

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PRISON AND THE COMMUNITY:

An exploration of resettlement and desistance among female
offenders in England and Canada

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Abstract

Despite recent developments in law and policy in both England and Wales and Canada which have aimed to decrease the number of offenders being sent to prison, prison populations continue to increase. In England the prison population has nearly doubled since 1991 (Morgan and Liebling, 2007) and despite a slight decrease in the overall prison population in Canada in recent years both female offenders and offenders who have breached the conditions of their release are being sent to prison more frequently (Motiuk, Cousineau and Gileno, 2005; Dell, Sinclair and Boe, 2001: iv). Despite efforts to create a more 'seamless' service and provide a continuity of care for those leaving prison, recidivism rates remain high.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite recent developments in law and policy in both England and Wales and Canada which have aimed to decrease the number of offenders being sent to prison, prison populations continue to increase. In England the prison population has nearly doubled since 1991 (Morgan and Lieblich, 2007) and despite a slight decrease in the overall prison population in Canada in recent years both female offenders and offenders who have breached the conditions of their release are being sent to prison more frequently (Motiuk, Cousineau and Gileno, 2005; Dell, Sinclair and Boe, 2001: iv). Despite efforts to create a more 'seamless' service and provide a continuity of care for those leaving prison, recidivism rates remain high.

Throughout this dissertation the following questions will be discussed:

- What are the barriers to successful re-settlement? Are they the same or different in England and Wales and Canada? Are they different for female and male offenders?
- Why do some offenders return to prison repeatedly while others are able to move on and desist from crime? Are the reasons the same for female and male offenders?
- Can prisons play a more effective role in preparing offenders for release, thereby aiding the resettlement and desistance process? Is this the role of prisons?
- Have prisons become 'too good' that offenders would rather go back to prison than try to re-settle in the community? Or are prisons so atrocious that they only serve to make offender's situations worse upon release subsequently decreasing an offender's chance of successful resettlement?
- What can be done to 'bridge the gap' making the transition from prison into the community more successful, thereby decreasing prison populations and decreasing crime?

These questions will be explored in as much depth as the scope of this dissertation will allow, comparing where appropriate similarities and differences between England and Wales and Canada. The goal is to contribute to the literature on how to make the transition from prison into the community more successful for offenders.

Chapter one introduces the concept of a continuity of care from prison to the community in England and Wales and Canada and provides an overview of the political climate of both correctional systems. Chapter two explores the barriers to resettlement awaiting released prisoners while chapter three explores the complicated process of desistance from crime and the effects of gender on desistance. Finally, chapter four explores ways in which the gap between prison and the community can be bridged making the transition more successful in terms of resettlement and decreased reoffending. This chapter also explores implications of putting policy into practice and includes recommendations for the future in terms of further bridging the gap between prisons and the community.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY

The initial ideas for this dissertation came while I was working as a Correctional Officer in a federal women's prison in Canada. It became increasingly frustrating watching many offenders be released from the prison, only to see them return a short time later. Even women who seemed to have a good chance of successful resettlement returned a short time later. Other times it felt as though we could stand with the front gate open and await a quick return.

I began to wonder why this was happening, on a deeper level than simply acknowledging the 'revolving door' of the criminal justice system. What was happening when prisoners try, or in some cases, are forced, to re-enter the community as they do not necessarily leave prison when *they* feel ready, they leave prison when policy and law dictate or when a review board decides to grant their release. I wondered why some offenders never came back, while others returned repeatedly. I wanted to learn about the experiences of female offenders who leave prison and are supposed to reintegrate/re-settle into the community and try to uncover, in as much detail as possible, why they so often return to prison.

INTERNATIONAL SAMPLE

Throughout this dissertation I will present original empirical data from interviews I conducted with three female offenders currently incarcerated in a federal women's prison in Canada as well as three female offenders in England living at a bail hostel. The 'eligibility criteria' to participate in this study, aside from being female, was that they had been in prison, were released to the community and had subsequently returned to prison either for breaching their release conditions or re-offending. The criteria had to be slightly modified for the interviews in England, as I was denied access to a women's prison after making several attempts. As an alternative I was able to gain access to a women's bail hostel where I interviewed three women. Two of the women had been in prison twice in the past, were released to the community in between prison sentences and are now back in the community again. One woman had only been in prison once before and is now in the community, however I felt she could contribute to the study by discussing the challenges she is faced with and the differences between prison and the community. Although the female offenders interviewed in England were not currently incarcerated, they had been in the past and I felt interviewing them would provide similar insight regarding their experiences when released from prison and what had led to their return to prison. The Canadian interviews were conducted in a prison and the offenders had volunteered to participate in the study by responding to a poster the social programs staff displayed on my behalf. The offenders I interviewed in England volunteered to participate after I spoke to the residents of the bail hostel about the study. All six participants were informed that their anonymity would be protected, as their names would never be used nor would any other information that would allow them to be identified. Prior to conducting the interviews ethical approval was granted by the University of Sheffield's School of Law Ethics Committee and all six participants provided informed consent.

AIMS OF CASE STUDY

My goal in conducting these interviews was to learn from individuals who have experienced the transition from prison into the community in order to contribute to the development of more appropriate interventions based on real accounts of perceived barriers. Furthermore, by conducting interviews in Canada and England my hope was to explore whether these experiences are similar or different across the two jurisdictions. I asked a series of questions in interviews that were one to two hours in length. These included:

- Did the thought of going back to prison cross your mind when you breached your conditions or re-offended?
- Do you use drugs? (If Yes) Which came first for you drugs or crime?
- Do you have children?
- When was the last time you were with them?
- Did you see them while you were in the community on release? (if not why not)
- Between prison and the community where do you feel you have more support?

Findings from the interviews will supplement a much broader literature review and will be included throughout the dissertation where they pertain to the topic being discussed.

While this empirical data comes from a sample of female offenders in Canada and England and Wales it is important to point out that resettlement and desistance literature to date has predominantly focussed on males. Therefore much of the literature discussed throughout this dissertation comes from studies that focussed on male offenders; however where gender similarities and differences have been found they will be explored.

