

Federal Probation

Probation Officers' Role Perceptions and Attitudes
Toward Firearmns *Richard D. Sluder*
Robert A. Shearer
Dennis W. Potts

Family Violence: Challenging Cases for
Probation Officers *Meredith Hofford*

Role Negotiation: Sorting Out the Nuts
and Bolts of Day-to-Day Staff
Supervision *Jud Watkins*
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Single-Cell Occupancy in America's
..... *Steven T. Adwell*

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This Issue in Brief

Probation Officers' Role Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Firearms.—The issue of whether probation officers should carry firearms has tremendous implications for the future of probation. Despite the importance of the issue, however, there has been little empirical investigation to determine whether probation officers' opinions about firearms are related to their role perceptions, individual characteristics, or other work-related factors. Using data collected from a population of probation officers attending a state-wide probation training academy, authors Richard D. Sluder, Robert A. Shearer, and Dennis W. Potts explore relationships between those variables and officers' opinions as to whether they should be permitted or required to carry firearms in the performance of their duties. The authors discuss findings from the study, as well as implications for the delivery of probation services.

Family Violence: Challenging Cases for Probation Officers.—Author Meredith Hofford presents data on the frequency and seriousness of domestic violence and offers suggestions and guidance as to how the courts and probation officials can improve their supervision of the perpetrators of domestic violence. The article presents the proposition that domestic violence is much more widespread—and its consequences much more serious—than has been generally accepted. The author points out that with adequate and effective probationary supervision, the recurrence of domestic violence, the frequency of violent crime stemming from domestic violence, and the intergenerational effects of spousal abuse on children can all be significantly decreased.

Role Negotiation: Sorting Out the Nuts and Bolts of Day-to-Day Staff Supervision.—As organizations become larger and more complex, the need for cooperation and coordination between managers and staff increases significantly. Authors Jud Watkins and Robert A. Luke, Jr., describe a structured way for people who work together to sort out their day-to-day needs and arrive at an interpersonal contract, or agreement, that promotes the mutual efficiency and job satisfaction of both negotiators. The authors detail

the procedure of role negotiation, cite examples of its application in the probation and pretrial services setting, and suggest alternative uses such as group nego-

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Female Inmates and Their Families

BY GEORGE C. KISER*

ONLY IN recent years have social scientists begun to devote substantial attention to the families of inmates. That long neglect has been a serious mistake—for at least four reasons. First, without understanding family influence, it is impossible to understand why some prisoners committed their crimes (Robins, West, & Herjanic, 1976; Baunach, 1985, p. 5). Second, if the Nation is as concerned about the victims of crime as it professes, we must recognize that those victims include many families of inmates (Salholz et al., 1990). Third, there is considerable evidence that inmates' family relationships affect their potential for rehabilitation (Hairston, 1988; Jorgensen, Hernandez, & Warren, 1986; Feinman, 1980, p. 33). And, fourth, prisoners' attitudes may influence the law-abiding attitudes of other family members, particularly young children.

The social sciences have long been demonstrating that families are among the most powerful influences on human behavior. Fortunately, criminal justice scholars are at last discovering that inmates, too, are more understandable when placed within the context of their families. But this research has barely begun, and inmate families remain one of the most neglected areas of criminal justice.

This article turns attention to the family relationships of *female* inmates. Although only 5.6 percent of all prisoners in the United States are women, this group is central to the whole topic of inmate family relationships. When women inmates committed their crimes, they were far more likely than male prisoners to be living with and responsible for small children. While in prison, the women appear to be more preoccupied with family relationships. Moreover, for several years the population of female prisons has been growing far more rapidly than the population of male prisons. During the last 5 years alone, the number of women inmates has doubled. The figure now stands at about 40,000, but with the current emphasis on "law and order" there is every reason to believe it will continue to increase dramatically (Salholz et al. 1990).

Methodology

This article explores the family relationships of female inmates at Illinois' Dwight Correctional Center (DCC). Located some 80 miles southwest of Chicago, this 530-inmate facility is that State's only all-female penitentiary.

