

# WOMEN'S PATHWAYS INTO, THROUGH AND OUT OF PRISON

Understanding the Needs, Challenges and Successes  
of Women Imprisoned for Drug Offending and  
Re-turning to Communities in Thailand





This publication is the product of collaboration between the Thailand Institute of Justice and Griffith Criminology Institute, Australia.

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Thailand imprisons more of its citizens than any other country in South East Asia. It has the highest female incarceration rate in the region and has witnessed substantial growth in prisoner numbers since the 1990s (Jeffries & Chuenurah 2016). Principally, this growth has been compelled by changes in drug law, policy, and criminal justice practice. The government of Thailand has taken a punitive approach to illicit drugs since the 1990s.

Predictably, the government's hard-line approach to illicit drugs (particularly methamphetamine) has caused Thailand's prison population to rise steeply, with drug offenders being significantly over-represented. Punitiveness has disproportionately impacted women. This is evidenced by the fact that drug offenders constitute a higher proportion of females than the male prison population (Havanon et al., 2012a; Havanon et al., 2012b; Jeffries, 2014; Jeffries & Chuenurah 2016). For example, Jeffries and Chuenurah's (2016: 96) study of imprisonment trends in Thailand from 2003 to 2013 found that drug offending/criminalisation was the most substantial driver behind prison population changes and *"in every year drug offenders constituted the largest proportion of sentenced prisoners regardless of sex. However, compared to men, far higher proportions of the female sentenced prison population were incarcerated for a drug offence over the decade."*

More recent data show that in 2020 there were 47,926 females incarcerated in Thai prisons, which corresponds to a rate of 69.1 per 100,000 in the general population. A decade early, in 2010, there were 29,175 imprisoned females at a rate of 43.9 per 100,000 (World Prison Brief, 2020). At present, women in Thailand are housed in 107 prison facilities, and 84% of them are 'doing time' for a drug offence. In comparison, 79% of the male prison population is incarcerated for a drug offence (Department of Corrections, 2020). As women's representation in Thailand's prisons grows, so does the number of women who return to society from prison. Thus, one of the challenges confronting Thai society is the successful re-entry of mounting numbers of formerly incarcerated women.

National level re-offending data in Thailand is sketchy. The recidivism rate generated by the Department of Corrections relies on a person's national ID number tracking. Thus, the national level re-offending data only reflects the re-incarceration rate of released prisoners with the national ID card. Available data sourced from the Thailand Department of Corrections demonstrates that around 16% of persons (mean percentage between 2013 and 2019) formerly incarcerated for a drug offence are re-incarcerated within a year of release. This proportion increases with time. On average, two years after release, 28% of drug offenders are re-incarcerated. By year three, this percentage had grown to an average of 38% (see Table 1, below).

**Table 1: Proportion of drug offenders re-imprisoned in Thailand by years post-release**

Year of release	Number of released prisoners	Number of released prisoners with ID cards	Number of prisoners reoffending within 1 year	%	Number of prisoners reoffending within 2 years	%	Number of prisoners reoffending within 3 years	%
2013	42,578	24,406	4,350	17.82	7,200	29.5	9,339	38.27
2014	63,042	47,372	7,626	16.1	12,806	27.03	17,075	36.04
2015	85,525	66,977	10,651	15.9	19,074	28.48	25,779	38.49
2016	95,495	84,710	13,223	15.61	24,128	28.48	32,455	38.31
2017	87,794	80,293	12,991	16.18	23,376	29.11	27,740*	34.55*
2018	69,734	65,026	11,024	16.95	15,530*	23.88*		
2019	105,570	99,773	7,590*	7.61*				

\*The figures indicated include only prisoners with ID cards

National level re-offending data by gender shows that women released from prison are exceptionally lower than men to be re-incarcerated one, two- and three-years post-imprisonment. For women prisoners released in 2018, 8.6% are re-incarcerated in one year, 14.6% in two years and 17.3% in three year after release. Women prisoners' re-offending rates are much lower than that of their male counterparts (i.e. 16.5%, 28.5% and 33.4% respectively) (see Table 2, below).

**Table 2: Proportion of offenders re-imprisoned in Thailand by years post-release and gender**

Released year (fiscal year Oct - Sep.)	Gender	Numbers of released prisoners	Numbers of prisoners with ID number	Tracking period					
				Numbers of prisoners re-offend in a year	%	Numbers of prisoners re-offend in 2 years	%	Numbers of prisoners re-offend in 3 years	%
2013	Male	64,836	32,810	5,616	17.12	9,373	28.57	12,214	37.23
	Female	9,426	5,907	558	9.45	951	16.1	1,245	21.08
2014	Male	92,916	63,887	9,909	15.51	16,726	26.18	22,457	35.15
	Female	12,962	9,935	796	8.01	1,390	13.99	1,879	18.91
2015	Male	123,271	88,661	13,789	15.55	24,284	27.39	32,906	37.11
	Female	16,568	12,760	1,042	8.17	1,911	14.98	2,587	20.27
2016	Male	127,396	106,992	16,681	15.59	30,027	28.06	40,487	37.84
	Female	19,262	16,221	1,224	7.55	2,252	13.88	3,139	19.35
2017	Male	118,581	102,652	16,399	15.98	29,112	28.36	37,968	36.99
	Female	17,164	14,757	1,125	7.62	2,092	14.18	2,770	18.77
2018	Male	98,098	87,007	14,381	16.53	24,760	28.46	29,097	33.44
	Female	11,959	10,696	917	8.57	1,557	14.56	1,852	17.31
2019	Male	141,446	128,158	20,481	15.98	28,786	22.46	n/a	n/a
	Female	18,698	16,914	1,363	8.06	1,921	11.36	n/a	n/a
2020	Male	136,782	126,789	9,274	7.31	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Female	18,827	17,471	693	3.97	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a


*\*The figures indicated include only prisoners with ID cards*

To date, there have been no assessments of women's re-entry in Thailand. Current knowledge of re-integration comes almost exclusively from studies of prisoners (predominately men) returning to the community in Western countries. This is a significant oversight. Understanding the experiences of Thai women returning to the community after imprisonment is necessary to facilitate their successful re-entry.

In June 2019, utilising the voices of women (imprisoned and formerly imprisoned) and prison personnel, the Thailand Institute of Justice, in collaboration with Griffith Criminology Institute, undertook a comprehensive study exploring women's experiences of drug offending / criminalisation, imprisonment, and re-entry. Re-entry does not occur in a vacuum. Understanding women's post-release experiences necessitates knowledge of their pathways to, experiences of, and journeys out of prison. Results from this research are presented in this report.

We begin in the next chapter with a review of the extant research on women's re-entry. The methodological approach for this study is described in Chapter 3. Research findings are then reported sequentially. Chapter 4 provides a descriptive overview of the research participants. Chapter 5 elucidates women's pathways into prison. Chapter 6 describes women's lives in prison. Chapter 7 discusses women's re-entry expectations and experiences, including needs, challenges, and successes. In Chapter 8, the findings are summarised, and recommendations made to better support women's re-integration.





**CHAPTER 2**  
OVERVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH  
ON WOMEN'S RE-ENTRY

Gender structures the social world and as such, impacts women's experiences of offending/criminalisation, imprisonment, and re-entry. Studies illustrate that female prisoners and those returning to the community constitute special populations. These women share similar needs with their male counterparts, but their experiences are oftentimes unique and differ in significant ways from those of men. This creates challenges during women's return to society (Covington & Bloom, 2007).

Facilitating the successful re-entry of formerly incarcerated women requires knowledge of their pathways to and experiences of incarceration. A now widespread corpus of research demonstrates that women's offending / criminalisation is connected to a clustering of interrelated and interconnected circumstances, which constrain and mould women's behaviours and life choices (Artz, Hoffman-Wanderer & Moul, 2011; Owen, Wells & Pollock, 2017). These circumstances comprise: victimisation and trauma, disordered family lives and other adverse experiences, deviant peer group associations, mental health problems and addiction, male influence and control, low levels of education, economic marginalisation, and familial caretaking responsibilities (Daly, 1994; Bradley & Davino, 2002; DeHart, 2005; Yahner & Dugan, 2008; Salisbury and Van Voorhis, 2009; Simpson, Stalans, 2009; Lynch et al., 2012; Owen et al., 2017; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2019; Jeffries, Chuenurah, Rao & Yamada Park 2019a; Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis, 2019b).

Although men's pathways to prison are characterised by many of these same factors, women experience these aspects differently and perhaps more acutely than men (Stalans, 2009; Owen et al., 2017). For example, while victimisation and associated trauma are linked to both female and male prison trajectories, women tend to be victimised in multiple ways (e.g. child abuse and domestic violence) and more frequently (DeHart, 2008; Stalans, 2009; Lynch et al., 2012; Owen et al., 2017). As a result, victimisation denotes as an experience that has a greater influence in determining women's prison routes. Likewise, although incarcerated women and men often recount victimisation experiences, some forms of ill-treatment differ. For women, victimisation through domestically violent or controlling romantic relationships is particularly implicated as a gendered factor in their imprisonment trajectories (Stalans, 2009; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2019; Jeffries et al., 2019a; Jeffries et al., 2019b).

Moreover, gendered norms result in a greater emphasis on social bonding and relationship building for women. Thus, attachments to family and intimate partners are more likely related to women's imprisonment pathways than is the case with men. These bonds are exacerbated in societies with matrifocal kinship systems, such as Thailand. Here, cultural expectations are placed on women to meet extended familial needs (Angeles & Sunata, 2009: 554; Jeffries et al., 2019b). To uphold familial obligations, matrifocality requires women to undertake "*daughter duty*". Dutiful daughters take care of parents and other natal family members (e.g. siblings, grandparents, extended kin), including the provision of financial support (Angeles & Sunata, 2009: 554). As noted by Angeles and Sunata (2009: 556), "*daughter duty is demanded as an obligatory function necessary for family, kin, and community reproduction, and it is demanding in terms of size and frequency of material exchanges and spiralling expectations*". Thus, many aspects of women's pathways to prison are better understood through the lens of relationships, in a way that differs from male trajectories.

The particularities of women's requisites and background not only set them on a pathway to prison, they also determine imprisonment experiences. Women's incarceration encounters are in many ways different from men. Most prisons and prison regimes have been established for the male majority which make women's gender specific needs peripheral. Subsequently, imprisonment can be an especially castigatory experience for women, further compounding the trauma and marginalisation that led them into prison in the first place. For example,

since women are the principal familial caregivers, separation from kin through incarceration can give rise to extreme angst for them, and those with victimisation histories will feel exposed and fearful of further abuse in a prison setting. It is, therefore, important that rehabilitative efforts in prison pay attention to the pathway that women have travelled (Brown & Bloom, 2009: 314). Prison systems should, for example, support rather than rupture women's familial relationships and assist women to heal rather than exacerbate their trauma.

Re-entry, like pathways to and experiences of imprisonment, is a gendered phenomenon because women's lives post-release are distinct from men's (Brown & Bloom, 2009: 315; Cobbina, 2010: 211). Covington (2001) specifies that gender differences in pathways to prison are inherent in re-entry. Formerly incarcerated women have multifaceted and intersectional needs distinct from those of men stemming largely from victimisation, substance abuse, mental illness, economic marginality, and their need to reconnect with families, particularly their children (Cobbina, 2010). More explicitly, the research literature on prison re-entry highlights the following as being the foremost needs among women: 1) obtaining stable and secure housing, 2) maintaining healthy relational connections, 3) establishing financial security, 4) healing from trauma, mental health problems and substance abuse, 5) normative community acceptance, 6) provision of through-care support / continuity of care, 7) supportive prison environments and re-entry planning, 8) having spirituality and faith, and 9) possessing emotional strength and motivation to change. Each is discussed in detail below.