The interviewees will be referred to as follows:

COUNTRY	NAME	ETHNICITY	AGE RANGE
CANADIAN INTERVIEWEES	<i>A</i>	ABORIGINAL	22-30
	<i>B</i>	ABORIGINAL	31-45
	<i>C</i>	ABORIGINAL	31-45
BRITISH INTERVIEWEES	<i>1</i>	WHITE BRITISH	18-21
	<i>2</i>	WHITE BRITISH	22-30
	<i>3</i>	WHITE BRITISH	31-45

1. THE CONTINUITY OF CARE - HOW IT IS SUPPOSED TO WORK

ENGLAND AND WALES

At present, there are approximately 83,000 adults in prison in England Wales (Howard League, 2008) which is nearly double the number from 1991-1992 (Morgan and Liebling, 2007). In 2008, the male prison population increased by four per cent in England and Wales, while the female prisoner population increased by 5 per cent to approximately 4,500 female prisoners (Fawcett Society, 2006). In England and Wales in 2002, 67 per cent of male prisoners discharged from prison were reconvicted within two years (Cuppleditch and Evans 2005 cited in LeBel *et al*, 2008: 133). Similarly, in 2004, 64 per cent of female prisoners released in England and Wales reoffended within two years (Fawcett Society, 2006). Prison populations are out of control, for many reasons. Not only are more offenders being sent to prison for less serious offences, more are being sent to prison for breaching their release conditions. As Baroness Corston stated in her report 'breach is racketing up the use of custody to little avail and there are alternative community solutions... [to be explored]' (Corston, forward: I, 2007).

Despite the fact that the Criminal Justice Act 1991 stressed that custody was meant to be a last resort for crimes of such a serious nature that prison was the only appropriate punishment (Burnett and Maruna, 2004) imprisonment rates continue to increase as sentencers feel this is what the public wants (Ashworth 2003 cited in Burnett and Maruna, 2004). The majority of women in custody in England and Wales have been convicted of non-violent offences, drug offences and theft and handling. Despite not being the most serious offences for which prison is the only appropriate punishment, the female prison population has more than doubled in the last decade (Prison Reform Trust, 2007). Not only is the incarceration rate in England and Wales the highest in Western Europe (Home Office 2005a, cited in Morgan and Liebling, 2007) but Morgan and Liebling have pointed out that new sentences introduced under the Criminal Justice Act 2003 'make it likely that the heavy reliance on custody will continue' (2007: 1100).

CANADA

In 2004/2005 there were approximately 152,000 adults under the supervision of correctional agencies in Canada. Of these, 32,000 were in federal penitentiaries or provincial or territorial jails while the remainder were under supervision in the community (Statistics Canada). Of the 32,000 prisoners, approximately 900 are women incarcerated in federal prisons. Undeniably a large increase from the 210 federally incarcerated women in 1996 (Motiuk *et al*, 2005). It is important to point out that female offenders in Canada make up a slightly larger percentage of the provincial correctional population than the federal correctional population (6 per cent as opposed to 4 per cent) (Kong and Au Coin, 2008). This means that of the convicted female offender population in Canada, more are serving shorter sentences as provincial sentences are for less than two years whereas federal sentences are for more than two years. Women in provincial jails are most commonly serving sentences for drug related crimes and theft, whereas a much higher percentage of women in federal prisons are serving sentences for violent offences (Trevethan, 1999). Based on crime type and sentence length, the female prisoner population in England and Wales is most comparable to the provincial female prisoner population in Canada. Research on female offenders in Canada however has predominantly focussed on the federal

population under the supervision of the Correctional Service of Canada, where there has also been a significant increase in population.

Similar to the Criminal Justice Act 1991 in England and Wales, Canadian parliament have made changes to the sentencing provisions of the Criminal Code in an effort to ensure that alternatives to prison are used in all appropriate cases; however, there continue to be high rates of imprisonment in Canada (Prison Justice, 2007). In 2003 'Canada's rate [of imprisonment] was at the high end compared to Europe, but was significantly below the incarceration rate of the United States' (Motiuk *et al.*, 2005: 9).

Although the increase in prison populations in England and Wales and Canada presents numerous problems, the focus of this dissertation is the process of returning offenders from prison to the community and how to make this a more successful transition: 'successful' in terms of reducing the number of offenders going back to prison repeatedly for breaching the conditions of their release or for reoffending *and* by reducing crime through stronger resettlement plans and more successful desistance. Can and should prisons play a role in helping to make this transition more successful? According to the mission statements of both the Correctional Service of Canada and Her Majesty's Prison Service in England and Wales, prisons are mandated to play a role in the continuity of care from prison into the community.

THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

The mission statement of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is:

The CSC, as part of the criminal justice system and respecting the rule of law, contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control. (Motiuk, *et al.*, 2005: 3)

CSC's mission statement 'provides federal corrections with a strategic framework for contributing to the safe return of offenders to the community' (Motiuk *et al.*, 2005:3).

Furthermore, the 1992 *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* provides the legal framework under which CSC operates and stipulates that CSC is:

to contribute to a just, peaceful, and safe society by: carrying out sentences imposed by the courts ...*assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.* (Motiuk *et al.*, 2005: 3, emphasis added)

HER MAJESTY'S PRISON SERVICE

Her Majesty's Prison Service in England and Wales shares a similar mission statement to the CSC in that it is also mandated to help provide a continuity of care for offenders from prison to the community.

Its Statement of Purpose reads:

Her Majesty's Prison Service serves the public by keeping in custody those convicted by the courts. Our duty is to look after them with humanity and to help them lead law abiding and useful lives *in custody and after release.* (Cited in Morgan and Liebling, 2007: 1111, emphasis added)

In his 1990 report Lord Woolf explained that the prison service protects the public by preventing crime by 'looking after prisoners with humanity... [and]...minimizing the negative effects of imprisonment' (cited in Morgan and Liebling, 2007: 1111). He further stated that life in prison should resemble life outside prison to every extent possible, and should provide opportunities to gain skills. While clarifying that this did not mean returning to a treatment model of corrections, Woolf acknowledged that releasing prisoners in an 'embittered and disaffected state' would only serve to increase the likelihood of re-offending (Woolf Report paras. 14.8-9, cited in Morgan and Liebling, 2007: 1112).

PRISON'S ROLE IN RESETTLEMENT

While mandated to contribute to the successful resettlement of offenders, it is important to note that prisons can only play an assisting role in this process and cannot be held responsible for the totality of its success. Blaming recidivism and unsuccessful resettlement solely on prisons 'not working' would be to ignore both the role of the individual offender and that of the community in the resettlement process.

The Corrections and Conditional Release Act of 1992 states that the Correctional Service of Canada is mandated to 'carry out sentences imposed by the courts' (Motiuk *et al*, 2005: 3). This means, as in England and Wales, that prison environments are not supposed to be an additional punishment over and above the incapacitory nature of imprisonment itself. Offenders are sent to prison as punishment for a crime they have committed, or as some have described it, for violating the 'social norms or generally accepted standards of society' (Laub and Sampson, 2001: 10). However, one may argue that if no effort is made to increase the chances of successful resettlement and desistance while offenders are incarcerated, they are likely to return to criminal activity once released because none of the issues that initially led to incarceration have been addressed.