The research was conducted during the summer of 1987, while I was teaching a college course (American

Judicial Process) at DCC. During the first evening of class, I told the students of my interest in inmate family relationships and that I might eventually prepare a manuscript for possible publication. Much of the information was provided by these students (six regular enrollees plus another two or three inmates who occasionally "sat in"). All indicated they had no objection to use of their information and perspectives in my writing. From time to time, they talked about their families and/or those of other prisoners in class discussion (on relevant topics, such as rehabilitation theory), during "recess," before and after class, and over meals at the central dining room. Some of their discussion was spontaneous, but occasionally I asked them specific questions.

Additional information came from term papers. Students could write either: (1) a traditional library-research term paper or (2) one on the hardships of imprisonment, including family-related problems, with heavy emphasis upon their own experience. Although they were under no pressure to do so, all but one chose the second option. It is important to emphasize that their accounts were not limited to their own families. The term papers also included impressions and information gathered from other inmates (including broad impressions my students had formed over the months or years of imprisonment, their personal knowledge of close acquaintances, and, in one case, three indepth interviews with inmates not enrolled in the class).

Information came also from conversations I had with various inmates not associated with my class (for instance, in the library and the snack bar). Sometimes I asked them questions, but frequently women I had just met spontaneously talked about their families.

Finally, information came from a questionnaire survey of 49 Dwight inmates conducted by one of my students for an earlier class. She provided me with photocopies of all the questionnaires and authorized their incorporation into my research. To protect her interests and those of other informants, I assured that no inmate's name would appear in my writing.

I make no claim that my findings are generalizable to all inmates in the United States, to all female inmates, or even to all inmates at the Dwight Correctional Center. In fact, Dwight is clearly not a typical penitentiary, and the women I studied are probably not a cross-section of its population.

In all likelihood, my sample over-represents DCC inmates with more traditional values and better family relationships. All the students in my class were high school graduates, working toward a university

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degree. Without exception, they were polite, dedicated students—in other words, the kind of people one might well expect to maintain good family relationships. The questionnaire survey was probably biased in the same direction, for it sampled a disproportionate number of prisoners enrolled in college classes (the student researcher simply used a “convenience” sample).

Women’s prisons are quite different from those for men and probably more conducive to the maintenance of family relationships. Institutions for men tend to be more violent, security conscious, and dehumanizing (Simon, 1975, pp. 78-79). Dwight is a fairly typical women’s prison. As prisons go, it is relatively visitor-friendly, and it lacks many of the worst jungle-like characteristics of male prisons which stifle the human capacity for love, understanding, and rationality—traits essential to getting along with human beings in general and the family in particular. At Dwight, no powerful gangs have developed, and there is relatively little violence. Friction between prisoners and officers is much less apparent than at men’s penitentiaries. The last lockdown at Dwight occurred about a half century ago. Typically a prison-wide shakedown discovers no weapons, but perhaps a few items of forbidden clothing or jewelry. The average sentence (about 7 years) is relatively short compared to that of men’s penitentiaries, and the women are far more likely to be doing time for nonviolent crimes. Except for the wall and barbed wire, the casual visitor might think DCC was a small college or prep school. Inmates live in attractive, relatively small “cottages.” Children can occasionally be seen playing on the grounds. In short, the setting is so different from men’s prisons that any generalizations ought to be made with great caution.

Still another bias in my sample is that it consists entirely of inmates. All people, of course, see the world through their own particular values and biases, and inmates are no exception. Ideally, we should include the perspectives of numerous others familiar with inmate family relationships: arresting officers; jailers and prison personnel; counselors; children, parents, and other relatives of prisoners; individuals who raise the children left behind; and the like. Some researchers have in fact moved slightly in that direction (Stanton, 1980), but we still know relatively little about even the inmate’s perspective—and it is obviously a vital part of the total picture.