## 2.1 Stable and secure housing

For many formerly incarcerated women, the ability to acquire housing is 'out of reach' due to socio-economic marginalisation, individual-level disadvantages (e.g. mental ill health and substance abuse), stigma, and gender discrimination in the housing market (Baldry, McDonnell, Mapleston & Peeters, 2006; Heidemann, Cederbaum & Martinez, 2015). Research shows that formerly incarcerated women have greater problems securing housing than do their male counterparts (Baldry et al., 2006). Yet having a place to call home is imperative for successful re-entry as it enables women to regain independence, privacy, and exert autonomy over their lives (O'Brien, 2001; Maidment, 2005; Opsal, 2014; Heidemann et al., 2015). As argued by Tarpey and Friend (2016: 283), "*permanent and stable accommodation located to facilitate re-integration is important to provide the stability to address offending behaviour and is viewed as the cornerstone for beginning a life free from crime.*"

In contrast, there is a strong correlation between poor accommodation and negative outcomes for formerly incarcerated women (Goulding, 2004; Severance, 2004; Baldry et al., 2006; O'Brien, 2007; Koski & Bantley, 2013; Tarpey & Friend, 2016). Research by Baldry et al. (2006), for example, found that women who have unstable or unsuitable accommodation are more likely to return to prison. For those re-entering the community, homelessness creates an environment conducive to substance misuse and other criminal activities (Goulding, 2004; Carter, 2017: 4). Women who cannot secure stable housing may also be forced to return to unhealthy and unsafe housing environments after release because there are no other alternatives (Van Olphen, Brotzman, Wilson & Reid, 2009: 4).

## 2.2 Relational connections

Research consistently shows that connections to family and friends are strong predictors of successful re-entry (O'Brien, 2001; Maidment, 2005; Bui & Monash, 2009). In their summary of the prior research, Arditti and Few (2006: 103) conclude that *"those [women] who maintain family ties and re-enter family life successfully after incarceration are less likely to be re-arrested."* Relationships with romantic partners, family and friends, provide formerly incarcerated women with crucial sources of support through the endowment of practical assistance (e.g. money, housing, childcare, and employment opportunities) and/or, emotional provisioning while also tendering a sense of belonging (Leverentz, 2006; Arditti & Few, 2008; Cobbina, 2010; Leverentz, 2011; Heidemann et al., 2014; Opsal, 2014). Further, and compared to men, positive interpersonal relationships are more significant for women's positive transformation post-incarceration (Herrschaft, Veysey, Tubman-Carbone & Christian, 2009).

However, it is important to recognise that familial, romantic and peer relationships might also impede women's re-entry. For many formerly incarcerated women, intimate partners, friends and family members may, for example, be deviant/criminal themselves. These associations may lead women back down a pathway to substance abuse and offending (Bui & Morash, 2010; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2013).

Pathways research (see above) consistently shows that women's victimisation and associated trauma via intimate relationships can contribute to offending/criminalisation. Thus, abusive and criminal intimate partners can create difficulties for women leaving prison. They can, for example, make home an unsafe place to live, and as a coping mechanism, women may start/return to drugs and or alcohol misuse. Further, abusive and criminal romantic partners may use, coerce or manipulate women into further offending (Bui & Morash, 2010). For instance, research undertaken by Cobbina (2010) showed that domestically violent men often impeded women's re-entry. Even if boyfriends/husbands are not overtly abusive, intimate relationships with dysfunctional men can be a source of much angst for formerly incarcerated women (Cobbina, 2010; Kellett & Willging, 2011). Women may find themselves embroiled in their intimate partners' deviant/criminal activities. Disconnecting from these activities could mean 'breaking up' the family. This is something many women are not economically and/or personally willing to do. Thus, women may share in their deviant/criminal partner's enterprises in order to maintain the relationship and in an attempt to ensure economic survival (Few-Demo & Arditti, 2013: 1301).

Studies of women's re-entry show that children can be an important catalyst for change. Researchers have, for example, identified motherhood as an impetus to desist from crime and substance misuse (Van DeMark, 2007; Cobbina, 2010). Women will often be anxious to re-unite with their children after release. While motherhood can act as a motivator for women's re-entry success, it nevertheless poses challenges that may result in strain, maternal distress, and lead women back down a pathway to crime and/or substance misuse (Harm & Phillips, 2001; Arditti & Few, 2008; Brown & Bloom, 2009). To begin with, circumstances that set women on a pathway to prison frequently remain unchanged or are made worse post-incarceration. This means that post-release, women attempting to re-unite with and parent their children must still grapple with issues such as economic deprivation, domestic violence victimisation, and addiction (Arditti & Few, 2008; Brown & Bloom, 2009). For example, Harm and Phillip's (2001) study of re-entry found that while some women reported positivity around re-uniting with and parenting their children, others expressed deep concern over their ability to provide for their children financially and emotionally. The women expressed angst about drug use and/or the desire to use drugs, as a result of dealing with their children. Thus, like other relationships, motherhood can be positive or negative to women's re-entry success.



## 2.3 Financial security

Poverty frequently underpins women's pathways into prison and this economic marginality is likely to be exacerbated by serving time. Women regularly leave prison with no savings and few job prospects (Severance, 2004: 76). Studies show that, post-release, men have *"better opportunities for securing a sufficient income-producing and legal job by virtue of their gender alone"* (O'Brien, 2001: 2). Formerly incarcerated women are *"ineligible for some jobs and turned down for others"* and the ex-inmate stigma weighs particularly heavy on them (stigma is discussed more fully in section 2.5, below) (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Severance, 2004; Blitz, 2006; Johnson, 2014).

Dodge and Pogrebin's (2001) research illuminate the difficulties of securing employment post-release. Here, most women reported experiencing negative reactions from potential employers because of their criminal histories. This resulted in women taking meaningless, low-paid 'dead-end' jobs with no chance of advancement. Securing stable employment and earning enough money to support themselves and their families is crucial to women's successful re-entry (O'Brien, 2001; Severance, 2004; Blitz, 2006; O'Brien & Leem, 2006; Van Olphen et al., 2009; Salem, Nyamathi Idemudia, Slaughter & Ames, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Pogrebin et al., 2016). O'Brien and Leem (2006) found that the crucial needs reported by women in their study included job placement, job training, and education. The inability to secure adequately paying employment may force women to return to unsafe or unhealthy living environments (e.g. return to abusive families or spouses for support) and/or push them to earn a living illegally (e.g. by selling drugs, engaging in sex work or property offending) (Van Olphen et al., 2009: 10).

## 2.4 Trauma, mental health and substance abuse

Women in prison often have co-occurring needs related to experiences of traumatic victimisation, substance abuse, mental and physical ill health (Lewis & Hayes, 1997; Binswanger, Nowels, Corsi, Long, Booth, Kutner & Steiner, 2011a; Binswanger, Blatchford Lindsay & Stern, 2011b; Salem et al., 2013; Johnson, Schonbrun, Peabody, Shefner, Ferandes, Rosen & Zlotnick, 2014; Colbert, Sekula, Zoucha and Cohen, 2016; Dehart & Lachini, 2018). Prison environments can both ameliorate (e.g. by forcing sobriety or by physically removing women from 'outside hardships' such as abusive intimate partners) and exacerbate these problems. In terms of the latter, studies show that the prison experience can be especially traumatic for women (Carlton & Segrave, 2011). Thus, in their research on women's re-entry, Carlton and Segrave (2011: 558) found that *"the experience of imprisonment can emulate and magnify pre-existing traumas, placing women at risk upon release."*

Being released from prison can intensify women's suffering. Studies show that re-entry is often traumatic and overwhelming. Women may feel unprepared to leave the stable and predictable structure of the prison (Kenemore & Roldan, 2005). Going from possessing little or no agency to doing everything for themselves can be engulfing and stress-inducing (Kellett & Willging, 2011). As concluded by Carlton and Segrave (2011: 560), *"trauma at once precedes and is often compounded by imprisonment and the pains associated with release"* (e.g. inability to find housing, employment, feelings of loneliness, despair and strain created by moving from a very controlled to an uncontrolled environment) (also see, Colbert et al., 2013).

Given the relationship between trauma and ill health, it is unsurprising that women's post-release mental and physical well-being is typically poorer than that of women in the general community, and that they are significantly more likely to die of unnatural causes (Lewis & Hayes, 1997; Carlton & Segrave, 2014: 271). Predictably, re-entering society with a history of trauma, mental and/or physical health problems poses challenges.

Mallik-Kane and Visher's (2008) study on health and women's re-entry showed that reintegration experiences varied by health status. Women with physical, mental, and substance abuse conditions followed distinct trajectories, reporting significantly more negative experiences in terms of obtaining housing, securing employment, gaining familial support, and maintaining abstinence. In particular, and compared to their counterparts, women leaving prison with pre-existing substance abuse problems engaged in more post-release substance use and criminal behaviour and were more likely to be re-incarcerated within one year of release (Severance, 2004; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). Visher and Bakken (2014) similarly found that women with poor mental health were less likely (than those without mental health conditions) to be employed or to receive financial assistance from family after release. They were significantly more likely to have trouble securing stable housing, more likely to report drug use, and more likely to engage in criminal activity.

## 2.5 Normative community acceptance

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Believing that you will be accepted back into normative society is an important factor in re-entry success. However, formerly incarcerated women often experience on-going normative community stigmatisation; they feel as though they are being treated as outcasts. Through women's social interactions, they become acutely aware that they are viewed as perpetually untrustworthy, deviant and criminal. This stigma is perpetuated by normative societal constructions of ex-inmates as having an essential and therefore inescapable non-normative immorality. The label 'ex-prisoner' is typically viewed by normative members of the community as not only a reflection of a woman's past misdeed but also as a prediction of her future behaviour. The potency of this narrative means that women labelled 'criminal' by the state via incarceration may struggle to escape the label (Opsal, 2011: 139).

Women re-entering society are intensely aware of their criminal label. Further, the ex-inmate stigma is more acutely damaging for women because they are perceived as doubly deviant, having violated normative cultural expectations pertaining to appropriate feminine behaviour in addition to criminal law (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Opsal, 2011; Moran, 2012). The impact of the ex-inmate stigma on women re-entering the community is manifested in several ways. First, employers are significantly less likely to hire ex-inmates than they are to hire persons without a criminal record. Second, securing housing is difficult for those with a history of imprisonment. As women become aware of their outsider status, they may isolate themselves and experience psychological stress and other health problems (Opsal, 2011).

Stigmatisation is further heightened for substance-abusing women who must contend with the non-normative labels of 'criminal' and 'drug user'. Formerly imprisoned women with substance misuse problems have reported that the stigma of drug use and incarceration have hampered their ability to obtain or benefit from much needed support services, with a resultant return to drug use (Carlton & Segrave, 2014).

