

Chosen Topic: Motherhood behind Bars: How Prisons Treat Women Differently

Overview of the Topic

This essay will dive deeper into how prisons in Western societies handle the motherhood and why the experiences of inmate mothers are unique than the other inmates and the mothers. Mostly it has been observed that the women prisoners undergo severe challenges which the male prisoners do not need to face. Just like, the pregnancy in custody, separation from children and lack of maternal care. Feminist criminology points to that the prison system was initially established for male correctional purpose, which is why it cannot always meet the emotional and physical needs of the women. The essay will explore women's punishment pattern actually impacts on the overall motherhood, the policies encircling the children of prisoners, and feminist arguments for more gender-responsive approaches.

Key Themes

1. Historical Gender Bias in Prison

Earlier, the prison system has been introduced to penalize and rectify the male offenders. I will analyze how this male-dominated model of prison ignores the social roles and family accountability of women, especially mothers.

2. Motherhood and Sentencing

Women inmates are frequently judged both as an offender and as a bad mother. I will delve deeper into how gendered stereotypes affect on sentencing and moral judgments in court.

3. Pregnancy and Childbirth in Custody

I will analyze the treatment women inmates get in prisons, such as access to prenatal care, nutrition, and medical precaution at the time of labor. Feminist viewpoints show that neglecting pregnant inmates is a violation of human rights.

4. Separation from Children

A massive portion of inmate mothers are shown to have incarcerated far from where their family resides. Thus, for their families visiting the inmates often is not possible frequently. This section will highlight the emotional trauma of separation and its impact on both the mother and the children.

5. Children of Incarcerated Mothers

I will include some studies on how maternal imprisonment impacts on the mental health education and social development of a children.

6. Family-Centered and Gender-Responsive Prisons

This section will showcase the alternative programs designed for the prison system to support the mother inmates, like mother-baby units or community-based sentences that permit parenting while serving time.

7. Feminist Critiques and Policy Reform

Feminist criminologists condemn that the justice system must identify the social reasons behind the crimes committed by women, like their impoverishment, and abuse, and serve them with rehabilitation, but not punishment.

10 Possible background Sources

Baldwin, L. & Epstein, R. (2017). *Short but not sweet: A study of the impact of short custodial sentences on mothers and their children*. The Prison Reform Trust. Retrieved From: <https://www.nicco.org.uk/userfiles/downloads/5bc45012612b4-short-but-not-sweet.pdf>

This source will be helpful as this study showcases how even short sentences can affect the mothers and the children profoundly. It showcases the emotional trauma for a child to get separated from his mother, and how the justice system frequently ignores the caregiving role of the mother. This also reinforces feminist arguments that prisons are not aimed at meeting the distinctive necessities of a mother.

Torres, A. J. C., Barbosa-Silva, L., Oliveira-Silva, L. C., Miziara, O. P. P., Guahy, U. C. R., Fisher, A. N., & Ryan, M. K. (2024). The impact of motherhood on women's career progression: A scoping review of evidence-based interventions. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(4), 275.

This study will be beneficial as it analyses how motherhood gets influenced and affects opportunities and progression of women adversely. It shows economic, social and structural barriers. Though it concentrates on the career context, the study contributes important insights into how motherhood shapes the role, accountability and societal expectations of women. This supports the feminist arguments that the system, including the prisons, sometimes cannot accommodate women's caregiving responsibilities, supporting the demands for policies that consider distinctive challenges underwent by the mothers.

Condry, R., & Minson, S. (2021). Conceptualizing the effects of imprisonment on families: Collateral consequences, secondary punishment, or symbiotic harms?. *Theoretical Criminology*, 25(4), 540-558.

From this resource I will explain how imprisonment impacts on the families through symbiotic harms. This study refers that when the mothers get incarcerated, their families and children also go through some heinous social, emotional and financial ups and downs. This also supports the feminist arguments that the justice system sometimes neglects the extensive effects of incarcerating women, especially the mothers.

Gobena, E. B., Hean, S., Heaslip, V., & Studsrød, I. (2023). The lived experience of motherhood after prison: A qualitative systematic review. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 33(6), 442-460.

This study will add more depth as in this study the life of mothers has been investigated, after they leave the prison. The study aims at showing the emotional hindrances, stereotypes and challenges faced by women while they try to reconnect with the society and children. This supports the feminist ideas that post-prison programs should affect the specific needs of mothers to help them to reintegrate into the society successfully.

Hannah-Moffat, K., & Shaw, M. (Eds.). (2021). *An ideal prison?: Critical essays on women's imprisonment in Canada*. Fernwood Publishing.

This study will be productive as it shows how the women prisoners are treated in Canada, in contrast to the male offenders. This book reflects the unique challenges posed to the women, as it comprises issues like motherhood, emotional needs and societal support. It supports the feminist argument that the prisons frequently ignore the specific needs of women and reflects why gender-responsive reforms are essential.

Jones, J. K. (2025). *Barriers and Success Factors of Reentry Programs for Women After Incarceration* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).

This source will be necessary for my study as it highlights the challenges and success rates of rehabilitation programs after a women prisoner come out of the prison. The study showcases the challenges underwent by the mothers while trying to combine with their children and also with the society, like the lack of support, stigma and financial strain. This supports feminist arguments that gender responsive reentry programs are indispensable to convey the unique concerns of women leaving prisons.

Lowell, A. F., Peacock-Chambers, E., Zayde, A., DeCoste, C. L., McMahon, T. J., & Suchman, N. E. (2021). Mothering from the inside out: addressing the intersection of addiction, adversity, and attachment with evidence-based parenting intervention. *Current Addiction Reports*, 8(4), 605-615.

This study will be helpful for my research as it investigates the empirical parenting interventions, that supports the mothers dealing with adversities and addiction. The study reflects the effect of substance abuse, trauma, and disrupted parenthood that leaves impact of the motherhood. This supports the feminist arguments that the prisons and rehabilitation programs communicate the in-depth emotional and social needs of the mothers to furnish rehabilitation and healthy family bonding.

Smith, J. M., Gacono, C. B., & Cunliffe, T. B. (2021). *Understanding female offenders: Psychopathy, criminal behavior, assessment, and treatment*. Academic Press.

This study will be beneficial as the study shows the wide-ranging outlook of female offenders, such as the cognitive profiles, criminal behavior and treatment needs. The book

showcases how the pathways of crime of women frequently be different from that of the men's, affected by relationship, trauma, and social determinants. This supports feminist arguments that prisons and rehabilitation programs must reflect the unique experiences and needs of women, such as the mothers, but not necessarily applying to the male-dominated models of justice.

Traylor, L. L. (2024). Returning to Motherhood: Post-Incarceration Reintegration and Mothering for Justice-Involved Black Women. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 1-19.

This study will be beneficial for my research as it analyses how justice-involved Black women steer the motherhood after getting incarcerated, The study aims at showing unique challenges they undergo while reconnecting with their children, handling stereotypes and reintegrating into society. This reinforces feminist arguments that post-prison programs must be culturally sensitive and convey the detailed social and emotional needs of the mothers.

Van Voorhis, P. (2022). Defining and evaluating gender-responsive treatment. *The Wiley handbook on what works with girls and women in conflict with the law: A critical review of theory, practice, and policy*, 135-156.

This study will be productive for my research as it analyses the gender responsive treatment and its application into the women in justice system. This study showcases the programs aiming at conveying the unique needs of women, including trauma, motherhood, and social support. This strengthens the feminist argument that prisons and rehabilitation programs should be adjusted to women, and not using one size fits all approaches aimed at piloting men.