The Centrality of Family

The literature indicates that women inmates are more family-oriented than male inmates—a conclusion compatible with my limited observations at three prisons. Prior to teaching at DCC, I had taught at two maximum security men’s prisons (Pontiac in Illinois and Canon City in Colorado). In neither case had those

prisoners said much about their families. At Dwight inmate family concerns were much more apparent and pervasive. In fact, the first inmate I met there, a library worker, had a large color picture of her son sitting on her desk; within moments of being introduced, she told me about him, emphasizing her pride in his recent graduation from high school and excitement over the fact that she would soon be released and reunited with him. Dwight inmates commonly tape photos of their children to the inside of their prison identification badges—which they are required to wear virtually round the clock. The prison newspaper carried frequent stories about children and other family members. There was a children’s play area, staffed by inmate volunteers. Visiting family members and inmates often gathered at the recreation area, with much laughter and apparent excitement. Several family-oriented groups were active. For visiting children, one such group sponsored puppet shows designed “to reinforce social mores,” and another was dedicated to raising “the positive consciousness of women concerning their roles as mothers” (Columbo, 1987). The latter group was making products to sell and using the money to purchase playground equipment and toys (Mecca 1987).

The importance of family concerns was also apparent in the questionnaire survey. In response to the question, “When you received your time, what was the first thing that came to your mind?,” 26 percent of the respondents (13 of 49) included explicit references to their families. The centrality of family came through even more clearly in response to a second question: “During your incarceration, what has been the biggest psychological effect for you to deal with?” This time 47 percent of the respondents (23 of 49) gave answers that explicitly included family relationships. The major themes which emerged in replies to both questions were: (1) missing their families and (2) the well-being of their children.

Some of my informants observed that, when people are sent to the penitentiary, their outside friends tend to abandon them. They noted that this loss of friendship often came at precisely the time friends were most desperately needed—when inmates were at the lowest point in their lives: ashamed of their crimes and incarceration; frustrated by the countless humiliations of prison life; lonely; depressed; drained of self-confidence; and sometimes even suicidal. Consequently, they were desperately in need of reassurance and fellowship from people who really cared about them. It was difficult to replace lost friends with new friendships in prison, for the women tended to distrust other inmates. For some of them, only the family was left, and they reportedly clung to it like a drowning person to a lifeboat in a raging sea. A loving family could do

many critically important things for them: "take in" their children; safeguard their property; continue to believe in them when no one else did; send money for special food and clothing; write, visit, and phone; and perhaps even have a place for them to come back to upon release. According to one inmate, the family could even be used as a sort of monitor to assure better institutional treatment: When inmate illnesses were not taken seriously, she said, some of the inmates would "call home to have someone continually call the institution to ensure the proper care and attention will be given."

Some inmates had no family support. Some had broken with their families even before entering the penitentiary, while in other cases the relationship had been shattered by their imprisonment. Several of the women bitterly referred to the failure of their families to come through when they were so desperately needed.

Inmates' Children as Innocent Victims

Many of the inmates at Dwight (and other women's prisons) are mothers. According to the warden at Dwight, as of 1987, 82 percent of that institution's inmates were single heads of households ("Special joys," 1987). That same year, an article in the DCC prison newspaper estimated that 88 percent of the inmates there were mothers (Columbo, 1987). In the questionnaire survey at Dwight, 65 percent of the women (32 of 49) indicated that they had children. Of the 32 mothers responding, 68 percent had either one or two children, while 32 percent had three or more (e.g., at the upper extreme, one had 7, one 8, and one 10 children). Although there are no statistics on the number of women prisoners nationwide who are mothers, estimates range between 42 and 80 percent. (Sametz, 1980—cited in Jorgensen, 1986, p. 50)

Inasmuch as most inmates are relatively youthful, many of their children are very young. In one study, over half the female inmates had been residing with one or more dependent children before their imprisonment (Datesman & Cales, 1983, p. 145). A prominent theme in both the scholarly and popular literature is the terrible suffering their imprisonment causes their children, who are, of course, "innocent victims of their mothers' crimes" (Salholz, 1990, p. 38; Mann, 1984, pp. 234-239; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1976; Harris, 1988). My informants, too, talked a lot about the hard life of the children—especially those living with the mother at the time of her arrest.