## 2.6 Through-care support / continuity of care

Reconnecting to normative society can be difficult for formerly incarcerated women due to a myriad of factors (e.g. stigma, mental health problems, substance abuse histories, and trauma). The pains of re-entry can be soothed by connecting women on the outside with health care, social support services and programming that is relevant to their needs (Carter, 2017; Valera, 2017). However, studies show that pre-release planning is rarely done in prison and as a result, formerly incarcerated women find it difficult to access much needed community support services. This is concerning because *“institutional and community anchors”* (e.g. non-profit service organisations and health care services) provide considerable support and create *“positive pathways”* for formerly incarcerated women (Valera, 2017: 8-10). It is therefore crucial that through-care support/continuity of care is provided pre and post-release because when women's needs are negated, they are at greater risk of failure (Arditti & Few, 2006; Schram, Koons-Witt, Williams & McShane, 2006; Baldwin, 2009; Cobbina, 2010; Morozova, Azbel, Grishaev, Dvoryak, Wickersham, & Altice, 2013; Valera, 2017).

In many correctional systems, women may be released on parole. The parole system, at least in theory, delivers a ready-made avenue for service provision and through-care support. Originally, the aims of parole were to assist the criminal justice system in achieving the ambitions of rehabilitation and re-integration. However, more recently, a shift has occurred in many Western nations (e.g. the United Kingdom and the United States), and systems of parole are now framed around surveillance and risk management (Opsal, 2009: 311-312).

Opsal's (2009; 2014) research on re-entry and parole, for example, revealed that women generally experienced parole negatively. Parole was perceived as a tool of surveillance, a prison without walls, rather than as an institution concerned with the provision of social support. Being 'on parole' was found to hinder rather than promote women's re-entry efforts. Parole was described as invoking *“feelings of fear, anxiety and, in some cases, dependency in a group of women struggling to regain control over their own lives”* (Opsal, 2014: 202). Women wrestled with the competing and conflicting demands of their supervision requirements, employment and resuming their roles as mothers (Opsal, 2009: 324; Opsal, 2014: 202). Opsal (2014: 202) concludes that in very important ways, *“parole supervision [does] not facilitate women's re-entry into roles [as employee and mother] that could have aided their re-integration into their communities.”* Similarly, Pollack's (2009) study of female parolees showed the need for confidential spaces of support to aid in establishing a successful post-prison life. However, parole was construed as little more than an extension of government control. This did little more than exacerbate formerly incarcerated women's exclusion from society.

## 2.7 Prison experiences and re-entry planning

Given what is known about women's pathways into prison, re-entry planning prior to release is imperative to address women's individual needs and allow for through-care support/continuity of care. However, and as noted above, re-entry plans are frequently negated (Valera, 2017: 8-10). Prison authorities should be planning for re-entry from the beginning of a woman's sentence. In prison, women should be supported to heal from trauma, remain connected with families (especially their children), and address problems of substance misuse and mental illness, by extended training and educational opportunities that increase their chances of securing meaningful, adequately paying employment post-release (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

Unfortunately, women's incarceration experiences rarely prepare them for life outside prison walls. For instance, Huebner, DeJong, & Cobbina's (2010) study of recidivism amongst formerly incarcerated women, showed no correlation between participation in prison-based programmes and recidivism because of the inability of such programmes to address women's gender-specific needs. Baldwin's (2009) study revealed that women's pre-incarceration experiences (e.g. abuse and trauma) followed them from the community into prison. Women in this research reported being re-victimised by prison staff and were not offered programmes specific to their needs, namely, education, employment, help for physical, mental and sexual abuse, re-entry programming/planning, and connection to post-release support services. Similarly, Maidment (2005) sought to identify factors important to women's re-integration and discovered a lack of needs-based gender-specific programming in prison which impeded women's re-entry prospects. In Malaysia, Teh's (2006) study of women's re-integration requirements resulted in recommendations for the introduction of substance abuse programmes in female correctional facilities alongside programmes/services to address women's mental health needs and histories of violent victimisation.

## 2.8 Spirituality and faith

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Religion has long played a significant role in prison programmes and treatment. Religious practices can provide comfort and guidance to some women in prison and as such, may continue to do so post-release. Severance (2004) explored how female inmates prepare themselves for re-entry. Faith and prayer were highlighted as strategies many women viewed as essential to re-entry success. Similarly, Parson and Warner-Robbins (2002) found that a belief in God is important to some formerly incarcerated women. In this study, faith provided women with *"a source of strength and peace in their lives."* Nevertheless, acceptance into religious communities outside prison walls is not always guaranteed. The stigma of the ex-inmate label may result in rejection by religious communities (Dodge & Pogrenbin, 2001). Further, for some women, *"faith may signify a fatalistic outlook in which success is perceived as out of their control"* (Severance, 2004: 93).

## 2.9 Emotional strength and motivation to change

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Some researchers maintain that re-entry can only be successful if women are motivated to change and have the personal determination it takes to be successful (Davis et al., 2012; Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002). However, motivation to change and determination to 'stay the course', while important, are often restricted by social circumstances beyond women's control. Many women who leave prison have high hopes and expectations of how life will be on the outside but are left disappointed once they encounter the real-life difficulties of re-entry (e.g. lack of service provision, lack of support, lack of stable housing, and stigma) (Kellett & Willging, 2011).

## 2.10 Summary

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Prior research shows that as pathways into prisons are multifaceted and gendered, so too are experiences of incarceration and trajectories out of prison. Criminalised women are frequently stigmatised as irrevocably deviant. They have violated the law and transgressed the fundamental moral principles of normative womanhood. Women's lives prior to, during and post-imprisonment are thus marred by stigma as well as limited resources, and a host of other intersectional vulnerabilities (e.g. histories of abuse and trauma, problems with mental health, substance abuse, economic marginalisation). Unsurprisingly, women leaving prison have complex needs but generally receive little support and must attempt to rebuild their lives as 'immoral' women on the margins of normative society.



**CHAPTER 3**  
**RESEARCH METHODS**

The aims of this research are to understand the needs, challenges, and successes of women re-entering Thailand society post-imprisonment. As outlined in Chapter 1, most women returning to the community from prison in Thailand will have been incarcerated for a drug offence. Thus, to reflect the majority female prison population, this study focuses on drug offending/criminalised women.

Prior research on prisoner re-entry has traditionally concentrated on recidivism (defined as re-arrest and/or re-imprisonment) as the primary, if not the only, indicator of success for formerly incarcerated women. However, re-entry achievement is likely multidimensional. It may include, for example, re-connecting and contributing to family life, abstaining from drug use, securing legitimate employment and/or stable and secure housing, being emotionally 'strong' and persevering, establishing healthy intimate relationships, and so on (Heidemann et al., 2015). Heidemann and colleagues (2015: 37) argue that *"given the complex histories and a host of internal challenges and external barriers, a focus predominantly on recidivism obscures those outcomes that formerly incarcerated women most desire for their own lives. Defining success simply in relation to criminal justice outcomes such as re-arrest or re-incarceration may further be dehumanising to this population."*

Given the marginalised status of criminalised women and the fact that women are experts in their own lives, women's voices were placed at the centre of our research methodology (Rose, 1997; Shantz, & Frigon 2009a, Shantz, Kilty and Frigon, 2009b). Gender differences in pathways to criminalisation are inherent in women's experiences of imprisonment and re-entry. Thus, using in-depth interviews and focus groups, we explore women's experiences of offending/criminalisation, imprisonment and re-entry. Utilising the voices of women (imprisoned and formerly imprisoned) and those who support them during incarceration and re-entry (i.e. prison personnel), this study will identify what constitutes re-entry successes and explore the needs/challenges of women returning to the community.

Thailand places a high priority on the gender-specific contexts out of which offending arises and the different needs of women in prison. This is manifested in the work undertaken to guide the development of *the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders* (the Bangkok Rules) which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2010. The Bangkok Rules make a strong statement about Thailand's recognition of and commitment to the fair and equitable treatment of women in prison (United Nations General Assembly, 2010).

In practice, several women's prisons in Thailand are now considered Bangkok Rules compliant. As of 1 March 2020, there were fifteen Bangkok Rules Model Prisons across the country. Thailand's Model Prisons consider women's unique circumstances through the implementation of policies, practices and programming that are more sensitive to the life circumstances and realities of women's experiences. There is a commitment within these facilities to eliminate discrimination, to better understand and respond to women's complex gendered needs, support and prepare them for re-entry (see more information in Text Box 1, below). Further, in 2019 when the fieldwork for this research was undertaken, one of these model prisons was piloting an intensive re-entry programme and is thus denoted as a Model Prison Plus.



### TEXT BOX 1: Model Prison

While the adoption of the UN Bangkok Rules was the first important step for improving treatment and living conditions of women prisoners across the world, significant efforts are needed to ensure that the Rules are understood and implemented. With the aim of promoting the implementation of the UN Bangkok Rules worldwide, the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ) was established by the Royal Thai Government on 13 June 2011. One of TIJ's missions is to promote and support the implementation of the UN Bangkok Rules in correctional institutions at both the international and the domestic levels.

In 2015, TIJ, in cooperation with the Department of Corrections (DoC) of Thailand, established the Model Prison Project with the aim of (1) enhancing understanding of prison staff about the UN Bangkok Rules, (2) encouraging female prison / correctional institutions across Thailand to carry out their policies and practices in line with the Bangkok Rules, and (3) selecting prisons that have been evaluated to be specialized learning centres for other prisons to emulate.

In phase 1 from 2015 to 2016, TIJ selected prisons that had the potential to improve their infrastructure and staff capacity to become model prison. During phase 2 from 2017 to 2019, a region-based approach was used in which prisons could apply to become model prisons. This started from Northern Thailand and then moved on to the East, Central and Southern regions of Thailand. Throughout this process, technical support was provided by TIJ to help prisons improve their compliance with the Bangkok Rules. At the end of the project, TIJ certified 15 prisons as “model prisons” with details as follows.

Before becoming a model prison, each prison that applied to join the project had to pass the evaluation with at least 95%. This evaluation was conducted using the ‘index of implementation’, which comprises nine sections with 154 indicators. The nine sections are (1) Prison policy, (2) Admission and registration, (3) Hygiene and health care, (4) Safety and security, (5) Contact with the outside world, (6) Inmates’ classification, (7) Special categories, (8) Pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and mothers with children in prison, and (9) Pre-release programme.

TIJ used these evaluation criteria from 2015 until 2018. In 2019, TIJ expanded the index of implementation from 9 sections to 10 sections. A section called ‘Progress in prison facility development’ was added, with 7 indicators aimed at documenting efforts put in by the prison director and prison staff to make their prison more Bangkok Rules compliant.

Imprisoned women in Thailand may therefore be housed in institutions that are either compliant or not yet compliant with the Bangkok Rules. To adequately reflect variation in experiences by prison type, research participants were drawn from a mainstream women’s prison (Prison A), a Bangkok Rules Model Prison (Prison B), and the Model Prison Plus (Prison C). To protect the anonymity of research participants, the names and locations of these correctional facilities are not provided. Focus groups with prison staff, alongside in-depth interviews with women sentenced for drug offending, were conducted in each prison. In total, 75 interviews were undertaken with imprisoned women, and an additional five interviews were completed with women post-release. More specifically, interviews were undertaken with five separate groups of women. Details appear below:

- **Group 1:** 25 interviews with women incarcerated in Prison A (mainstream prison).
- **Group 2:** 25 interviews with women incarcerated in Prison B (Bangkok Rules Model Prison).
- **Group 3:** 20 interviews with women incarcerated in Prison C (Bangkok Rules Plus Prison).
- **Group 4:** 5 interviews with recently re-imprisoned women in Prison C (Bangkok Rules Plus Prison).
- **Group 5:** post-release interviews with 5 women in Group 3. Including women released from the Model Prison Plus Programme provided the possibility of following women post-release as they were linked to a post-release service provider. We sought to interview all women in Group 3 one month and three months post-release. Post-release contact details were sourced for 16 women. However, in reality, we were only able to contact and interview five women. Of these, interviews were undertaken with two women one month and three months post-release. The remaining three women were available for the interview one month after re-entry.

