leave.' I couldn't do that. I had to protect my children. I didn't care. Most of us don't care about ourselves. But when they attack children. And when he molested my little five-year old. And I heard, 'Daddy why are you touching my bottom like that?' That did it. I did not care anymore. I just had to get them out of that situation."

"Unfortunately murder is the worst of the worst. People don't know us as we are here. They're just thinking that we need to keep them in prison. And they don't want to hear. That's why this organization that's helping women in prison now. They're bringing it to light. That women are different than men. Finally the word is getting out there. And there's a little sympathy, but not much. When you're talking about a crime like murder—and just about all the ladies you've interviewed except for one, are in for murder- women are different than men. They commit crimes for different reasons."

"My children were my life. They still are. Being away from them all these years. I can see what it's done to them. And I've got grandchildren that come up and see me. And it's the same thing. 'Nana Donna, when are you coming home. You're not bad. You're good. I love you. Are you ever gonna come home?'"

"And you deal with this ... all the time."

Figure 7: Levine, Ron. *Edith May, 81 Child Abuse*. Grand Valley, Ontario. 1999. JPEG file.

"I've lived 81 years enjoying life."

"I was heavy, I was 210 pounds, I'm 116 now. It's a lot of weight to lose. I'll show you a picture of me, you'd say 'God were you ever beautiful,' you'd take me out. I don't bother with men [now]."

"[They say] that I beat the children and that I burnt the children ... I just love kiddies, I see them there crying, you know, ... they want to get picked-up, ... I always pick them up and say, 'Come on to mommy.'"

From the London [Ontario] Free Press/1.15.2003

Eighty-one-year-old Edith Sanders became the oldest female inmate in the federal prison system yesterday after she was sentenced to four years for abusing two daughters and a woman she enslaved in her London home.

The case chronicled hideous acts committed against Sanders's adopted daughter, Kimberly Campbell, now 45, her biological daughter, Yvonne Overton, 58, and Beatrice Feick, 64. Feick was kept as a house slave for more than 30 years from 1951 to 1985.

Witnesses testified she used cattle prods, electrical cords, hockey sticks and other objects to beat the women.

They lived in Sanders's weird house of animals, boarders and children on Hill Street and later on Princess Avenue.

Feick, who fled the household in 1985 with the help of Family Services London, was tortured in the cruelest ways by Sanders, including being forced to eat animal feces. "Nobody would believe it because it was too outrageous," Overton said.

Figure 8: Levine, Ron. *Beverly, 60 Forgery, possession, grand theft, burglary 22nd offence, since 1964 CCWF*, 2003. JPEG file.

"I came here for petty theft with a prior. I do it cause I use drugs and I got to make the money so I can buy the drugs so I go out and commit different little crimes. Go into the store, fill up their shopping cart and just take off. Stuff like expensive cigarettes, liquor, stuff like that."

Figure 9: Levine, Ron. *Katherine, 54 Attempted murder CCWF, 2003.* JPEG file.

"Never been to jail. I have lost everything I had. When I get out of here, I don't have no clothes, no house, no nothing."

"This is my first time ever crying. When I got my sentence, I never cried. But now, it's really hard. They gave me 10 years. I didn't have no gun. I was out there to try and stop my grand kids from fighting. They blamed everything on me. The judge told me that I was a bad example to ... 16 and 17 year olds ...but he didn't let me speak, I was trying to tell him that I was out there to stop the fighting, but they never did let me speak in court."

Figure 10: Levine, Ron. *Christine, 53 31 Bank Robberies dressed as a man.* Grand Valley, Ontario. 1999. JPEG file.

"I am a trans-gender person. I was incarcerated November 8th of 1998. I have spent about 3 years and 7 months in segregated custody. Cells you wouldn't put dogs into for longer than a day."

"I was quite successful in my domain of work which was Industrial Construction Manager and Engineering Services Manager. But when I had the gender change things certainly changed to the negative."

"When I went through the change, I basically hid-out for a few years. The satirical part is that I get ostracized by society and then by my family and I guess, in retrospect, I should have probably sought the post-gender surgery counseling to deal with these issues..."

"I'm not a typical inmate. I've had, you know, a long dark road and I've had a different culture than most of these people so, at this stage I've applied for the position of grievance coordinator. I'm probably the first one of first in the female jails who is actually pursuing the interests of women."

Figure 11: Levine, Ron. *Jane, 66 Murder CIW*. 2013. JPEG file.

"Being in prison is horrifying, really."

"It's horrifying to see how women are treated in prison. Prisons have become the mental health setting for many mentally ill people. My lifetime of wrongdoings was two speeding tickets."

"We lock people up for all kinds of reasons and we don't even have a pretense of providing them any kind of health care. And then we put them out on the streets again with \$200 and say 'have at it!' Make life work for you."