Sometimes children were with the mother when she committed the crime. One of my respondents, for example, had murdered another family member in the presence of her children. In many cases, youngsters did not see the crime but were present when the police

arrested their mothers, and that, too, could be traumatic—especially for children too young to understand what was happening. One of the term papers, reporting on an interview with an inmate mother, said:

At the time of her arrest Jane was handcuffed and pushed by officers as her children (including a 3-year-old) watched and cried for their mother. They wanted to come but were not allowed. Instead they were left in the care of a neighbor.

Quoting the mother, the paper continued:

I wanted to comfort them. It tore me apart not to be able to do so. The officers could have done it a different way so my children would not have to have gone through the fear.

In fairness to the police, it should be noted that this woman was charged with, and convicted of, attempted murder.

Children were sometimes left with relatives or neighbors, including persons they barely knew. Anxious to reassure the kids, some of these individuals built up false expectations. In one instance, a neighbor with whom the children were left at the time of the arrest "was feverishly trying to calm them with statements of assurance that mother would be back soon." In fact, it was 4 days before their mother was released on bail and they saw her again.

Still another crisis point sometimes occurred when the mother was released on bail and returned home. Small children rejoiced in the belief that she was home for good, only to have those hopes shattered when they learned she would have to leave again. In the words of one woman, her small daughter "was really frightened when she couldn't come with me a second time."

Even grown "children" may find the crime, arrest, and imprisonment a most unsettling experience. One woman reported that when she called her adult son, father of three children, from the police station, he wept "uncontrollably":

When he visited me at Cook County Jail, we cried most of the 30-minute visit every Saturday. It was the only thing we were able to do. Words were lost to us. He would be ever so depressed after a visit and would disappear from home for 2 or 3 days.

After the arrest, older children sometimes wished to assist the mother but didn't know how. They found the judicial process confusing and its slow course frustrating. While their own lives depended heavily upon the outcome of the case, they had little knowledge with which to understand the case or predict the verdict and sentence. One woman, who had been assigned free counsel by the court, said her 17-year-old daughter "was crying and very upset and confused as to what and why all these things were happening. They (she had several children, including some grown ones) had no idea what to do, so they hired a lawyer to try to see just what was happening to their mother. . . ."

Sometimes even the mothers seemed to be conspiring to keep their children in the dark. Some of the

youngsters wanted to attend the trial, to see for themselves what was happening. For the parent, there were problems with that "solution"—and problems with not allowing them to attend. If the children stayed away they might become even more apprehensive, but attendance could aggravate the shame and humiliation already felt by both mother and child. One woman allowed her children to attend the first 4 days of her trial, then abruptly forbid them to go on the fifth and final day. Her 18-year-old daughter begged to come along:

I felt an indescribably frightening feeling. I couldn't look directly at her. . . . [She] tearfully and beggingly inquired again, "Please Mama, just this once." Tearfully I got into the car and left without looking back.

Also minimizing children's access to information was the fact that some mothers attempted to hide their crime, trial, and imprisonment from them—particularly if the children were very young. In one study, about a fourth of the women inmates' children did not know they were in prison (Datesman & Cales, 1983, p. 145). In the Dwight situation, some of the children did not learn the truth until well after the mother had entered the penitentiary. According to one inmate who had been there for several years:

A mother's reasons for lying may range from the fact that she is too embarrassed to tell the truth and she does not want their child to know they did something wrong. Secondly, she may want to prevent her children from worrying or getting scared and upset. Finally, she may not want her children to let others know exactly where she is.

Whether or not children knew about their mothers' crimes and imprisonment, they had a heavy and continuing price to pay for being the children of convicts. One daughter "had a basketball scholarship she forfeited because she had no one to buy clothes for her or any means of support. She had to get a job." Children were said to be spurned by neighbors and classmates: ". . . My 13-year-old daughter . . . was in 7th grade. . . . The teasing and shunning she got from schoolmates and neighborhood children kept her in tears."

Researchers have documented a host of behavioral and psychological problems in children precipitated or aggravated by the imprisonment of parents. Among such problems found by Fritsch and Burkhead (1981, pp. 85-86), for instance, were withdrawal from play, reversion to infancy behavior, deterioration of attitude toward and performance in school, excessive crying, and scary dreams. According to my respondents, many of the children, even very young ones, blamed themselves for the mother's crime. They told of children falling into deep depression, continuing to suffer from bouts of weeping years after the mother's confinement, and even attempting suicide. One woman blamed her own crime for an adult son's subsequent felony and penitentiary sentence.