The interview topics consisted of women's responses to broad discussion topics which included:

1. Pathways into prison (Groups 1-4 above)
  - a. Childhood experiences
  - b. Adulthood experiences
  - c. Education, employment and economic circumstances
  - d. Health and substance abuse histories
  - e. Circumstances surrounding their offending/criminalisation
  - f. Prior arrests and terms of imprisonment
2. Life in prison (Groups 1-4 above)
  - a. Experiences of imprisonment
  - b. Needs addressed / not addressed in prison
  - c. Pre-release planning
3. Expectations/experiences of re-entry (Groups 1-5 above)
  - a. Definitions of success and how these might/were/are being achieved
  - b. Challenges that might be/were /are being faced
  - c. Needs and how these might/were/are being addressed

In each prison, all eligible study participants were approached by prison staff and asked if they would like to contribute. To ensure women received the relevant information and gave informed consent, at the beginning of each interview, we explained the aim of the study, confidentiality, anonymity and the voluntary nature of participation before confirming (written) consent to participate. Anonymity was protected by not identifying the prisons, assigning pseudonyms and presenting results thematically. In addition, to reduce the possibility of identifying the women, we do not use the pseudonyms to individually connect women's life stories prior to, during and post-imprisonment. Thus, if a pseudonym is used more than once between different results chapters, this occurred randomly and does not represent a continuation of a woman's individual story. So, for example, when discussing women's pathways into prison, we might quote the story of a woman named Amy. Then when moving on to describe women's experiences of imprisonment, Amy might be referenced again and so on when talking about re-entry. These Amys will not be the same person. In other words, the pseudonyms used in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are in no way connected to one another. Within chapters, the pseudonyms may denote the same person, but this will be specified. In other words, if these pseudonym links within chapters are not explicated, they do not exist.

In addition to the above interviews with currently and formerly incarcerated women, three focus groups were conducted with 16 correctional staff in Prisons 1, 2 and 3. The key themes explored during these focus groups included:

1. Perceptions of women's pathways into prison,
2. Perceptions of women's needs and experiences in prison, and
3. Perceptions of women's re-entry experiences, needs, challenges and successes.

The interviews and focus groups lasted between one and two hours and were audio-recorded. Some interviews were conducted in English and simultaneously interpreted into Thai. Other interviews and the focus groups were conducted in Thai. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed into English, collated and analysed thematically according to the broad discussion topics outlined above. To aid our analysis, we used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program NVivo. This program works on a code-and-retrieve theme basis. The theme coding process was also triangulated across project team members and cross-checked. During this process, we reflected on the codes in order to gain a sense of continuity and linkage between them. The results are presented in the following chapters, beginning with a descriptive overview of the research participants.





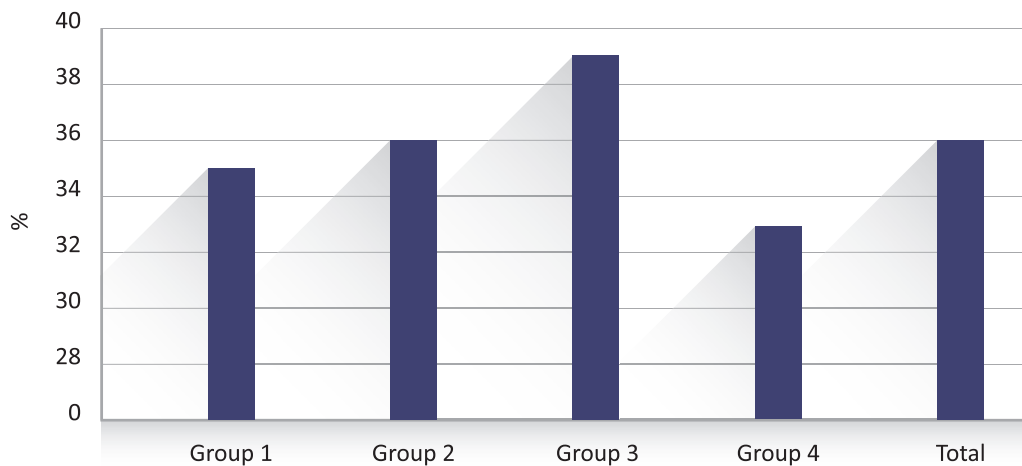
**CHAPTER 4**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

In this chapter, we provide a descriptive overview of the interview and focus group participants. First, the demographic profiles of the women interviewed (in Groups 1 to 3 and 4 where applicable) are provided. This is followed by a snapshot of the drug offences for which these women were imprisoned, their sentence lengths and the time left to serve. Details of focus group members are then conveyed, including current place of employment, job title, roles/responsibilities, and length of service.

## 4.1 Women's profiles

The mean age of the women interviewed was 36.5 years. In Prison A (Group 1), the mean age was 35 years. This compared to 35.8 years for those in Prison B (Group 2) and 39.2 years for those in Prison C (Group 3). In Group 4 (women recently re-incarcerated in Prison C), the mean age was 32.8 years (see Figure 1, below).

Figure 1: Mean age of imprisoned women



As demonstrated in Table 3 (below), most women identified as Buddhist. This was uniform across the Groups. Overall, less than one-fifth reported being Muslim and only a small number distinguished themselves as Christian.

**Table 3: Religion of imprisoned women**

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<i>Buddhist</i>	22	88	17	68	18	90	3	60	60	80
<i>Muslim</i>	3	12	6	24	1	5	1	20	11	15
<i>Christian</i>	0	0	2	8	1	5	1	20	4	5
<i>Total</i>	25	100	25	100	20	100	5	100	75	100

Educational levels were generally low. This finding varied little between the participant groups. Very few women had completed upper secondary school, and over 40% reported having never completed even primary school or having completed primary school only (see Table 4, below).

**Table 4: Imprisoned women’s level of education**

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<i>Did not complete primary school</i>	4	16	3	12	2	10	0	0	9	12
<i>Completed primary school only</i>	4	16	10	40	7	35	4	80	25	33
<i>Attended but did not complete lower secondary school</i>	2	8	5	20	0	0	0	0	7	9
<i>Completed lower secondary school and did not attend upper secondary school</i>	8	32	4	16	6	30	0	0	18	24
<i>Attended but did not complete upper secondary school</i>	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<i>Completed upper secondary school</i>	6	24	3	12	5	25	1	20	15	20
<i>Total</i>	25	100	25	100	20	100	5	100	75	100

Most women reported drug selling as their primary means of income prior to imprisonment. A not insignificant number also reported working as shop assistants/salespersons or as factory workers/general labourers. Other occupations/sources of income included: hotel/bar/restaurant work, being supported by an intimate partner or other family members, sex work, cleaner, and hairdresser (see Table 5, below).

Table 5: Imprisoned women's primary means of financial support prior to imprisonment

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<i>Hotel/bar/restaurant work</i>	2	8	1	4	1	5	0	0	4	5
<i>Shop assistant/sales</i>	5	20	2	8	4	20	0	0	11	15
<i>Drug dealing</i>	10	40	12	48	9	45	3	60	34	45
<i>Supported by an intimate partner or other family member</i>	2	8	3	12	1	5	1	20	7	9
<i>Sex industry</i>	3	12	4	16	0	0	0	0	7	9
<i>Cleaner</i>	2	8	1	4	0	0	0	0	3	4
<i>General labour or factory work</i>	1	4	2	8	4	20	1	20	8	11
<i>Hairdressing</i>	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	1	1
<i>Total</i>	25	100	25	100	20	100	5	100	75	100

Most of the women were convicted and sentenced to prison either for being in possession of methamphetamine (i.e. “yaba” and/or “ice”) or for distributing/selling these types of drugs. This pattern was consistent over the four interviewee groups (see Table 6, below).

Table 6: Imprisoned women's offence and drug type

Offence										
	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<i>Drug possession for use</i>	5	20	4	16	9	45	0	0	18	24
<i>Drug possession for distribution</i>	13	52	10	40	4	20	2	40	29	39
<i>Drug distribution</i>	7	28	11	44	6	30	3	60	27	36
<i>Driving under the influence of drugs</i>	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	1	1
<i>Total</i>	25	100	25	100	20	100	5	100	75	100

Drug type										
	Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<i>methamphetamine (includes “yaba” &amp; ice)</i>	24	96	25	100	19	95	5	100	73	97
<i>cocaine</i>	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<i>cannabis</i>	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	1	1
<i>Total</i>	25	100	25	100	20	100	5	100	75	100



Most interviewees (64%) were sentenced to imprisonment terms between 2 and 5 years. Differences between the groups were noted. A greater percentage of women in Group 2 (Prison B) was sentenced to longer terms, while larger proportions of women in Groups 1 and 3 were serving shorter sentences (see Table 7, below).

**Table 7: Imprisoned women’s sentence length**

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<i>6 months to no more than 1 year</i>	0	0	0	0	2	10	0	0	2	3
<i>1 year to no more than 2 years</i>	6	24	2	8	9	45	0	0	17	23
<i>2 years to no more than 5 years</i>	19	76	16	64	8	40	5	100	48	64
<i>5 years to no more than 10 years</i>	0	0	6	24	1	5	0	0	7	9
<i>10 years to no more than 15 years</i>	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	1
<i>Total</i>	25	100	25	100	20	100	5	100	75	100

At the time of the interview 72% of the women interviewed in Prison A (Group 1) and 96% of those in Prison B (Group 2) were due for release within four months. For those in Prison C (Group 3), most women were due for release within a year (see Table 8, below). It should be noted that many of the women reported that their release dates could be earlier if they received a Royal Pardon (see Text Box 2).

**TEXT BOX: 2 Royal Pardons in Thailand**

According to the Department of Corrections, Royal Pardon is the granting of pardon to a person inflicted the punishment. The pardon may be either in the form of an unconditional release, a commutation, or a reduction of punishment. This depends on the discretion of His Majesty the King as stated in Section 221 and 225 of the Constitution (B.E. 2540) and Section 259 to 267 of Division 7: Pardon, Commutation, and Reduction of Punishment in the Criminal Procedure Code Amendment Act (No. 23), B.E. 2548.

There were two Royal Pardons in 2020:

1. 14th August 2020: as a commemoration of His Majesty the King’s birthday around 40,000 convicts were released
2. 4th December 2020: marked the occasion of the late His Majesty the King Rama 9 (the birthday is on 5th December) around 30,000 convicts were released

Source: [http://www.correct.go.th/eng/royal\\_pardon.html](http://www.correct.go.th/eng/royal_pardon.html)

Table 8: Imprisoned women's time left to serve

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
< 1 month	2	8	5	20	1	5	8	11
1 month < 2 months	5	20	7	28	0	0	12	17
2 months < 4 months	11	44	12	48	3	15	26	37
4 months < 7 months	6	24	1	4	5	25	12	17
7 months < 1 year	1	4	0	0	9	45	10	14
1 year < 2 years	0	0	0	0	2	10	2	3
Total	25	100	25	100	20	100	70	100

It should be remembered that Group 4 included only five women recently re-incarcerated in Prison C. All these women were sentenced to terms of 2 years to no more than 5 years, and at the time of the interview, had only been incarcerated from 2 to 5 months.