Communities need to be involved in receiving offenders back into society, societal barriers need to be addressed and offenders themselves need *to want* to reintegrate and become law abiding, contributing members of society. Therefore, both an offender's circumstances or structural barriers and his or her choices or cognitive barriers need to change in order for resettlement and desistance to be successful, and prison may be a starting point in this process of change.

THE REALITY

Prisons are used as punishment, but for the overwhelming majority prison is not permanent. The public is protected whilst an offender is incarcerated, but the majority of offenders *will* return to the community and the majority will return after a relatively short period of time.

Approximately 80 per cent of admissions to Canadian federal prisons are offenders with sentences of 2 to 5 years and on average the time served in prison is approximately half their sentence (Motiuk *et al*, 2005:13). In 2005 approximately two thirds of female offenders sentenced to custody in England and Wales were sentenced for less than six months (Prison Reform Trust, 2007). Knowing that the majority of offenders leave prison after a relatively short period of time, one could argue that a greater focus on improving the resettlement process is required. As Seiter and Kadela (2003) rightly point out: more offenders being sentenced to

prison, means more prisoners eventually being released into the community (cited in Crow, 2006: 8).

AUTOMATIC RELEASE FROM PRISON

Both England and Wales and Canada have automatic release dates from prison for the majority of offences, which means that even if an offender is not granted an early release from a review board, they will automatically be released at some point. The exception is life sentences for which there is no automatic release date. However even an offender with a life sentence may be granted release from the Parole Board, or the Home Secretary in England and Wales (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Life sentencees may be released into the community, but will have conditions attached to their release for the rest of their lives. If they breach their conditions they risk being recalled to prison (Carlen and Worrall, 2004).²

In Canada there are several ways in which a federal offender can be released before the end of his or her sentence. Conditional release programs such as; day parole, full parole and statutory release, are 'based on the premise that a period of *supervised* transition from prison to the community enhances public safety and the rehabilitation of offenders' (Motiuk *et al*, 2005: 18, emphasis added). However, offenders released on day or full parole have been found to be less likely to re-offend violently than offenders released under statutory release (Motiuk *et al*, 2005). One could argue this is because day and full parole are earned whereas statutory release is automatic, occurring after two thirds of a custodial sentence. Therefore, an offender could be denied parole but still be released on their statutory release date whether or not they or the community are ready. Due to its automatic nature offenders released on statutory release have not necessarily developed insight into the reasons for their offending or experienced any significant levels of remorse or responsibility for their actions. As a result an offender released on statutory release may pose no less threat to society than when he or she was first incarcerated. Automatic releases occur in England and Wales as well. In England an offender who is given a prison sentence of 12 months or less will automatically be released halfway through and will only be supervised in the community if under 21 years of age (SEU, 2002). For sentences of 12 months to four years most prisoners will still be released halfway through on licence (with conditions) (SEU, 2002). Similar to prisoners released on conditional release in Canada, prisoners released on licence in England and Wales will be supervised for a period of time by a probation/parole officer in the community (SEU, 2002). Generally, an offender on conditional release is required to report to their probation officer once a week for a meeting that will last just fifteen to thirty minutes (Home Office, 2005). Whether or not this is enough support will be explored in more depth later.

² In Canada, the nature of the offence and length of sentence will determine which system (provincial or federal) an offender serves his or her sentence. The provincial system incorporates custodial penalties of less than two years or community penalties. If an offender receives a sentence of two years or more they will serve their sentence in a federal prison until released into the community where they will serve the remainder until their 'warrant expiry' (very end of their sentence).

In 2004 the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was established to 'transform the management of offenders and provide clear accountability for reducing reoffending' (Home Office, 2005 cited in Morgan and Liebling, 2007: 1110). NOMS was introduced post Criminal Justice Act 2003 in order to better manage an offender's sentence from 'end to end' providing continuity throughout the sentence by not only 'targeting the right sentence on the right offender' but also 'with interventions being delivered to the right person at the right time' (NOMS, 2007: ii). However, judging by the high rates at which both male and female offenders continue to return to prison, it seems that many offenders are falling through the cracks of this 'end to end' service.

As Gelsthorpe and Sharpe (2007) have pointed out, a large percentage of these are likely to be female offenders as approximately 70 per cent receive short sentences and are therefore released from prison without any supervision. Some of the barriers preventing a seamless transition from prison to the community will now be explored.

2. BARRIERS TO RESETTLEMENT

DEFINING 'RESETTLEMENT'

The words 'resettlement', 'reintegration' and 're-entry' are commonly used to describe the process of offenders leaving prison for the community. Definitions of these terms have varied in order to differentiate between different parts of this process. As Maruna *et al* explain:

Reintegration...or 're-entry' ...is both an event and a process. Narrowly speaking, re-entry comes the day a prisoner is released from confinement...more broadly, re-entry is also a long-term process...that actually starts prior to release and continues well afterwards. (2004: 5)

Maruna *et al* use the words 'reintegration' and 're-entry' interchangeably in referring to the point of release from prison into the community, and a longer process that begins before release and carries on into the community post release. The UK Association of Chief Officers of Probation defines resettlement as:

a systematic and evidence-based process by which actions are taken to work with the offender *in custody and on release, so that communities are better protected from harm and re-offending is significantly reduced. It encompasses the totality of work with prisoners, their families and significant others in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations.* (Cited in Morgan and Owers 2001: 12 emphasis added)

This definition of resettlement describes a multi-agency approach to reintegration/re-entry that involves not only the offender, but the offender's family and members of the community and voluntary agencies *both during and after* imprisonment for two primary purposes: to protect the community from further harm and to reduce re-offending. For the purposes of this dissertation all three terms: re-entry, reintegration and resettlement, will be used interchangeably.

As stated above, the overwhelming majority of prisoners will re-enter the community at some point. According to their mission statements, prisons in England and Wales and Canada do have a role to play in this and the challenge for correctional agencies is 'to provide programs and supervision that will enable the offender to safely reintegrate into the community' (Motiuk *et al*, 2005: 14). However, as Motiuk *et al* (2004) rightly suggest, in order to provide appropriate programs and support correctional agencies must understand the obstacles awaiting prisoners in the community.

EVIDENCE FROM EXISTING RESEARCH ON RESETTLEMENT NEEDS

As many barriers to resettlement are arguably similar for female and male offenders they will be discussed in general. However, where a barrier has been found to be more significant for female offenders it will be further explored.