But Who Will Take the Children?

According to an attorney for the National Women's Law Center: "When men get arrested, they ask for a lawyer. When women get arrested, they ask about their children" (Salholz, p. 51). A major concern of the Dwight respondents when arrested and convicted was who would take care of their children. As noted earlier, the questionnaire asked: "When you received your time, what was the first thing that came to your mind?" Some replies: "who would take care of my children"; "what will happen to my children, if they can cope without me"; "what was gonna happen to my children."

A number of writers have noted the tendency of women inmates to leave their children with relatives, such as their own parents or older children (Baunach, 1985, p. 29; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1976, p. 125; Libman, 1990). A long-time prisoner at Dwight reported: "Usually when a mother is sent to prison, her children are placed in the care of an extended family member, for example, a grandparent, aunt or sister. . . ." The questionnaire survey at Dwight found that 81 percent of the mothers had left their children with "family," 3 percent with "friends," 3 percent with the "Illinois Department of Children and Family Services," 9 percent with "other," and 3 percent had divided them between family and "other."

Although I have no statistics on the marital status of women at Dwight, probably few of the children were placed with husbands, for inmates rarely mentioned husbands in any context, and other studies of women prisoners have reported that few have intact marriages (Goetting & Howsen, 1983, p. 29; Datesman & Cales, 1983, p. 153; Bresler & Lewis, 1983, p. 119). In one study, only 20 percent of the children wound up living with the natural father (Baunach, 1985, p. 29). Women at Dwight mentioned a few instances of this. The success of these placements appears to have varied tremendously. One woman's children had first been taken by the Department of Children and Family Services, but she desperately wanted them placed with a family member. She finally located her ex-husband, by then remarried, and he agreed to take the children, but only with the stipulation that she not be allowed to see them as long as she remained in prison. At the time of the interview, she had not seen them for 5 years:

Seeing that it was better for him to have them than the state I signed the papers and all my rights to my children away. My feelings about this are now of horror that I let myself be conned like that. I often cry and am currently undergoing therapy and trying to regain my sanity. I now realize it would have been better for the state to have them.

For another woman, placement with the husband had worked out much better, for he had faithfully brought the child to visit her. A third case was more

mixed. At first the husband refused to have anything to do with his wife, and they soon divorced, but recently he had been bringing the child to visit her.

An inmate divorcee with several children, including grown ones, had divided her younger children among their older siblings. A 13-year-old daughter, for example, had gone to live with her 23-year-old sister, who was married with two children of her own.

The most dreaded option was having the state take the children for adoption or placement in foster homes. Consequently, that tended to occur only in unusual circumstances: children so young they would require constant care; a mother with so many children that family members could take them only with extreme hardship to themselves; or family members simply unwilling to take in someone else's child.

Mothers much preferred placement with family members. That would keep the children from being thrust into a family of strangers, allow them to be with people who really cared for them, and enable them to keep their family identity. Moreover, respondents thought family members would be more likely to encourage children to visit and maintain a close relationship with the mother. Finally, mothers thought they would be far more likely to get their children back if they were left with family members. Other studies have also found a strong tendency for inmate mothers to prefer placement of their children with family members—for reasons similar to those just noted (Baunach, 1985, p. 30).

One of the term papers illustrated the problem of foster care and adoption with a mother of five children. Her oldest four were taken by various family members, but her newborn was taken by the state:

She had no one who could care for the child. The terrifying reality is that the child is now in the hands of total strangers and in a culture altogether alien to hers, for she is of Hispanic origin.

A second foster-care placement of a Hispanic child also led to problems. The inmate's husband kept the older child while the younger one, just 2 months old at the time, was taken by the state and placed in a foster home (English-speaking, although the birth mother spoke little English). While the husband regularly brought the older child to visit, the foster mother rarely brought the younger one:

[The birth mother] has shared with me the frustration, guilt and anger she feels knowing that her child has been separated from not only herself but from her father and oldest sister. The foster mother is neither objective nor supportive about anything, especially when it concerns the relationships between the prisoner and the child. In the past year, the child has visited on [only] two separate occasions. . . . It is no secret that the foster mother plans on keeping the daughter. . . .