In order to capture differences between first and repeat incarceration experiences, we sought to enlist equal numbers of women in Groups 1-3 who had a) previously been imprisoned and b) were incarcerated for the first time. As demonstrated in Table 9 (below), this was achieved.

Table 9: Has served prior imprisonment terms

Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Total	
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
14	56	13	52	10	50	37	53

## 4.2 Focus group participant profiles

Three focus groups involving a total of 16 participants were facilitated. Details about these focus groups are provided in Table 10 (below). As can be seen, focus group members undertook a variety of roles within the prisons. Most had extensive experience working for the Thailand Department of Corrections and were responsible for the well-being of special category prisoners (i.e. women with mental health problems, mothers, foreign nationals, elderly and physically disabled prisoners) as well as re-integration planning/support, rehabilitation and/or vocational training.

Table 10: Characteristics of focus group participants

Prison	Number	%
<i>Prison A</i>	5	31
<i>Prison B</i>	6	38
<i>Prison C</i>	5	31
<i>Total</i>	16	100

Job title	Number	%
<i>Social worker</i>	6	38
<i>Superintendent/Director</i>	3	19
<i>Psychologist</i>	1	6
<i>Penologist</i>	3	19
<i>Wing Chief/Deputy</i>	2	13
<i>Officer</i>	1	6
<i>Total</i>	16	100

Role / Responsibilities	Number	%
<i>Prisoner classification</i>	3	14
<i>Care for special categories of prisoners</i>	5	24
<i>Re-integration planning/support</i>	3	14
<i>Oversight of prison wing</i>	2	10
<i>Rehabilitation and/or vocational training</i>	8	38
<i>Total</i>	21*	100

Length of time working for the Thailand Department of Corrections	Number	%
<i>&lt; 1 year</i>	1	6
<i>1-2 years</i>	3	19
<i>3-4 years</i>	3	19
<i>7-15 years</i>	5	31
<i>&gt;15 years -30 years</i>	4	25
<i>Total</i>	16	100

\* The total number is greater than 16 because some focus group participants had more than one role/responsibility

## 4.3 Summary

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In this chapter, we have provided a descriptive profile of the interview and focus group participants. Overall, at the time of the interview, the age of the imprisoned women was in the thirties, most identified as Buddhist, and had low levels of education. Prior to incarceration, drug selling had been the primary means of financial support for the majority. In the main, the women were imprisoned for drug offences related to methamphetamine (i.e. “yaba” and ice); most were serving sentences of between 2 and 5 years and were due for release within 4 months. Around half the women were re-incarcerated. The prison staff who participated in the focus groups undertook numerous roles within their prisons, had extensive experience, and were responsible for the well-being of special category prisoners, re-integration planning/support, rehabilitation and/or vocational training.

In the next chapter, we describe women’s pathways to imprisonment.



**CHAPTER 5**  
**PATHWAYS INTO PRISON**

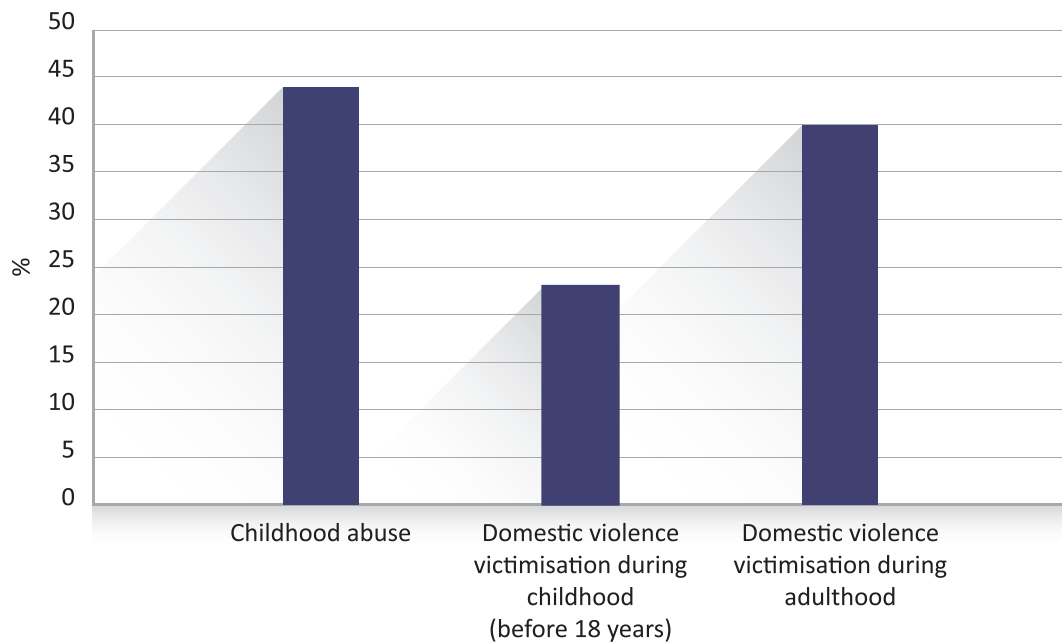
The first step toward understanding and in turn constructively responding to women's reintegration, is gleaning knowledge of how women come to be imprisoned in the first place. The characteristics of women's life histories not only set them on a pathway to prison; these characteristics also impact their incarceration and post-release experiences. In this chapter, we begin by overviewing women's imprisonment journeys. Utilising the interviews with imprisoned women (Groups 1 to 3) and focus group discussions with prison personnel, the following key themes (discussed in more detail below) were identified as being central to women's pathways to prison in Thailand for drug offending:

- Victimisation
  - Childhood abuse and domestic violence
- Other adverse life experiences
  - Adversity in childhood
    - Familial and community dysfunction
    - Severance of parent/child relationships
    - Low levels of education
    - Poverty
    - Leaving home at a young age to take on adult responsibilities such as parenting, employment and/or getting married
    - Intimate partnering with problematic men
  - Adulthood
    - Intimate partnering with problematic men
- Economic marginalisation and familial caretaking responsibilities
- Deviant peer group association and childhood deviance/criminality
- Emotional distress, substance misuse and low levels of help-seeking

### 5.1 Victimisation

Prior research shows a strong relationship between victimisation, associated trauma, substance abuse, offending/criminalisation and imprisonment. Studies of imprisoned women report higher rates of victimisation (i.e. physical, sexual and emotional abuse) than in the general female population (Saxena, Grella & Messina, 2016). Moreover, in contrast to male prisoners, victimisation experiences are more common, start earlier, and last longer for female prisoners (Owen et al., 2017). Arguably, the line between victim and offender is more often blurred for women than men. Here, victimisation (including physical and emotional abuse) in childhood was a common theme in the imprisoned women's stories, as was being the victim of domestic violence over the life course (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Victimization experiences



### 5.1.1 Childhood abuse

There is widespread evidence of the relationship between childhood abuse and offending/criminalisation. As noted by prison personnel, *“in some cases, some of them [imprisoned women] have been abused by their family”*. Previous studies have found that being a victim of childhood abuse increases the likelihood of substance misuse and engaging in drug-related crime. Drug and alcohol use can provide a ready-made coping mechanism, a form of self-medication and thus, an outlet for escaping the trauma of abuse. Female victims of childhood maltreatment are noted to be especially vulnerable to substance misuse and as such, more likely to become involved in drug offending. In addition, researchers have noted that many female offenders’ criminal involvement begins after running away from home to escape familial violence. Once ‘on the street’, and with few resources at their disposal, women turn to crime (including but not limited to drug selling and sex work) to support themselves (see review by Fagan, 2001).

As children, 44% of the women in this research had experienced child abuse defined as either violence being perpetrated directly against them by caregivers, and / or having lived with violence being perpetrated by male family members against their mothers (see Figure 2, above). For example, Boonsri experienced physical violence ‘at the hand’ of both her father and stepmother, and later witnessed her mother being violently assaulted by her stepfather. When she was a toddler her father *“threw [her] against the wall because [she] was too attached to [her] mother and [she] cried all the time”*. Boonsri’s parents eventually separated, and she was left in her father’s and stepmother’s care. Both caregivers were abusive toward Boonsri. In the quote below, Boonsri provides examples of the physical abuse perpetrated against her by her stepmother:

*“One day she took me on a motorbike with her and put cigarettes in my pocket. But as we were moving, the wind blew all the cigarettes away. So, she hit me very badly. There was [another] time when she hit me nonstop and grabbed my throat like she was going to strangle me. I didn’t know why but she was having a seriously strong anger. I remember that I became scared of her. There’s also another time when I wanted to go to the temple fair with friends. I was a child and I was just curious what’s there at the fair. So, I went, and my stepmother couldn’t find me. When she did, she was very angry and grabbed a stick and hit me so many times on my legs until I bled.”*

Boonsri's father also continued to physically abuse her. She explained, *"what happened was [my father's] girlfriend told my father that I didn't go to school because I went to see a boy. In fact, I was a tomboy. I didn't like guys and my father knew that. But my father listened to his girlfriend and thought that I went to see a boy, so he hit me with a stick. You can still see the scar."*

Eventually, the abuse Boonsri endured at home led her to drop out of school and run away from home. She voiced, *"I chose to call off my education [in Grade 8] even though I had never missed school. I was very miserable and desperate. I ran away and hid out in an overgrown forest under a motorway bridge so my father wouldn't find me. From my house to the motorway is around two kilometres. I left my house at two o'clock in the morning and walked around the forest until it got dark and slept on a tree and sometimes in a concrete tunnel. I really hated him and his girlfriend. A day and a half. I was hiding inside the tunnel. When there's no car passing by, I kept on walking with 200 baht in my pocket. I took a bus [to find my mother]." However, there was no respite from violence at Boonsri's mother's house. She continued, "I asked a motorbike taxi to call my mother, so she came to pick me up. But after living with her for a while, I had to move out again. My mother had a new husband. So, he's technically my stepfather. One day, they were drunk and fighting, and he was going to use a knife on my mother."*

Research shows that children living with domestic violence *"exhibit levels of emotional and behavioural problems, trauma symptoms, and compromised social and academic development comparable to children who are the direct victims of physical abuse"* (Gillindger & Goddard, 2007; Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). Thus, living with domestic violence constitutes child abuse. Like Boonsri, other women described witnessing horrific acts of violence being perpetrated by paternal caregivers against their mothers or stepmothers. Duangkamol told us, *"when my father was drunk, he would have arguments with my mother. He also hit her as well. And this happened every day. I saw them fighting when I was really young. It was so severe. My mother was bleeding."*

Apinya similarly described the violence perpetrated by her father against her mother. She narrated, *"smacking her face, hitting her head and pulling her long hair. The most brutal action was when my father tried to slash my mother's face with a knife. All I did was cry and run out to my cousin's house next door. I was scared to death. In my mind, I saw blood spilling all over my mother's face"*.

Comparable to those who had experienced direct forms of abuse, women who had lived with domestic violence as children expressed feelings of being fearful, unsafe, unloved, powerless, and different from other children. These feelings are represented in the following quotes:

*"I have seen mother and father physically fight since I was little. I felt sad. I thought my family wasn't like other families because I saw mother and father fight every day. Why don't I have a good family like others?"*

*"I always cried and begged my father not to hit my mother. Bleeding, head busted open. I feel very sad. Why did they have to fight each other? Why did adults do this kind of thing?"*

*"To tell you the truth, I used to hate men. I kicked them all the time since I was seven. I never knew what love looked like or what a loving family look like. I never felt the warmth in my life. All the violence and hitting."*

*"I was sad. Because I was young, and I didn't see the reason why they had to fight. And I couldn't do anything about it."*



Abuse experienced in the family home frequently caused young women to “run away,” become “attached” to deviant friendship groups, and use and/or sell drugs (discussed fully in section 5.4, below). Childhood abuse, therefore, played a fundamental role in women’s offending pathways. In the following quotes, the link between child abuse and subsequent deviant/criminal behaviour is described. In both cases, the women had been physically abused by a paternal caregiver. They turned to drugs to numb the pain, and to deviant friendship groups and/or intimate partners to gain a sense of belonging, acceptance and love.