ACCOMMODATION

According to Baroness Corston's report 30 per cent of women lose their accommodation while in prison. This means that when released from prison many female offenders find themselves homeless (Corston Report, 2007). Furthermore, as there are far fewer female offenders than males there are fewer female prisons and halfway houses/bail hostels for female offenders in the community. There are only five bail hostels for female offenders in England and Wales

(Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2007). This means female prisoners are often sent to prison and released to bail hostels long distances from home and from familial support (Corston, 2007). Similar problems exist in Canada in terms of a shortage of halfway houses for female offenders in the community. One of the offenders interviewed in Canada spoke of this problem when asked if she had seen her children while on release in the community stating:

No, I didn't see them...they're too far away and I had to be back at the halfway house by curfew so that's not enough time to get to where they are and back...they're 12 hours away by car and they can't afford to come here. [Interviewee A]

Another offender spoke of the location of the halfway house in relation to where she used to use drugs and commit crime:

I didn't want to go to that halfway house because it's in the worst location...it's way too close to my old stomping grounds...it's too tempting to just go back. [Interviewee B]

Finally, as many prisoners have limited histories of employment and low levels of education, obtaining a job and making enough money to afford and sustain housing is a further barrier to resettlement.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

In 2004 approximately 77 per cent of the federal prison population in Canada did not have a high school diploma (Motiuk *et al.*, 2005). Approximately half of the federal female prisoner population has less than a grade nine education and 80 per cent were unemployed at the time of admission (Trevethan, 1999). In their report, the SEU (2002) found that for a high percentage of prisoners, their writing, numeracy and reading skills were below those of an eleven year old child. Lack of education and employment are both factors which have been found to account for a high percentage of re-offending (SEU, 2002). Therefore, if offenders could increase their levels of education and gain employable skills while incarcerated, perhaps the likelihood of obtaining employment once released would increase and recidivism would decrease as it has been found that obtaining employment can significantly reduce the risk of reoffending (*ibid*). Furthermore, the stigma attached to having a criminal record and having been in prison makes it even more difficult for an ex-prisoner to obtain and sustain meaningful employment (Western *et al.*, 2001 cited in LeBel *et al.*, 2008: 134). Even if an offender does obtain employable skills while in prison, having to disclose a criminal record to a potential employer is likely to be 'a significant barrier, resulting in discrimination' (SEU, 2002: 9).

Finally, the majority of female offenders serve short sentences making it difficult to complete education and employment programs while incarcerated (SEU, 2002). A major problem with this however is that short-term prisoners have the highest reoffending rates (SEU, 2002) therefore greater support and *community* interventions need to be focussed on female offenders.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

For many offenders, going to prison is the first chance they have had to deal with substance abuse issues (SEU, 2002). It has been estimated that approximately 70 per cent of prisoners have a substance abuse problem and 80 per cent of those individuals have never received treatment (SEU, 2002). Substance abuse is particularly high among female offenders. In 2001/2002, 61 per cent of the female offenders admitted to federal custody in Canada abused drugs (Boe,

Nafekh, Vuong, Sinclair and Cousineau, 2003). In a 2005 sample of female offenders in England and Wales 32 per cent had misused drugs and 24 per cent had misused alcohol (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2007). While prisons in England and Wales are beginning to offer intensive drug treatment programs they are still in developmental stages (SEU, 2002). In 1999 a substance abuse program designed to focus on the unique needs of female federal offenders in Canada was introduced (VanDenBroek, 2006). The program has three components, two of which are delivered in custody and a third which focuses on maintenance is delivered in the community once released. The community component was added because it was felt that community follow up in female offender treatment was lacking and it has been argued that the community component still requires strengthening (VanDenBroek, 2006).

Perhaps the most significant finding from the interviews I conducted was that the offenders in Canada stated they had more support both in general and in terms of programs in prison than they did in the community. Offenders in England and Wales however reported having more support in the community than they did in prison. Despite this difference, participants from both groups found it easier to stay off drugs while in prison. One offender interviewed in England stated she had considered breaching her licence on purpose so she would be sent back to prison, but subsequently did not as she felt she had more support in the community for substance abuse:

I wanted to go back...I don't know why...but I thought if I go back to prison I can sort me head out...it's the only way I can keep off drugs is back in prison...but there's no support in there for that and seeing other people using drugs in prison is really hard...it's just that out here I know exactly where to go to get them but I have to keep telling myself not to go...I'm constantly struggling with myself. [Interviewee 3]

An offender in Canada spoke of her return to drug use:

I had enough support while I was at the treatment centre, and in prison there's the programs and the staff...but not at the halfway house...I need structure and I need support...but there was too much freedom too soon...there was nothing to do and it was too overwhelming. [Interviewee C]

Another offender in Canada stated:

Me...I learned a lot being in prison. All my life all I knew how to do was drugs and selling drugs. All through the years I've been in four different prisons and it has kept me from killing myself, it has taught me how to look inside myself, it has brought back my spirituality, and is teaching me how to find work and learn, and the substance abuse programs in here really sits with you. [Interviewee B]

This offender spoke of the lack of substance abuse programming in the community and identified boredom as the reason she eventually left the halfway house and began using drugs again before turning herself in to the authorities and being sent back to prison.

Substance misuse is arguably an area where female offenders need increased support in the community as it appears to be a barrier to successful resettlement in both jurisdictions.

CHILDCARE

A significantly high proportion of female prisoners have children. According to the Fawcett Society (2006) approximately 66 per cent of female prisoners in England and Wales have dependent children, which results in approximately 17,700 children a year being separated from their mothers by imprisonment. A shortage of child care resources in the community has been identified as a potential barrier to successful resettlement for female offenders as they may not be able to attend programs in the community if they cannot secure appropriate child care. It is important to point out however, that this only applies in situations where female offenders still have custody of their children which for many is not the case. Of the six women interviewed, five had children but none had custody of them. When asked if they had seen their children while released to the community, none of them had:

I haven't seen my kids in years...one lives with my parents and the other lives with the dad's parents, and I'm not allowed to see them, I have to go through social services to see them, but I have to show that I can be stable first before I'll be allowed to see them.
[Interviewee 3]

My kid doesn't want to see me until I'm straightened out. We talk on the phone, but she wants her mom to get better and go to treatment and be better before she'll see me.
[Interviewee B]

MENTAL HEALTH

Research shows that levels of diagnosed mental illness are high among female prisoners. Approximately 20 per cent of federal female offenders in Canada have been hospitalized in a mental health facility, 12 per cent have a psychiatric diagnosis and 21 per cent have been prescribed medication for mental health issues (Motiuk *et al.*, 2005). For some offenders, prison might be the first time they have had access to counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists. For those offenders who have been diagnosed with mental health concerns, an integral part of their resettlement plans should be to ensure that once released they continue to have professional support as well as access to appropriate medications.

PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS/IMPULSIVITY

Limited problem solving skills and a tendency to act impulsively are common to many offenders (Motiuk *et al.*, 2005) and are likely to inhibit successful resettlement. Approximately 79 per cent of federal offenders in Canada have been identified as having poor problem solving skills and an equally high percentage are considered to be impulsive (*ibid.*). The ability to adapt and cope when plans change or expectations are not met once released is something prisoners may need help with and techniques could be practiced while incarcerated. Two of the inmates interviewed in Canada spoke of their release plans changing right before their release and how this played a significant role in the deterioration of their resettlement.

One interviewee stated:

I thought I was going to a treatment centre when I got out...but just before I was released they told me I didn't need to go to treatment and was being sent to a halfway house right back in the same neighbourhood where I used to do drugs and crime...they messed with my treatment...and that set me off right from the beginning...that messed everything up.[Interviewee B]

Being able to adapt when things do not go as planned is a crucial part of life in the community and will play a role in whether or not resettlement is successful.

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS TO RESETTLEMENT **THE OFFENDER**

Many offenders have also been the victims of abuse (Rumgay, 2004a). Female offenders especially report experiencing high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse throughout their lives which has arguably led to low levels of self-esteem and confidence as well as perhaps a feeling of hopelessness for the future in being able to make significant changes in their lives. Levels of depression, self harm and suicide have been found to be significantly higher among female prisoners than male prisoners (Corston Report, 2007).

Burnett and Maruna describe hope as having 'the will and the ways, the desire for a particular outcome, and...the perceived ability and means of achieving the outcome' (2004: 396). Studies have shown that offenders are good predictors of how successful they are going to be upon release. If offenders leave prison convinced they will re-offend and go back to prison they are likely correct. Offenders with higher levels of hope 'are better able to cope with the problems they encounter after they leave the prison walls' (Burnett and Maruna, 2004: 398). If an offender has no hope for the future, this may become an added barrier to his or her resettlement. This notion of one's mindset and subjective outlook on the future will be further explored when discussing individual agency and desistance.

THE COMMUNITY

A criminal record and having served time in prison has a high level of stigma attached to it which can further impede the resettlement process. As Clear *et al* (2001) have pointed out members of the community and those in a position to potentially help an offender resettle often react with distrust and suspicion.

Braithwaite (1989) discusses the negative effects of stigma in his theory of reintegrative shaming which differentiates between two different types of shaming: reintegrative and stigmatizing. Reintegrative shaming is 'shaming which is followed by efforts to reintegrate the offender back into the community of law-abiding...citizens through words or gestures of forgiveness or ceremonies to decertify the offender as deviant' (Braithwaite, 1989: 100). Stigmatizing shaming is defined as 'disintegrative shaming in which no effort is made to reconcile the offender with the community' (1989: 101). Communities that rely on stigmatizing shaming tend to have higher crime rates, as stigma makes criminal subcultures appear more attractive to offenders who feel they are not accepted among conventional society and subsequently find acceptance among subcultures who together 'reject the rejectors' (Braithwaite, 1989: 102). Conversely, communities that practice reintegrative shaming are likely to have lower crime rates as a strong disapproval for the criminal behaviour is clearly articulated while the offender is not made to feel permanently rejected (*ibid.*). 'In the Christian tradition of 'hate the sin and love the sinner'... [reintegrative shaming]...is directed at signifying evil deeds rather than evil persons' (Braithwaite, 1989: 101). One could argue that sending an individual to prison satisfies the shaming component of reintegrative shaming, however this has to be followed by efforts to

reintegrate that individual into law-abiding society. This process should begin immediately upon incarceration in order to increase the chances of successful reintegration once released.

CAN PRISONS PLAY A ROLE IN SUCCESSFUL RESETTLEMENT?

While perhaps not all barriers to resettlement can be addressed for every prisoner, efforts should be made to decrease the amount of social barriers awaiting offenders upon release. Efforts should be made to help support and encourage offenders to make positive changes in an effort to prevent them from becoming barriers in their own resettlement. Programmes offered in prisons need to reflect the broad needs of both male and female offenders and increased efforts need to be made to have these programs and supports continue into the community. Arguably some of the focus in prisons may need to be on practical interventions, including but not limited to: learning how to create a resume, how to interview for a job and how to open a bank account.

SUPPORT – IN PRISON VERSUS THE COMMUNITY

In federal women's prisons in Canada, offenders have access to a lot of supports such as: their primary worker/correctional officer, correctional managers, institutional parole officers, behavioural counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, programs staff, employment supervisors, elders and chaplains, community and aboriginal liaison workers and health care staff. The extent of this support seems to diminish after released. When asked who they go to for support in the community the Canadian offenders interviewed said they would go to the staff at the halfway house or a family member if they had maintained a relationship with any of them. All three offenders in Canada reported feeling a lack of support once they were in the community, both in terms of personal support and program/treatment support. Two of the offenders in Canada reported phoning the prison from the community to speak to their former primary worker.³ They explained feeling as though they did not have anyone else to turn to for support. One might argue that offenders should not have to phone prison for support when they have been released as they should be building support networks and focussing on their futures in the community. However, for some offenders, prison may be the only place they have support and when they leave prison they lose that support.

Offenders interviewed in England identified the staff at the bail hostel, their drug worker and probation officer as their main sources of support. Both groups of offenders interviewed stated they felt their relationship with their community probation/parole officer was important and reported meeting with them once a week for fifteen to thirty minutes. One could argue that this level of support is inadequate.

A second interesting finding was a comment made by one of the offenders interviewed in Canada:

It's like...in prison we can talk with whoever we want and associate with whoever we want...but then when we're out there we aren't supposed to associate with anyone who we think might be involved in criminal activity and that could mean all of the people we were friends with in here so we lose that support too. [Interviewee A]

³ A primary worker is a correctional/prison officer in a federal women's prison in Canada.

A standard condition attached to an offender's release/licence in Canada is not to associate with anyone whom he or she suspects might be involved in criminal activity (National Parole Board). From an offender's perspective this could mean his or her only source of support such as their best friend from prison, is someone they could get sent back to prison for associating with. From a crime prevention perspective, however, restricting an offender associating with individuals who are breaking the law is understandable as it is important for offenders to disassociate themselves from individuals who encourage deviant behaviours.