Although mothers much preferred leaving their children with family members, that option was by no means problem-free. The relatives were often poor,

and adding another child or two to the family was sometimes burdensome. There was not always enough money for food, clothing, medicine, and school. Getting welfare, food stamps, and other government benefits for children in such unorthodox status was at times, reportedly, very difficult and slow. Other studies have reached the same conclusion (Datesman & Cales, 1983, pp. 142-143).

It should be noted that some of the mothers were able to help support their children by working at a DCC factory which produces clothing for state mental hospitals and prisons. Some reportedly earned around \$200 per month (on a piece-rate basis) and sent much of it to their children.

Family Visits in Prison

Inmates treasured visits with their families, which they interpreted as concrete evidence that those people still cared for them. Visits also reassured inmates that their families were alright and gave them opportunities to atone for the shame and suffering they had brought upon the family. Mothers were particularly excited about seeing their children, seeing how much they had changed, and attempting to keep alive the notion that they were really the parents despite their temporary absence from home. A mother of two small children who had always had a good relationship with her parents wrote: "I wanted to see my family everyday, but that was . . . impossible because . . . the institution only allows two visits per week and also my family had a life of their own to lead." On the rare occasions when her family postponed visits, she was very upset:

At times, I couldn't understand why my family would tell me they were coming on a certain day and then had to cancel because of other obligations. I would feel very hurt and even unwanted or forgotten. I would go to my room and cry in "privacy."

Some inmates received regular and frequent family visits, others saw their families only once in a great while, and still others appeared to be totally abandoned. Some of the women said their families' failure to visit was among the greatest hardships they had suffered in prison. One of my students reported that inmates who have no visitors sometimes become very upset, particularly during holidays when visiting is common and being apart from one's family is "a painful reality." While some of the visitorless women "are happy and excited that their friend is going to spend some time with 'people of the free world,'" others resort to "spitting vicious and cruel remarks." They do so, the student suggested, "out of envy or . . . frustration."

Visiting the penitentiary is often difficult. In the words of one student:

The burden of providing for her children leaves these extended members in a financial bind. After clothing, feeding, and sending

the children to school, there is little motivation or money to plan a trip down to Dwight, which is 80 miles from Chicago. Most importantly these family members do not own a car and outsiders are unreliable.

Visiting is inhibited by many other factors as well. As noted earlier, a former spouse may not allow the children to visit. Foster parents may also discourage visits out of indifference or having concluded that regular contact with a convicted felon will undermine what they are trying to teach the child. Some of the inmates were from out of state and their families lived far away. Upon arrival at the prison, visitors might have to submit to searches, which some reportedly found humiliating. Or if a head-count had failed to clear, all visits might be suspended until the "missing" prisoner had been located; this could lead to problems for families too poor to spend the night, for those on tight schedules, and for those dependent upon others for transportation.

Despite the fact that visits were generally treasured by inmates, they could also be very painful—both for the inmate and the visitors. Children, for example, sometimes asked troubling questions. One 27-year-old woman serving a 45-year sentence said her 6-year-old son "keeps asking me when I'm coming home. What do you tell a child when he asks something like that?"

As noted earlier, Dwight inmates had sometimes lied to their children about where they were. Other studies have found the same pattern (Daehlin & Hynes, 1974; Zalba, 1964). This deception sometimes led to embarrassment and tension during visits to the DCC. One of my students had heard young children visiting the prison say things like "my mother can't be home with us because she is in school" or "she has a job here and it keeps her away from home." But, she continued, "I've . . . [also] witnessed the look of entrapment, when the child challenges the mother's lie saying 'Mom this is a jail, see the fence and barbed wires outside.'"

As McCarthy (1980) has noted, because inmates cannot communicate a great deal with their children and someone else assumes parental duties, children may begin thinking of the caregiver as the real parent. That sometimes led to problems during visits at Dwight. When a foster mother brought a 3-year-old to visit her mother: "It was pure agony for the mother to hear her daughter calling someone else Mommy."