*“My foster father drank quite a lot. When he was drunk, he was always yelling. I was beaten by him every time he was drunk, which was almost every day. My memory of him was always him beating me. I felt really scared of him at the time so that’s part of the reason why I decided to use drugs. [The abuse] made me feel like I didn’t want to stay home. So that’s part of the reason I decided I didn’t want to go to school. So, I spent time with my friends and started doing drugs. It was around the fifth grade when I started using drugs [yaba], it helped me forget about what was going on at home. [I was using yaba] Every day. I moved in with my friends and never went back to school. I started selling drugs [to support myself].”*

*“My father was very strict, so whenever I got into trouble he’d yell. When he was very mad, he’d hit us. I was really scared of him. At the time I felt like my father didn’t love me. When I turned about twelve, I got lots of friends at school, so got close to them. We skipped school together, hung out during the day, night, go to nightlife and used drugs. At the time, I felt like my father didn’t love me. I felt like I received more attention from friends, from my boyfriend, compared to what I got from my family. I also felt more confident and prettier about myself when I used drugs.”*

#### 5.1.2 Domestic violence victimisation

Domestic violence is linked to women’s drug offending/criminalisation in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, women may be compelled into criminality by their victimisers through love and/or fear. Indirectly, domestic violence can have a negative economic impact, limiting the financial means of victimised women and leading them to crime out of economic necessity. When asked to reflect on how women came to be incarcerated, prison personnel in one focus group recounted both points, noting that *“it [the pathway into prison for drug offending] is because those who were abused [by domestically violent intimate partners] are [economically] dependent [on them]. They must depend on their partner all the time, so they cannot walk away from that cycle. [Also] there might be some cases that the boyfriends do drugs and force them to use, sell or deliver drugs for them.”*

The trauma of intimate partner abuse can also lead to substance misuse as a coping mechanism. This then links to offending/criminalisation, and/or as will be demonstrated below, domestically violent men may report women’s drug offending to the authorities in order to punish them for trying to exit the abusive relationship.

During adolescence, 23% of the women reported having been the victim of domestic violence, and as adults, 40% revealed that they had been victimised in this way (see Figure 2, above). The violence reported included controlling behaviours, emotional abuse, sexual assault and often brutal physical violence. For example, Fern was only 13 years old when she started dating her 26-year-old boyfriend. He assaulted Fern so severely that a scar is still visible on her elbow. As she described it, *“I had a boyfriend when I was in grade 7. He was 26 years old [and I was] 13. But when we were together, he usually got into arguments. He was a jealous type of guy. He used a metal ruler*

to hit my arm. In fact, he aimed at my face, but I used my arm to block him hitting me. He hit me so hard that my elbow was dislocated." Kanok also depicted severe physical violence 'at the hand' of an intimate partner. She told us, "When I was four months pregnant, he was high on drugs. And drunk and got jealous. So, he stabbed me with a knife a few times in the arms. And then he stabbed my tummy. But he missed the baby. I still got the baby afterwards."

For Hom and Ploy, domestic violence indirectly impacted their pathways to crime. Hom offended out of economic necessity. Her violent and controlling husband would not allow her to leave the family to find legitimate employment, and so Hom decided to sell drugs. She wanted to save money to escape the violence and support her children. Ploy started sniffing glue to cope with the trauma of her domestic violence victimisation. She eventually developed an addiction to methamphetamine, earning money to support her addiction by selling drugs and prostitution. Hom's and Ploy's stories are illuminated further below.

Hom's husband and the father of her child was controlling, physically violent and emotionally hurtful/negligent. She told us, "I had already got one child. He used drugs and sometimes, under the influence of drugs, he couldn't control himself, he hit me, hurt me. He also had affairs with other women and didn't come back home. I was just a housewife. I couldn't go work. I had to wait for him at home. He took drugs, not only yaba, he used heroin. I couldn't leave. The reason why [I started selling drugs] is because at that time I had two babies and I wanted to have my own house outside of this family. So, I needed to earn some money to provide for myself with my children. I wanted to have somewhere we could stay outside [away from my husband]."

When Ploy was 13 years old, she was raped by her 16-year-old boyfriend. They were subsequently married because he "took responsibility" for having 'sex' (i.e. raping) her. After Ploy "moved in" with her boyfriend, he "kicked, punched and all kinds of things that a man can do to hurt people every day." At the age of 15 years, Ploy became pregnant but her boyfriend "hit [her] until [she] lost [her] unborn child." Ploy explained she then "turned to" glue sniffing because she "didn't know what to turn to." She continued to inhale glue for many years. After eventually escaping her now former boyfriend, the boyfriend stalked Ploy for many years, and subsequent intimate partners were domestically violent. Ploy eventually worked as a prostitute on the streets of Patpong and developed an addiction to yaba. In reference to her use of yaba, Ploy said, "I felt that I couldn't live without it. I needed it all the time".

Sroy and Aom's domestically violent partners used the drug offending of these women to control, entrap and punish them by outing their crimes to the police. Sroy explained how her emotionally and physically violent as well as controlling drug-using boyfriend picked her up from prison on the day of her release with drugs in the car. Despite her plans to remain drug-free, Sroy felt pressured to start using drugs again. She said, "so, he picked me up the day I was released from prison and brought the drugs and handed it to me. He's addicted to drugs and we were both using it before I was arrested. My plan was to move back and work with my mother, raise my children and never get involved with drugs again. I think it was because of him. I moved back with him on that day because I didn't want him to feel sad or upset that I wanted to live with my mother." Sroy continues, "he made me feel like I'm a really bad person because I'm a drug addict, but he was the one who gave me the drugs. He's addicted to drugs. He was really controlling and wanted me to stay in the house. I could use drugs in the house, but I couldn't go out and use it with my friends". Sroy eventually left her abuser. However, as is often the case with domestically violent men who lose control over their victim, Sroy's now ex-boyfriend punished her for leaving the relationship, and his actions resulted in her return to prison. She explains, "we got into a fight and separated so we lived separately. He got really upset with me; that's why he called the police to my house to arrest me".

Like Sroy, Aom lived with domestic violence and was incarcerated because her abusive intimate partner reported her drug offending to the police after she had left him. Aom described her boyfriend and father of her four children as *“physically and verbally abusive. He did everything to me”*. *This man was a drug user and dealer. Aom used drugs “almost every day”* because it helped her cope with the abusive living situation. She said, *“every time I had a problem or was stressed [due to her boyfriend’s abusive behaviour] I would do drugs”*. *Aom decided to leave the relationship, “I told him I wanted to end this relationship”*. In response, her boyfriend *“stole drugs from me, sold it and got caught so he gave the police the information that he got the drugs from me.”*

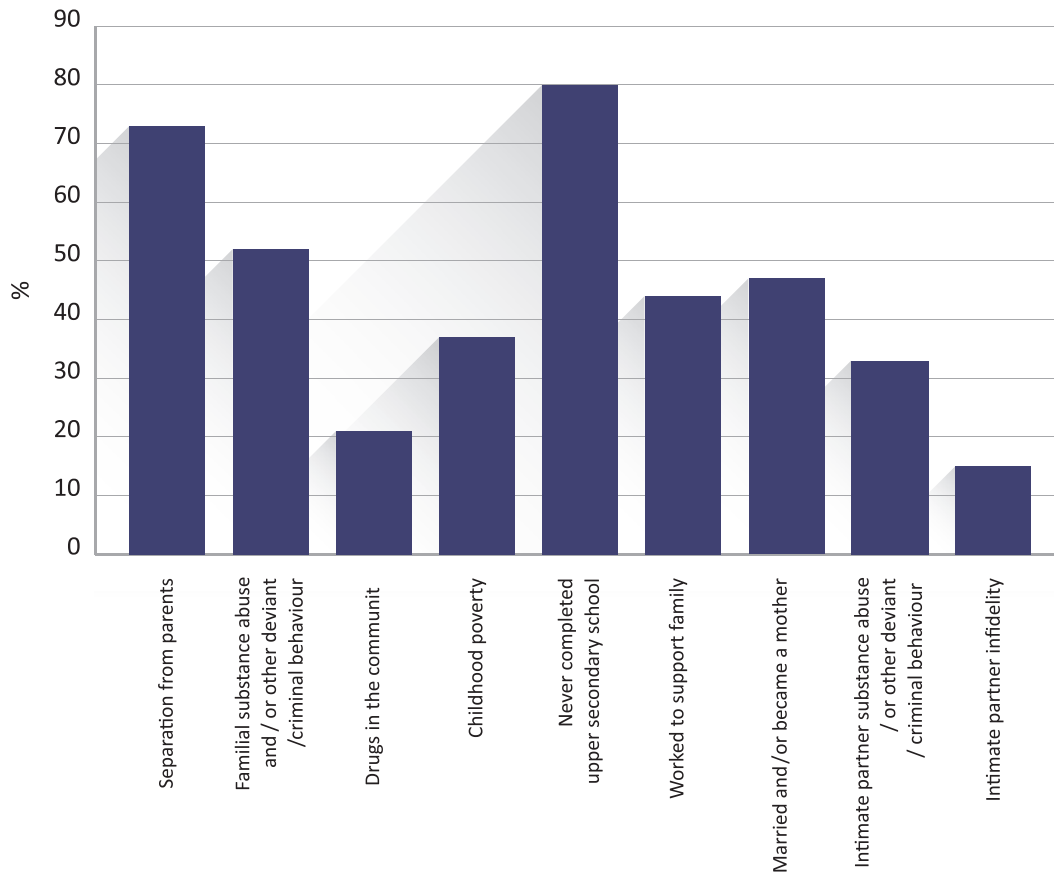
## 5.2 Other adverse life experiences

Other adverse life experiences are stressful or traumatic events that include but are not limited to child abuse and domestic violence victimisation (discussed above). In childhood, these may incorporate community and household dysfunction such as growing up with substance abusing family members, parental separation, death of a primary caregiver, parental abandonment, poverty and leaving home at a young age to take on adult responsibilities such as parenting, employment and/or getting married. During adulthood, adversity can be embedded in dysfunctional intimate relationships, families and communities. Like victimisation, other adversity across the life course is associated with both substance abuse and offending/criminalisation (Kim, Gerber & Kim, 2007; Cherukuri, Britton & Subramanian, 2009; Artz et al., 2011; Shechory, Perry and Addad, 2011; Havanon, Jeradechakul, Wathanotai, Ratanarojsakul & Sankatiprapa, 2012a; Havanon, Jeradechakul, Wathanotai, Paungsawad & Sintunava, 2012b; Owen et al., 2017; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2019).

### 5.2.1 Adverse childhood experiences

During childhood, many of the women described living in disordered communities (i.e. communities characterised by drug use and dealing), households marred by severance of the parent/child relationship (through parental abandonment, imprisonment or death), familial substance abuse and/or other deviant/criminal behaviour, poverty, associated low levels of education, and child labour. Teen pregnancy and motherhood were also common alongside marrying young, and/or being in intimate relationships with partners who were unfaithful, used drugs, and/or were engaged in other deviant/criminal behaviours (usually drug dealing) (see Figure 3, below and Table 4 for educational level achieved).