"Aging in prison is really difficult. Fighting to not have to be placed in an upper bunk. Younger more aggressive inmates trying to push you aside to get in front of you in line for all kinds of things. There have been instances of women coming back from canteen, having their things stolen. Because they really can't protect themselves. There have been lots of difficulties. But I think the greatest difficulty is the lack of respect. Being treated as a human being. From the guards. I don't mean to characterize. There certainly are some very decent guards who go out of their way."

"There's no such thing as retirement from work in here. If you are at all physically able, you will work in here."

"Women don't come into the prison system because they think it's a good idea to go to prison for a few years. Especially for women, a lot of their crimes are crimes of survival. Drugs, Prostitution and so forth. We make no effort to help them. No effort to help them with their children. In terms of parenting skills or anything else. We need to provide something in the front end. Things like, knowing that half of all high school dropouts end up in the criminal justice system. Why are we not spending the 9 billion that we're spending on the prison system, on the front end and preventing more of that. There's a lot of things that need to change within the system if we truly are interested in rehabilitating people."

"CDCR said that, of the 10,000 women in the California prison system, probably 5000 could be released into the community on an ankle bracelet. And yet, statewide, we've probably released around 200."

"What I would propose is taking the elderly in prison, put them on an ankle bracelets. An elderly like myself costs an average of \$130,000 a year to maintain in prison and we have the lowest recidivism rate. Less than 1 percent. Why not put these people in the community. It's a 3 for 1 in terms of prisoners. So I'm hoping that proposal goes somewhere. But really, it makes the most sense. It makes no sense at all to keep people with walkers and canes and wheelchairs in the prison system. And it's taking away directly from the education system in our state."

Figure 12: Levine, Ron. *Consuelo*, 63 CCWF. 2003. JPEG file.

"I'm an alcoholic, my husband is an alcoholic and we fight all the time."

"If God permits for me to go home I'm gonna change my life but I need God's help to make it with my addiction. And I know that God is very merciful and powerful, that there's nothing that Jesus Christ cannot do. I just have to seek him and he will take me wherever I want to go."

"Spousal abuse just happened about 20 years ago, cause he used to like to go out drinking with other women and I found out about it and like, I'm a very jealous woman."

"He told me that we could make it, we could make it if we try. We have to both leave the booze alone and start going to church, AA's and do recreational things like he's a fisherman and I like to go skiing that's what I plan to do with the few years I do have of my life, that God allows me, I plan to be a good mother and a good wife and some day I will make it."

Figure 13: Levine, Ron. *Julie, 52 Murder*. Nova Institute, Nova Scotia. 2002. JPEG file.

"Why am I in? I'm in for second degree murder. Got me into a place where I couldn't cope. My husband. He was mentally and verbally abusive. He started hitting on my daughter. She was 28. That's what done it. And from then on it went from bad to worse."

"I always worked, ever since I was 17. I was a concrete worker. I worked in a fish plant, I did a little bit of babysitting, and I did some volunteer work for the salvation army."

"He kept pushing me and pushing me, you see. I had just started back to work, and they had a 2 weeks pay period that they kept back and he didn't buy any groceries for those 2 weeks so there was nothing to eat in the house so I went to my sister's twice to have something to eat and my friends place once in those 2 weeks I had lost 10 pounds. No money."

"He suffered from depression. He would go into black moods. Very black moods where he wouldn't speak to me for 2 or 3 weeks. He would stay out in the garage and only come in for meals, he would take off to work but he wasn't really at work. He was supposed to get 50 hours of work one week and I was expecting a half decent pay ... he only worked 20. So where was he for the other 30?"

"That morning I just snapped. I couldn't take it any longer, I couldn't think of a way out."

"I was very hungry."

Figure 14: Levine, Ron. *Linda, 54 Murder CCWF*, 2003. JPEG file.

"I was married to a man that acted one way and then when he adopted my two children, he turned vicious. He molested my daughter, hurt them, we had another child in the marriage and one day it just got so bad that I kinda flipped and the psyches told me it was disassociation and I killed him. I stopped him from hurting my children anymore. And, I came to prison in '87, well I was out on bail for 2 years, until the trial, awaiting the trial. Then, I've been here ever since. Sixteen and a half years."

"He bought a riot gun and he told our neighbor that he was going to kill anybody that stepped on our porch if I didn't kill him first. And for the 5 years we were married, every Sunday we'd go down to Santa Cruz to where his family plot was and he told me that's where he wanted to be, that's where he belonged. Rather than leave him, just kill him cause that's what was going to happen anyway and, as insane as it sounds, my husband committed suicide. For 5 years, he told me 'do this, do this, do this'. And I finally did."

Figure 15: Levine, Ron. *Janet, 51* [Photographed with Krista C] *Assault, Multiple DUI's Grand Valley, Ontario*. 1999. JPEG file.