Even the "best" visits sometimes reduced both inmate and visitor to tears and depression:

When Mary comes here to Dwight to see me every two weeks it is an OK visit until time to go home, then she cries and sometimes has to be dragged away from me. My [adult] son gets very depressed and cries also at times. My older daughters cry at times. . . .

Getting Money and Other Material Assistance From Home

Many inmates are totally dependent upon the institution for satisfying their material needs. While the food and clothing it furnishes are sufficient to meet basic needs, they are not what most of us would choose. While inmate wages can be used to supplement prison-supplied consumer goods, most of the women earn very little. Consequently financial assistance from home can make the difference between living the life of an ordinary inmate and living more like people in the "free world." It can also enable prisoners to make payments on treasured goods they have left back home.

Financial problems sometimes led to hard feelings between inmates and their families. Prior to her imprisonment one of the women had purchased a "comfortable" house, "a middle income earner's dream." After her arrest and imprisonment, her adult children attempted to make the payments (\$198 a month). But their incomes were modest, and they had assumed financial obligations for their younger brothers and sisters, so they eventually defaulted and the bank repossessed the house. In an effort to protect their mother, they did not tell her what had happened: "They lied and pretended all they could, but the truth did come out. I was angry, hurt, and blamed everyone but myself for losing it."

Another inmate complained about family members leading inmates to believe they would send money or consumer goods, then failing to follow through: "It can really hit a nerve when you ask [them] to send you some money and are told 'I'll see what I can do,' or 'It's on the way,' and it never gets here."

One of the problems reported by female inmates in a study by MacKenzie, Robinson, and Campbell (1989) was "missing little 'luxuries,' e.g., your favorite food, your own clothes." Some of the Dwight prisoners talked about the frustration of having to depend upon the institution for food and clothing. Those with money could do better, but that generally required assistance from home:

I am fortunate that I have family support. . . . One . . . tries to maintain a good image and sense of self-worth by dressing to feel good. Unfortunately, for many, there is little or no money coming from home so they have to rely mainly on what the state pays them. . . . Those inmates who do have financial support from home are able to purchase clothing from catalogs and feel good about their appearance. They are able to purchase wants and not just needs from commissary.

Cooking one's own meals with some frequency could also reduce the frustration of imprisonment and per-

haps restore some self-esteem, but for the vast majority of inmates that, too, would require outside financial assistance. Prisoners complained about having to eat basically the same foods—day after day, month after month, year after year. But those with money from home could purchase their own groceries, plan their own menus, and cook and dine back in the cottages. In addition to choosing a more exciting menu, these lucky inmates could escape the more authoritarian atmosphere of the central dining hall. Sometimes they invited other inmates to dine with them, turning the meal into quite a social occasion. This was said to build and cement friendships and to make both hostess and guests feel better about themselves.

Missing Major Family Events

Some of the inmates said one of the worst aspects of imprisonment was their inability to be with families during times of great family sorrow. When family members were ill or dying, they felt they should be home in a supportive role. One inmate regretted being unable to be "at my mother's side when she had her surgery performed. I wanted to be there to comfort her and make sure she was alright. . . . I felt that I was 'supposed' to be there because . . . [such] events . . . held a major significance in my family's lives."

At the time of her crime, another inmate, a practical nurse, had been taking care of her elderly mother, "a double amputee, blind, and totally dependent on me for everything she needed." Upon conviction, she reportedly asked the judge to continue bail pending sentence so she could continue caring for her mother and arrange for alternative care, but her request was denied. Some 3 months later her mother died. The prisoner blamed herself for being away from home when she was so desperately needed there.

Some inmates worried that family members would die prior to their release. When asked the first thing she thought of when sentenced to the penitentiary, one woman said: "whether or not my mother would make it until I got home." While in prison, the nurse mentioned above lost not only her mother but also her ex-husband under unusually sad circumstances. Divorced prior to committing her crime, her imprisonment had led to their reconciliation, and they had made plans to remarry upon her release from prison. However, he died while on a trip looking for a house for them and for a new job for himself.