RESETTLEMENT PLANS

Although the offenders in Canada described the prison environment in a more positive light than those in England, community supports were described in a more positive light by the offenders interviewed in England. However, because of the poor prison experience in England and Wales resettlement is not starting, to a big enough extent, while offenders are still in prison. In England and Wales release plans are supposed to be prepared 15 days prior to release (SEU, 2002). This is arguably not sufficient time to create a structured and individualised release plan. By starting the process earlier offenders may be better prepared and the transition may be more successful. The reintegration process in the Canadian federal women's prisons could also start earlier, but be focussed on developing more contacts and support in the community for the offender, so that when offenders re-enter the community they have a larger support network. This is where restorative practices may be helpful in reconnecting offenders with family members or other pro-social supports.

Lack of accommodation, stigma, lack of meaningful employment, poor support systems including poor family ties and addiction are all factors likely to increase recidivism among ex-prisoners (Austin and Irwin 2000; Richards and Jones 1997 in LeBel *et al.*, 2008). Does this mean that if all of these issues were addressed and 'fixed' for offenders, they would no longer offend? While in theory providing programmes and support and creating resettlement plans earlier may help offenders build skills and confidence to aid in successful resettlement, this is only going to work in the long term if offenders are motivated to change. It is important to discuss the role of 'individual agency' as it pertains to successful resettlement and desistance from criminal activity. Some of the reasons offenders have been found to stop committing crime will now be explored.

3. DESISTANCE

Why do some offenders successfully re-settle in the community and stop offending while others continue to breach the conditions of their licence or commit new offences and end up back in prison?

DESISTANCE DEFINED

Although some have stated that there is no generally accepted definition of desistance (Laub and Sampson, 2001) attempts have been made. At one time desistance was defined as the 'termination point' of offending, however this definition has been criticised as there may be many termination points over the course of a criminal career (Maruna *et al.*, 2004). Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes and Muir argue that desistance does not have to mean there has been a permanent stop to offending, but rather 'desistance' can also mean 'significant crime-free gaps' (2004: 370). Therefore, a clearer distinction needed to be made between desistance and termination. Laub and Sampson sought to clarify the terms stating:

Termination is the time at which criminal activity stops. Desistance, by contrast, is the causal process that supports the termination of offending. While it is difficult to ascertain when the process of desistance begins, it is apparent that it continues after the termination of offending. In our view, *the process of desistance maintains the continued state of non-offending.* (2001: 11, emphasis added)

Maruna *et al* further explain:

any diminution in the level, seriousness or heterogeneity of criminal activity may mark a step in the process that will lead to the cessation of criminality... [therefore] ...desistance is a *process that occurs over time*, rather than as a switch that comes on or goes off. (2004:18, emphasis added)

These definitions help to clarify that desistance is not one point in time but a process occurring over time that helps to maintain non-offending.

In exploring the reasons one continues or ceases to offend there are both static and dynamic factors to consider. As Gendreau *et al* (1996) point out 'the most powerful, *static* predictors of recidivism... [are]...age, gender, criminal history and family background factors' (cited in LeBel *et al.*, 2008: 133). It is the *dynamic* factors involved in the cessation of criminal activity that are not as clearly understood. Dynamic factors are commonly divided between *social* and *subjective* variables. Social factors are commonly referred to as 'developmental events and processes that can be fairly reliably measured...[such as]...marriage, employment [and] parenthood' (ibid.). Subjective factors are 'the changes in the way individuals experience, understand, interpret and make sense of the world around them' (ibid.). Words commonly associated with subjective changes include: cognitive, internal, identity, agentic (agency), choices, values, goals and motivation (LeBel *et al.*, 2008) and while harder to measure than social factors they play an integral role in desisting from crime.

SOCIAL FACTORS OF DESISTANCE

The study of desistance from crime is said to have begun with the Gluecks' research in the United States in the early 20th century, however the term 'desistance' was not used in

criminology until the 1970's and 80's (Farrall and Maruna, 2004). Rutherford (1986) argued that offending is considered an 'age related phenomenon' (McIvor *et al.*, 2004:184). Continuing to research the relationship between age and crime, Laub and Sampson found that the development of social bonds such as marriage and meaningful employment in adulthood influence the cessation of criminal activity (cited in LeBel *et al.*, 2008). Although one might question the potential for marriage to decrease criminal activity, especially if an offender marries someone who encourages criminal activity, Laub and Sampson (2003) have clarified that it is not marriage alone that serves as a 'turning point' for an offender, but a *good quality* marriage. Warr (1998) explains this is because marrying a pro-social partner may result in spending less time with criminal associates (McIvor *et al.*, 2004: 1993).

While 'transitional events' such as: 'leaving home, getting married, finding work and assuming family responsibilities have been shown to influence desistance (Sampson and Laub 1993; Laub *et al.*, 1998) so too have individual choice and decision-making (Maruna 2001)' (McIvor *et al.*, 2004: 181). Laub and Sampson do not deny that personal choice (agency) plays a role in the desistance process, but argue that desistance results from a combination of life events, human agency and their personal backgrounds and experiences (Laub and Sampson, 2001). It is important to point out however, that if marriage has led to desistance, that process started with an offender making a *choice* to get married. Similarly, if obtaining employment led to desistance, that process began with a choice to seek employment and requires continued commitment every day as to whether or not to show up for work. Thus while marriage and employment may play a role in desistance the fact that the offender has *chosen* to make these commitments highlights the importance of subjective influences on desistance.

Some have claimed that the subjective and social factors of desistance cannot yet be disentangled (Laub and Sampson) and that it is unclear which factors influence desistance first. This debate is referred to as the 'structure-agency debate' and some have rightly argued that approaches which acknowledge the importance and continuous interaction between both structure and agency are favourable to those which focus solely on one or the other (Bottoms *et al.*, 2004).

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DESISTANCE

Desistance research has predominantly focused on males, however of the desistance studies that have focussed on female offenders both similarities and differences have been found. For example, research has found that females offend less and desist earlier than males (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Furthermore, Sommers *et al* (1994) found that while many of the same social factors associated with desistance are often identified by males and females 'a variety of factors may influence decisions to desist and these...may differ ...between men and women' (cited in McIvor *et al.*, 2004: 187). For example, while marriage has been found to influence desistance among males, it has been found that ending a relationship as opposed to getting married often leads to desistance among females (McIvor *et al.*, 2004). For females, leaving a relationship

may reflect a decision to dissociate from crime as female offending has often been linked to being in relationships with partners who abuse drugs and encourage criminal activity (ibid.).⁴

CHILDREN'S ROLE IN DESISTANCE

Leaving home and having children have also been found to influence desistance (McIvor *et al.*, 2004). It has been argued that leaving home has a significant impact on female desistance if it is associated with having a child. Graham and Bowling (1995) argue that 'having children imbues a sense of responsibility which is accompanied by a greater attention to the needs of others and greater cognizance of the consequences of one's own behaviour' (McIvor *et al.*, 2004:190). While this may be true for some female offenders, other studies have not produced the same results. 'When we focus on contemporary serious offenders, mere exposure to a given stimulus/catalyst is often not a sufficient bridge to conformity and sustained behaviour change' (Giordano *et al.*, 2002: 1038). Therefore, having a child may not be a 'catalyst' that will 'cause' desistance and this argument may reasonably be supported by the significantly high number of female offenders who have children and yet continue to return to prison.