"I never came to prison or jail till I was 40. I celebrated my 40th birthday in prison, before that I was a successful real estate agent."

"I got into an altercation with a girlfriend on a plane. We were coming to B.C. to live and I told her I was going to be with another woman and she attacked me five times. They had to move me, finally they had to put me in first class. By the time I got off the plane I was stinking drunk. And I was going to leave her there standing at the airport in Toronto with her bags and I felt sorry for her so I threw her in the limousine with me and on the way back to Brantford we partied. Hit every hotel along the way. Well, needless to say, by the time we hit Brantford she kept on pulling my hair, you know, hitting me, stuff like that so I gave her a good one and she charged me. I've been in for impaired driving. I mean I have a severe alcohol problem, God only knows. Binge drinker, I didn't drink for 13 years once, sometime I go 2, 3 years but when I start, I go insane."

"Drinking driving, that's my fifth conviction. I've lost my license for life, twice now."

"I've been in five different federal prisons because I have been a Bad Ass, there's no doubt about it, I've made a lot of brews got a lot of people drunk."

"I've been told I'm Dr Jeckel and Mr Hyde and I've been told that I'm the worst drunk anybody's ever seen by several different people, so something obviously happens to me. I wing right out."

Figure 16: Levine, Ron. *Lorralli, 57 Murder, second degree*. Nova Institute, Nova Scotia. 2002. JPEG file.

"My co-accused? He got life-25. I made a lot of mistakes along the way. The biggest mistake I made was having an affair. I loved my husband, I have no problem with him at all. Which didn't matter but then when I started modeling and whatnot, I kind of got into the fast lane of things and got caught up in the excitement. And one thing led to another. I started having an affair not realizing how far that would go. It came to jealousy and possessiveness. Obsessive. I didn't know until I was in the courtroom that he had been telling people, 'She's never going to leave him, so I guess I'm going to have to kill him.' I didn't know that."

"So, I get life-25 cause he was planning it and I didn't know. And he dragged me in on it because he didn't want me to be in the free world. All I had to do was tell the police. But then I went into shock, I was extremely, deeply, deeply depressed, I couldn't speak, and then accessory after the fact. Then I just kept denying, denying, denying, I just didn't care anymore. Then I would never have been in court if not to testify against him. If I had simply told them."

Figure 17: Levine, Ron. *Heather, 50 Murder, second degree*. Grand Valley, Ontario. 1999. JPEG file.

"Alcohol. I don't remember the crime whatsoever. I was on medication at the time and I started having a few beers in the afternoon. Somebody showed up and they had rum and I had a couple of drinks of rum and that's the last thing I can remember. 13 hours later I can remember being in the police station being questioned. I supposedly strangled a guy in my house ... asphyxiation."

"There's no background whatsoever to even justify what I could have been thinking in order to do it. Nothing. Nothing at all. I mean I wouldn't even slap my own kids butt. I wouldn't even slap the fingers, the way the grandmothers do and say ta ta. If my grandmother did that or my mother did that, look out, you know? I'd just move the kid and say 'No, you're not even seeing him again'. Because I have no place for violence in my life. None and that's why it's so mysterious, you know? so mysterious."

Future Implications

Prison growth is a complex, multidimensional problem. According to James approximately three quarters of women in the United States will meet the criteria for mental health and/or substance abuse diagnosis (10). Hongo reports, almost 80% of female inmates were found to meet criteria for one or more lifetime psychiatric disorders and up to 70% symptomatic (201). Aging issues such as slowdown of mobility, poor vision, and loss of hearing acuity are just a few of the natural processes of aging that can handicap the ADLs for aging female prisoners. Isolation, loneliness, and despair can result in depression and exposure of these feelings can add to the risk of predation. Despite all intentions of the criminal justice system to have prisoners conform to uniformity, these women are still humans with a need for identity and self-actualization. Although technology continues to advance quickly in the outside world, efforts to respond to the correctional system remains stagnant. Warehousing female offenders and extinguishing hope while they wait for calendar pages to turn can only create more visits to the mental health unit. The lack of support and rehabilitation renders the aging female prisoner the forgotten minority. Once in the penal system, the vulnerabilities of aging become exacerbated by inadequate facilities unable to meet the needs an aging population. Hongo reports studies have indicated that older adults benefit from wellness programs and health initiatives (207). Although isolation may be the initial punishment, chronic warehousing diminishes functionality, increased recidivism, and ultimately costs everyone regardless of the risks (Hongo 202). As the

number of women serving long prison terms continues to grow, more research is needed to understand how they are uniquely affected by incarceration. In addition, Williams states, in light of the increasing number of older women prisoners, expanded research on older women prisoners would lead to better guidance on the unique health and social issues that may affect this population (1478).

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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