Figure 3: Adverse childhood experiences



During focus group discussions with prison personnel, it was expressed that separation from parents often underpinned women’s offending: “mostly we find that their parents got divorced and they grow up with one parent or some of them grow up by themselves ... family issues, they think that doing drugs can help.” Close to three-quarters of the women were separated from their parents as children. The parents either died, were incarcerated, went away to work and/or separated from each other, thus fracturing the parent/child relationship. Duanphen, for example, was raised by a couple she described as her “foster parents” after her father was incarcerated and her mother left. She explained:

*“I lived with my foster parents and the other two siblings. They’re not my real siblings. I assume they’re also foster kids of my parents. My biological parents separated when I was born. I heard that my father was taken to prison and my mother had a new family. So, I know who they are but never grew up with them. My mother came to visit me more than my father. Because we all live in the same neighbourhood, so I played in the area they lived in. So, I knew they were my parents but he [father] never really came to visit me in my house.”*

Aew grew up “with [my] grandparent and aunt” because her “father and mother separated and they both had new families.” As a child, this made Aew feel “lacking because I felt that I was different from other children ... other children have a father and mother, but I did not.”

Reflecting on their childhoods, Nin, Pimchan, and Suda also described ensuing feelings of sadness and pain at being separated from their parents as children. Pimchan and Suda's parents divorced while Nin's parents were imprisoned. Each woman explained how the emotional pain of childhood parental disconnection led them into deviant behaviour during their early teen years. Their stories are recounted below:

*"[When I was] 12 years old [my mother and father] were imprisoned, and it was the death sentence. [I was raised] by my grandmother. I was so sad. I wanted to commit suicide by hanging myself. But my friends stopped me. They told me my parents would be home soon. But then the sentence came out to be the death sentence for both [so] I started to use drugs."*

*"After the divorce, my mother didn't come back home that often because she got a new boyfriend. This is understandable because she gave birth to me when she was 12. So, her teenager life was gone. I lived with my aunt and uncle. At first, I didn't want to be with them because I wanted to be with my own family. I cried. He [Father] stayed at the same house. But he was becoming crazy, because he was so stressed that my mother left him. So, no one would want to be near him. My mother left him. She didn't come back because if she came back, my father would physically abuse her again. My heart was not fulfilled. I felt like I was lacking love from my parents. My mother has never joined Mother's Day activity at school. And the same with my father, he didn't go. I was sad. And I decided to find happiness from somewhere else [i.e. friendship groups and drug use]"*

*"I wasn't close to my mother and father because they were divorced. I was close to my grandmother and my sister. I started misbehaving [after the divorce]. I skipped class. I got a boyfriend and I wanted to be with him all the time. If they [parents] were still together, I might not have been like that. So, this might somehow affect me."*

Some of the women reported witnessing drug offending in their childhood neighbourhoods. For example, and in reference to the location of her family home, Jane said, *"it is in a slum where there are plenty of drugs. You just open your door and you can see drug trafficking and dealing everywhere."* Correspondingly, prison personnel noted that one of the reasons women committed drug offences was because *"they live/d in drug communities, in the red zones."* Red zones are districts denoted by law enforcement as locales with an over-preponderance of drug dealers and concomitant congregation of drug users, including *"slum-like neighbourhoods"* (Hayashi, Small, Csete, Hattirat & Kerr, 2013: 4).

Further, to living in neighbourhoods saturated by drug use and offending, over half the women reported living with familial substance abuse and/or other deviant/criminal behaviour as children. This included fathers, mothers, older siblings and stepsiblings, cousins, uncles, aunts and grandparents who resided with the women during childhood (or close by, usually in the family compound). The women described these family members as one or more of the following: alcoholics, gambling addicts, drug users, drug sellers, and drug addicts. Exposure to these types of familial behaviours during childhood was linked to offending by both prison staff and women. Prison personnel made the following observation:

*"[The] majority of the [women] prisoners either [have a] father or mother [who] is an alcoholic. So, the child would not want to be at home. It is [a pathway to prison] because that father and mother drink, siblings, aunts also drink and gamble, so they think this is not wrong to drink or gamble and this also leads to the smoking of cigarettes and other issues."*

Tansanee explained how seeing her cousin use drugs in her early teen years led her to use yaba. She said, *“because I saw the relative [older cousin] with drugs and I wanted to know, I wanted to try.”* Tida’s mother *“sold drug since the beginning”*. She said, *“I’ve never been involved with it, but after I moved in with her [during early adolescence], I had no choice [but to help her sell drugs]. I knew all the things she was doing.”* Prija similarly started to use and sell drugs when she was *“15-16”* years of age after witnessing her parents operate a drug business throughout her childhood. She narrated, *“for me, I didn’t see any good thing in my life. I wanted to try [using and selling drugs] because my parents sold drugs. My life was supposed to be better than that. And I didn’t understand why my family had to be like that. Why me? I wasn’t happy at all. I was so disappointed.”*

The correlation between women’s criminality and growing up in environments ravaged by drug offending was summarised by one prison officer as follows: *“I think that the primary factor that misleads them is because of their family and their environment”*. Another staff member stated, *“it [the pathway to prison] depends on their surrounding factors [community] and their family. Since the beginning, it may start with their parents who have done it [drugs] before or because of the community that they are living in.”*

A few women lived with childhood poverty, reporting that their caregivers struggled to meet daily household expenses. Fa Ying stated, *“it was quite a hard life because grandma earned around 100 baht per day. She had to pay for my food and for me to go to school as well. My mother didn’t pay my grandmother at all for me.”* Kanya was treated badly by her classmates in school *“because I was poor, no one wanted to hang out with me. I was the poorest in the class. I got bullied a lot.”* Cherry and her mother begged for money in their local community. She stated, *“my mother didn’t have any money and my father also left to be with his mistress and he did not support us at all. Therefore, my mother must go around asking for money from the neighbourhood and locals and she asked us to do the same. I said to her that I don’t want to do it I’m so ashamed. My mother said, ‘just do it or how are we going to find food? We are not stealing.’ I went but it was still very shameful.”*

Poverty invariably resulted in the women exiting education at a young age (only a small number completed upper secondary school) and taking on adult work/employment tasks to help support their families. Chaisee explained how she left school in grade six and collected wood with her siblings; *“we have six kids in the family and our financial situation is not good. We were poor. I had to earn some money by going to collect some wood from the factory. My parents could not afford education. I did not want to trouble them. They had to work hard for all of us, so I just quit [school in grade 6].”*

Dao also grew up in a poor family. She left school in grade 7. At one point in Dao’s childhood, her father sold heroin to provide for his wife and daughter. Dao explains how she convinced her father to stop selling drugs and described the subsequent toll long working hours as a truck driver had on his health, the familial economic position and how from the age of ten, she was responsible for all the domestic chores:

*“Our family was very poor. So, my father sold heroin. Before I turned 10, I always see the police come to my house. On my 10th birthday, I asked my father for a birthday wish. I asked him to stop selling drugs. He stopped for me. I saw my father struggle. He worked at a truck company. He always came home really late because they had to work really hard. Sometimes I pretended that I slept so that my father could carry me and put me to bed. My house didn’t have electricity. We used a lamp, a gas lamp. I had to do all the house chores on my own. I had to cook the rice using a stove, a wood stove. I saw my father get really thin.”*

When Kla was around 12 years old, she stopped going to school and found employment to help support her family. Kla related the poverty that she lived with and explained the impact of this as follows:

*“The reason why I didn’t continue my studies was because when my mother was working as a labourer, my father had never given us any money. My mother had more children, and we needed to help each other to take care of our family. There were grandmother and grandfather as well. I was around eleven or twelve, I had to take care of my younger siblings and grow rice. That’s why I didn’t continue my studies. At the rice field, there were plenty of morning glories, so my mother asked me to pick them up and used it for our food. She would only cook us some noodles when we received money from the construction work. And they paid us only once a month. So, she cooked noodles once a month. Sometimes, she had two baht, but the noodles in the market were 1/2 baht per dish.”*

Kosum and Sanoh also left school and started working from a young age. Their stories appear below.

*“My mother had to work away from home most of the time. So, we grew up by ourselves. I worked as a freelancer too. When I was around seven or eight years old, I was hired to transplant rice seedlings around my village. I just stopped going [to school]. Because if I went while my mother’s not around, I wouldn’t have money to buy food. My mother was away a lot [working]. So, it was me alone with my younger siblings. I had to work to make a living for us.”*

*“I wanted to study but my family was poor because we had many people, so I had to let my younger brother and sister study. So, I had to stop [school]. I didn’t receive a good education because my aunt has seven children already. So, she couldn’t afford the education for everyone. After grade two, I had to work as a labourer at the construction site.”*

During focus group conversations, prison personnel correspondingly made the link between childhood poverty, substandard education and women’s pathways into prison:

*“The important reason [behind women’s imprisonment trajectories] is family issues. The majority of female prisoners come from poor families. It can be for many reasons, such as the economy, the environment. Family is the start of life, the fundamental unit, which determines whether she will be good or bad. Education goes hand in hand with family status. If the family is wealthy, they can support their kids for education. They have enough [money for] education. But when the family’s financial status is not good, it is difficult to support.”*

Adolescent pregnancy, motherhood and marriage (including unofficial coupling) were commonplace and also resulted in women leaving school early. Often, these teenage intimate relationships were formed with significantly older men, and in some cases, pregnancies and marriages emerged against the backdrop of sexual assault.

Thong “didn’t go to school [because she] got married at 14 and had [her] first child at 15” to a man who was 20 years of age. Si Mok was 15 years old when she met her “first boyfriend” and soon to be the father of her child. They “started dating for three months, then got married and then I got pregnant [and] quit school because of this.” Ubol “got pregnant at 15”, and her boyfriend was “30 years old.” Kaali’s boyfriend “was a soldier” and “more than 20 years old.” Kaali was only 12 years of age. She stayed “with [her] boyfriend at his place, and I didn’t go to school.” Yungying “got pregnant” with a man “20 years older” and as a result, “didn’t pursue her studies”. When Kat was 14 years old, she “dropped out of school” because she “got pregnant” with her 20-year-old boyfriend.