Some of the prisoners also lamented their absence from home during times of great family happiness. Stated one term paper: "I often thought of the major events that I was missing in my family's lives such as my sister's prom or wedding, my brother's wedding, the births of my nephews, and my oldest child's first day of school."

The fact of imprisonment did not mean that the prisoner was squeezed totally out of joyous family events. On Mother's Day or birthdays, of course, cards could be sent and telephone calls and visits could be made. One inmate had developed a special tradition to show her several children how proud she was of their progress in school: "When Sue Ann graduated from 8th grade, she was given a dozen yellow long stemmed roses as was my custom to give my daughters upon graduation."

Happy family events sometimes precipitated improvements in the lives of inmates. One credited her family's accomplishments in school for her decision to enter the college program in prison. She had taken great pride in her mother's achievement of the GED, her sister's graduation from high school, and her youngest brother's high school graduation and enrollment at a technical college: "I was so proud of them all. And their achievements really made me want to go on in school and helped me believe that I could be more than just a criminal."

Some of the inmates eagerly looked forward to early release so they could again participate directly in important family events. One, for example, was very excited that she would be home for her young son's first day of school.

But even "happy" family events could lead to problems. One prisoner found herself blaming her family because she was missing out on major family events: "I would often feel guilty about the way I would think because normally I'm not a selfish person, but some things, such as my sister's wedding, I felt they could have waited until I got home to do." Only after considerable reconsideration could she see the injustice of her position: "[I finally admitted that] . . . their lives must go on, it doesn't stop because of my incarceration."

Paradoxically, some of the most important family events, shared as fully as possible with the inmate, produced the greatest sadness:

... [Family visits on] the holidays, Mother's Day and my birthday are the hardest. There have been times when the officers would have to pull us apart, put my family out of the institution, and talk to me to ease my hurt and crying so I could get myself together to return to my cottage.

Summary and Conclusions

Until recent years, criminal justice scholars had paid little attention to female inmates or to the family relationships of prisoners, either male or female. This study of female inmates at Illinois' Dwight Correctional Center turns attention to both of these important topics. It focuses on: (1) the apparent preoccupation of many of the women with family relationships; (2) their tendency to see the children of female inmates as victims of their mothers' crimes; (3)

the difficult problem of finding temporary homes for such children; (4) the joys and sorrows of family visits at the penitentiary; (5) the importance of getting material assistance from home; and (6) inmate regrets over being away from home during such symbolically important family events as births, deaths, marriages, graduation, and the like. A limitation of my study is that it focuses on the perspectives of the inmates, and those perspectives may not always be consistent with reality.

A number of family views held by my informants would suggest that they may be amenable to rehabilitation. Time and again, informants emphasized that the worst aspect of doing time was family separation and the realization that they themselves had brought undeserved hardships to their families—particularly parents and small children. Several expressed a desire to prove to their families that they could stay out of trouble in the future. Some mothers talked about their eagerness to reclaim and raise their children. Many contrasted the misery of prison existence to the joys of family life in the free world. The following three quotations suggest the possibility that in the future at least some of these women would rule out additional crime because the family price is too high:

- (1) The sorrow, heartaches, pain, deaths, and separation it inflicted on my family are beyond my ability to describe.
- (2) What can I do while I'm here to help me get back the love & trust of my family?
- (3) I want to be able to take care of my sons and be the mother they deserve. I have no intentions of ever forging another check or doing anything contrary to the law again.

Such considerations would suggest that female prisons might do well to encourage inmate maintenance of family relationships (although perhaps not in every single case). Some institutions have already moved in this direction by such innovations as allowing family members to visit overnight, permitting an unrestricted number of visits by close family members, and allowing infants to live at the prison with their mothers. If more mothers had the opportunity to work at such prison industries as the DCC clothing factory, they could do more to support their children. While some of the most important reforms would have to be undertaken by the prisons themselves, other persons could also help alleviate some of the problems identified in this article. Charitable groups have been known to provide free transportation so impoverished family members could visit relatives in prison. When arresting mothers with small children, police officers might

do more to reduce the trauma. And, finally, more judges might wish to consider the wisdom of utilizing nonprison punishment for nonviolent mothers with children.

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