While the social factors discussed above may be related to decreased criminal activity, there also needs to be a conscious decision made by the offender to commit to change and sustain this commitment over time. As Liebrich has argued, 'the first step towards desistance is a conscious decision to 'go straight'... [and that]...may be triggered by an event or by a sudden clarity of insight' (1992: 288). This process of decision making with regard to desistance will now be further explored.

SUBJECTIVE FACTORS OF DESISTANCE

While transitional events have been found to lead to desistance for some offenders, others argue that desistance is about finding a new personal identity, one that does not conform to a criminal lifestyle and subsequently committing to that new identity and its codes of conduct (Maruna, 1999; Rungay, 2004b). Accordingly,

[this] new lifestyle must become saturated with the behavioural routines and conventionality in order to be convincing. Only through this accomplishment will the new identity continue to be recognised and validated by the offender's audience.
(Rungay, 2004b: 410)

There are many reasons however that sticking to this new identity is challenging for many offenders as arguably many have had limited exposure to the appropriate behavioural routines that should accompany this new identity. In referring specifically to female offenders Rungay states:

The social histories of many women offenders, including parental deprivation and abuse, victimisation, incomplete education and prolonged exposure to volatile social environments, will limit their ability to sustain their claim to an alternative conventional

⁴ Studies have found that men generally begin offending before abusing drugs, while the opposite has been found for female offenders (ibid.). However, of the six women interviewed, five reported getting involved in criminal activity *before* using drugs.

identity through unfamiliarity with many of the behavioural subroutines that support it. (2004b: 410)

In further explaining the desistance process and the role of agency, Giordano *et al* (2002) have identified four types of cognitive transformations that influence desistance. The first two focus on an offender's openness to change and the necessity that opportunities to enact these changes exist while the third and fourth transformations relate to Maruna and Runggay's notion of developing a new personal identity to such an extent that the deviant criminal lifestyle is no longer considered appropriate by the new conventional identity.

The importance of developing a new conventional identity highlights that there is more to desistance than social factors. For even if all of the social barriers to resettlement were 'fixed' desistance is not guaranteed as an offender's personal motivation and desire to maintain these changes are crucial to the desistance process. Reinforcing the complex balance between breaking down social barriers and personal motivation to seek and maintain positive change, Giordano *et al* explain:

The environment can... provide a...scaffolding that makes possible the construction of significant life changes...[however]...individuals...must attend to these new possibilities, discard old habits, and begin the process of crafting a different way of life. (2002: 1000)

PRISON'S ROLE IN DESISTANCE

- What can be done in prisons to aid offenders in the process of desistance?
- Can prisons play a role in helping offenders with either the social or subjective factors that influence desistance?

While prisons cannot be expected to help offenders with certain social factors such as marriage, they can provide programs to help address the reasons offenders have been sent to prison as well as the barriers to resettlement awaiting them in the community. Canadian federal women's prisons provide a lot of support through programming. The four core programs offered in women's prisons in Canada include: Abuse and Trauma, Substance Abuse, Parenting and Education and Employment Skills (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Since 1990 and the acceptance of the recommendations made by the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women in their report *Creating Choices*, federal women's prisons in Canada have been based on five guiding principles: 'empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity, supportive environment and shared responsibility' (Hannah-Moffat, 2000: 514). Despite great efforts by CSC to create a more 'women-centred' environment and provide programs to meet the unique needs of female offenders, Hannah-Moffat has criticised these efforts claiming that such programs place too much 'responsibility' on the female offender to make these changes herself (2000). Furthermore, Hannah-Moffat argues that CSC's approach to female prisons is purely based on semantics and women's prisons in Canada are still solely focussed on punishment: 'A 'women centred empowerment model' of punishment feminizes the discourse and practices of imprisonment without fundamentally challenging or restructuring the disciplinary relations of power in prison' (Hannah-Moffat, 2000: 521).

As Hannah-Moffat (2000) rightly points out, if an offender does not complete any programs while in prison, the parole board may not grant an early release stating the offender has not

adequately addressed areas of risk and need. Using this as an example Hannah-Moffat (2000) argues that women are being sent to prison more often and being kept there longer in order to be 'empowered'. Firstly, it is important to clarify that women who are sentenced to prison are first and foremost sent to prison because they have committed a crime, not to be empowered. Secondly, as stated earlier, the prison environment is not meant to punish an offender more than the incapacitory nature of prison already does. Therefore, arguments such as those pointed out by Hannah-Moffat highlight a dilemma for women's prisons and their role in resettlement and the desistance process.

Women's prisons are often criticised for being insensitive to the unique needs of female offenders as they have been predominantly created for males (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Alternatively when attempts are made to improve prisons and provide programs that specifically focus on the needs of female offenders, such as those offered in Canadian federal women's prisons, they are still criticised as being 'punishment in disguise' (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). While making prisons 'too good' welcomes criticism that prison is not the place for therapy, making prisons more punitive and taking away programs incites criticism of being inhumane and not respecting the needs of female offenders.

Women's prisons in Canada can perhaps be criticised for providing too much support as the offenders interviewed reported having substantially less support in the community. Perhaps by over supporting prisoners they are not being empowered to make decisions the way they will need to once released. As this interviewee stated:

When you've been in prison for so long and then you get out into the community you're lost. It takes a while for an inmate to get used to the fact that they're free [Interviewee B] It is suggested however that increasing supports in the community would be a better response to this potential dilemma than making prison environments less supportive.

It is important to make as much progress as possible while in prison, to improve an offender's outlook on his or her future. Furthermore, Giordano *et al* explain that an offender's 'subjective stance is especially important during the early stages of the change process' (2002: 1000). Therefore, if prisoners are released with a fatalistic mindset and believe that positive change is unattainable, successful resettlement and desistance are unlikely. Alternatively, some offenders leave prison very optimistic that they will not return to their old criminal lifestyle. However, if they have not done some work while in prison that will help them fight the social barriers awaiting them in the community their optimism may be met with so much disappointment the result may ultimately be defeat and re-imprisonment. While some have argued that a prisoner's optimism towards what life will be like once released may be unrealistic (Sampson and Laub, 2001) others maintain that having 'an overly optimistic sense of self-efficacy and control over the future may be associated with patterns of desistance' (Burnett and Maruna, 2004: 399). However, Burnett and Maruna (2004) explain that hope will be more effective in influencing desistance when there are less social problems to overcome.

4. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PRISON AND THE COMMUNITY

Burnett and Maruna have shed light on the question of whether or not prisons can be both a deterrent from crime and a place that provides enough support and intervention to increase successful resettlement:

Although the recent, increased emphasis on rehabilitative and resettlement efforts in the Prison Service is certainly welcome, prisons by their nature can breed fatalism and a sense of despondency among their inhabitants. (2004: 401)

Whether or not prisons are an adequate deterrent from crime is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is worth pointing out however, that four of the six women interviewed stated that they had considered the possibility that they could be sent back to prison if they breached their conditions, but that this did not stop them from subsequently breaching their conditions. In this case, prison has not served as a deterrent but is a place where female offenders in Canada may feel they have more support. If the support that is offered in federal women's prison in Canada could be continued into the community the transition may be more successful.

Prisons cannot be expected to undo and 'fix' in a relatively short period of time the experiences and mindsets of offenders that have developed over long periods. Therefore, the efforts made to assist offenders and the changes accomplished in prisons need to be carried on into the community. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) rightly points out that if efforts are not made to bridge the gap between prison and the community any progress accomplished while in prison will end upon release.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order to successfully bridge the gap between prisons and the community both prisons and communities need to be improved.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE

When developing new policies, the government and correctional agencies need to focus on factors likely to decrease reoffending and empower offenders to make positive changes. Cullen (2002) has argued that 'although criminology is rich in contemporary theories of crime, true theories of correctional intervention are in short supply' (cited in Farrall and Maruna, 2004: 360). As many of the barriers to resettlement and social factors that influence desistance have been identified through research, policy interventions should put these findings into practice. That said, policy interventions, while a crucial part of the reintegration process, can only do so much. Whether or not changes occur depends in large part on the subjective stance of the offender and the existence of real opportunities to make changes happen. Prisons can help to empower offenders by offering increased support and appropriate programs. However, if the opportunities to use the skills obtained in prison does not exist in the community, or if the offender does not want to make any changes resettlement is less likely to be successful.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Female offenders are often significantly displaced as a result of incarceration due to the minimal number of women's prisons and halfway houses/bail hostels in the community. Baroness

Corston recommended that women's prisons in England and Wales be replaced by 'geographically dispersed, small, multi-functional custodial centres within 10 years' (Corston, 2007: 5). This would allow female offenders to be closer to their families and other supports who may aid in the resettlement process. This, along with more community halfway houses would arguably be beneficial for female offenders in Canada as well.

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

High percentages of prisoners continue to be released from prison without jobs. As employment has been found to influence desistance it may be beneficial in bridging the gap to help offenders secure employment prior to release. A prison in England, HMP Hull, developed a project to aid in securing employment for offenders upon release. They have seconded an officer from the prison to split his or her time between the prison and the community matching prisoners to available jobs (SEU, 2002). While there may be restrictions on the types of employment deemed appropriate based on their crime, the Social Exclusion Unit has argued that 'current arrangements do not...balance...the need to protect the public and the importance of enabling those who do not pose a significant risk of harm to move into legitimate employment' (2002: 9). Programs that focus on addressing the needs of offenders should be offered in prisons. Where there is a lack of support in the community perhaps volunteers can become more involved in helping offenders feel supported by offering practical advice, guidance and facilitating the building of pro-social networks.

The geographical location of women's prisons and the financial strain of visiting can put pressure on the families of incarcerated women. In an effort to assist female offenders in restoring ties with their families with the goal of increasing successful resettlement upon release perhaps the government could subsidise the public transit cost in order for a family member to be able to make the journey to visit the female offender. Provision for such support already exists in England and Wales and could benefit female offenders in Canada as well.⁵

MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH

As Gelsthorpe and Sharpe (2007) and others have suggested a multi-agency approach is necessary when addressing the complex needs of female offenders. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) has stressed the need for a multi-agency response both during the transition from prison to the community as well for a continued period of time after release. In Canada too, CSC's guiding principle of *Shared Responsibility* stresses the importance of interaction between prison, the community and the offender (Hannah-Moffat, 2001). In England and Wales there are some support agencies such as Women in Prison (WIP) that aim to help bridge the gap between prison and the community by visiting women while incarcerated and offering practical advice and support for when they are released (Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts, 2007). Arguably, female offenders in both jurisdictions would benefit from increased support from multiple agencies in the community.

⁵<http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/keepingintouch/assistscheme>

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Some restorative justice advocates would like restorative practices to be integrated into the current justice system (Dignan, 2002). One way Dignan (2002) suggests this can be done is to do as Belgium has done in 30 prisons and create a position for a restorative justice counsellor in prisons who would facilitate mediation and other restorative justice processes. This counsellor would be a liaison between offenders in prison and victims in the community where both parties were willing to participate.

Dignan (2002) also suggests allowing some of a prisoner's earnings from working inside prison to go towards a victim's fund or directly to the victim(s) of an offender's crime if both parties agree. Barry (2007) describes this process of making restitution to the community as an example of 'generativity' which has been associated with desistance among female offenders. The offenders interviewed in Canada did not view prison as a terrible place, rather they spoke of it as a place with structure, stability and support. Unfortunately, all three women purposely considered breaching their conditions in order to go back as they had little support in the community. Conversely, the offenders interviewed in England felt they had more support in the community and described prison as a terrible place, with minimal support. Despite differences in where offenders from both jurisdictions are finding support, many of the barriers to resettlement were similar and centred significantly on substance abuse and location of prisons and halfway houses/bail hostels.

Despite efforts in both England and Wales and Canada to decrease prison populations, prison sentences continue to be used for offences that are not the most serious and violent in nature. However, once offenders are sent to prison there are choices in how to respond. Unless supports in the community are increased it is likely that the rate of released prisoners returning to prison within a short period of time will remain high. Not only do communities and their support need to improve, but resettlement plans need to start earlier and include multiple agencies. Prisons and their staff can play a role in helping prepare offenders for the social barriers that await them in the community. However an offender's motivation will determine to a great extent whether or not resettlement and desistance are successful. Prisons and their staff can encourage offenders to adopt a new conventional identity and help convey hope for the future, but if every door is closed on them in the community feelings of defeat are inevitable. Without continued support in the community sustaining positive changes and achievements made while in prison are unlikely. There are many people involved in the resettlement process but increased effort from all parties is necessary for successful resettlement to increase and reoffending to decrease.

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