Some women reported being forced by their families to marry/partner at a young age. When Yuphin was 16, her family discovered that she was “sleeping with” her boyfriend and “forced” them to marry. They had “one child together.” Two other women recounted similar stories:

*"I had a boyfriend when I was in grade 7 [13 years of age]. He was 26 years old. I kept it as a secret from my grandfather. After my grandfather found out, he brought me back to [place name] and held an engagement ceremony for us. That's why I didn't continue my study."*

*"When I started middle school [first year], I had a boyfriend. [He was a] senior. I had never had a boyfriend before, he was my first, and then we got married. I came to sleep at his house. My grandfather woke up to use the toilet and didn't see me in my room, so he called my father to tell him that his daughter had gone off with a boy. So, my father came early in the morning. My father came straight away to go see this boy. But he didn't actually know where his house was, so he went straight to the village chief of my boyfriend's house and demanded that he take him there. Then he found me right there. My father forced the boyfriend to marry me right away that same day. [I was] 13. I quit school and he studied until he finished high school. I had moved into his house."*

Additional women narrated marrying or becoming pregnant as a result of sexual assault. When Kaarlo was 14 years old she "got married" to a man who had "raped [her]" because "he took responsibility". She would later endure ongoing domestic violence at her husband's hand. Apasra "accidentally got a baby" with a man who "only wanted her body." Anchali "got pregnant about the age of 15-16 years" after going to a party with a boy she had just met at a local market. She explained:

*"I started having a baby. I got pregnant about the age of 15 - 16 years, and I went back and told mother that I got pregnant. I met that guy at the market. He took me to have a good time together at night. It was the first time that I drank, and I was so drunk, that night he forced me to have sex and I had a baby from that situation. I was totally drunk. When I woke up, I just found that I had already slept with him."*

In addition to the above, several women narrated stressful/dysfunctional intimate adolescent relationships marred by infidelity, spousal drug use and/or other deviant/criminal behaviours (including violence). Many of these relationships invariably broke down. These issues are illustrated in the following quotes:

*"He [the boyfriend] didn't take good care of me. When we started liking each other, he said that he had already divorced his wife, but in reality, his wife was pregnant at home. But I had already gotten intimate with him, and my mother told us to break things off, but neither of us would do it. My mother wouldn't let him inside the house, so we were selling drugs and sleeping at friends' houses instead. It was difficult."*

*"At first, I didn't know he [the boyfriend] was addicted to drugs. I found that out later after we had slept together."*

*"He [the boyfriend] owned most of the drugs in that area. He was a drug businessman. At first, we were so in love. But later, I started to feel so so, like not as loved as before. And a few months later, we were arrested."*

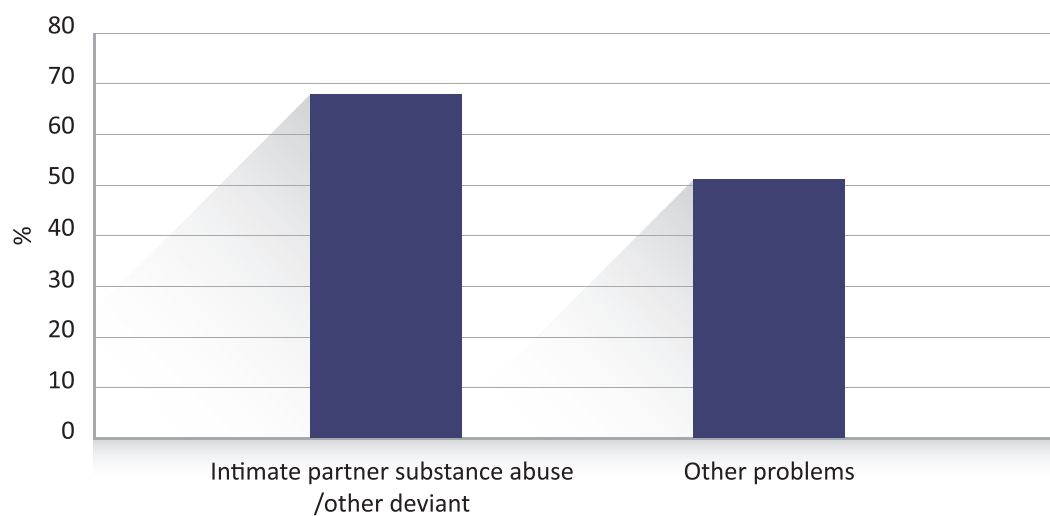
*"Later I moved in with this guy [the boyfriend] and he went to my parents and asked for permission to live together and my mother said okay. We lived together, he worked, I worked. But he was a womaniser. He had been married before and he had children. He had one child with his ex-wife, and he hit me sometimes. He sniffed glue with his friends. We had a child together. I got pregnant when I was 16. Back then, my dream was being a dancer, being a singer. After I gave birth to the baby, my mother raised the baby. I broke up with my boyfriend. I ran away, I didn't tell anyone."*



## 5.2.2 Adversity in adulthood

During adulthood, and in addition to living with domestic violence, dysfunctional intimate relationships were commonplace (see Figure 4, below). Most frequently, the women reported being romantically involved with men who either used and/or sold drugs. One woman said, “my boyfriend, he was kind of close to his friend. His friend sold drugs, so he wanted to sell drugs as well. He didn’t earn much because he used more than he sold. I feel bad about it because I told him to stop but he didn’t listen.” Another woman similarly stated, “my boyfriend was a drug dealer, but at first, I didn’t know about it. We met at a club. Then we decided to be in a relationship. After three months, I found out that he was a drug dealer.” When asked to describe her boyfriend, Kamala stated, “he was a party animal. He drank, he smoked, he took almost everything.”

Figure 4: Dysfunction in adulthood intimate relationships



Women’s pathways to prison are often directly connected with boyfriends, husbands and/or other men in their lives. Societal gender norms result in a greater emphasis on social bonding and relationship building for women. Thus, bonds with family and intimate partners are more likely related to women’s offending / criminalisation than is the case with men. Many women in prison are there because they have found themselves entangled in crimes committed by the men in their lives, and often, women’s roles in offending are secondary to that of men (Berko, Erez & Globokar, 2010; Havanon et al., 2012; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2019). The connection between intimate relationships with men and women’s offending/criminalisation was highlighted on numerous occasions by prison personnel during the focus groups. Their comments appear below:

*“One of the reasons [why women are in prison] is because of the boyfriend.”*

*“The big drug dealers are men. The women are the victims of the men. They have been forced to deliver, sell drugs. They become the victim.”*

*“Sometimes their boyfriend did it [the offending], and since they kind of stick with their boyfriend so they go to do it together. Or some of them just did not stop their boyfriend from doing so.”*

*“Just like the Thai proverb, ‘you are who you associate with’, yes sometimes their boyfriends influenced them to become involved with drugs.”*

*“If they have a boyfriend who is a [drug] seller, she will become a seller.”*

*"Boyfriends do sell [drugs], the girlfriends do not know, but also have to go to jail."*

*"The boyfriends or husband do it, the woman cannot escape, also has to go to jail. There was this case of burglary, the couple went to the temple, the girlfriend was praying outside, but the boyfriend went to steal the donation box, they both have to go to jail when the girlfriend was innocent. Do cases like this happen very often? There are many cases like this."*

*"For female drug offenders, from our interviews, they are not the lead offenders, mostly the boyfriends ... they live with. So, when the police go to the house, also she must go to jail."*

Other focus group participants explained that women often intentionally 'took the fall' for drug offending boyfriends/husbands. This occurred for two reasons. First, because there was a perception that 'doing time' in a woman's prison would be easier than in a male facility. This resulted in women taking the blame for their boyfriends/husbands to spare them the grief of incarceration. Second, gender norms that tie women to unpaid domestic labour within the home while ensuring male earning capacity, meant that incarcerating women rather than the men was in the best interests of familial economic survival:

*"There is also a belief that if imprisoned, it will not be as difficult [prison life] for the female as it is for the male. As in if the female accepts the charge for the male, there is a belief that it will not be as difficult for her [to serve time] as the male. People view the female prison as better. They believe that the female prison is not as bad as the male prison, so this means more females are imprisoned. Normally it is woman's mentality that will accept the charge for men, it is because of love. They accept to be imprisoned for the man and hope the man [will] stay outside the prison to take care of the children. In case the man is imprisoned instead, the woman must be the one who works and takes care of the children, which would be more difficult."*

For the women interviewed, intimate relationships with drug offending men often represented a turning point toward imprisonment. Women were either introduced to drug use and selling by their intimate partners and/or their drug offending accelerated in partnership with their boyfriends/husbands. In some cases, the women also 'took the fall' for their romantic partners' drug crimes.

Isra was introduced to yaba by her boyfriend. He both used and sold the drug. She narrated, *"he just gave it to me, asked me to try drugs. I wanted to try. Because I saw him use them, and I thought I could do it too [I think I was addicted. I used] three to four pills everyday"*. Madee narrated, *"I used it because I felt like my husband used it, you can do it, so why not. Why don't I try it? I can try it too [eventually] I felt like I was starting to get addicted to yaba"*. Phloi explained, *"I met my boyfriend and he sold drugs and he also consumed drugs as well. And so, I started consuming drugs after I met my boyfriend. My boyfriend asked me to try and then I did and then I got addicted."* Pensri similarly stated: *"so, my boyfriend was using drugs at first and I didn't use it, also because I didn't like the smell. But then I consumed the smell every day because my boyfriend was using the drugs. And then my boyfriend said, 'would you like to experiment? You can try it. If you don't like it, you don't have to.' But then I tried and got addicted. I wanted my boyfriend to be happy. He told me to use it, so I did."*

Kohsoom met her boyfriend *"through friends"*. They moved in together and *"everything is okay except the drug problem. He did drugs, he used drugs. I think, he was addicted. Later he turned into the drug seller (yaba) and then he got caught and now we get caught together."* Kohsoom tried yaba for the first time in this relationship. She explained, *"I was mad at him. So, I tried yaba. And then three weeks later, I got caught. I feel bad about it because I told him to stop but he didn't listen."* Kulap similarly explained how anger at her drug using/selling boyfriend led her to use yaba for the first time and eventually resulted in her imprisonment:

*“He [the boyfriend] said the drug will give you strength. But I was mad. He didn’t do anything [sat around the house all day]. He told me that if you use yaba, you will have strength. So, I grabbed the yaba from him to see, let see if this stuff will give me strength. After I took the yaba, I can clean the house, finish everything in one night. But I’m not beautiful and it made me dizzy all the time, feel sleepy all the time. So, I don’t think it is okay. On the day that we got caught, we had only five tablets left. So, we decided to use it all up.”*

Kusa had already tried ice with her friends before she met her boyfriend who both sold and used yaba. Within this relationship, Kusa’s drug use changed (from ice to yaba), and she soon developed an addiction to the latter. In the quote below, she explains how this unfolded:

*“[Eventually] I sort of knew that he had the style of a drug dealer. He gave me some ice. He had asked me if I did ice, and I said yes. So, he gave me some, but when I used drugs with him it was different from when I used it with my friend. When I was with the friend, it was like she was hogging the stuff for herself. I didn’t know at the time that sometimes she would singe an empty bottle for me. But when I was with him, he would singe the drugs directly for me, and it felt like we went all-out. It felt fulfilling. When I was doing it with the friend, it always seemed like she was hesitating for me to use it, but when I was with him it seemed like he was willing to give me all I wanted. So, from that time, I became addicted.”*

Kamon similarly explained how her drug use increased after she started living with her boyfriend, who was addicted to and sold yaba. *“At first, I only used it when my friends used it occasionally. I started using it more often when I lived with my boyfriend. The reason was that because he was a drug seller and because I had a history of using before.”* Likewise, Eve had only been using drugs socially with her friends, but this increased *“after I dated the guy, I used more drugs, and I also drank quite often. It’s because after I dated the guy, I moved into his house and his friends and neighbours, they all used drugs and they all went out at night. So, when I joined the group, I kind of like blended in.”* Ratana narrated a similar story. She said, *“I was badly addicted when I was with this boyfriend. I tried it [yaba] before, but I wasn’t addicted yet. I only used it occasionally when I was with a large group of friends. But when I was with this boyfriend, he was selling, so I used it constantly every day.”*

In the examples above, drug use was extenuated via intimate relationships but the shift from drug user to a dealer or to selling drugs alone also occurred within the context of romantic entanglements. Phueng, who was not using drugs at the time, explained how she started to sell drugs in partnership with her husband:

*“Even after I knew that he [the boyfriend] was using drugs, I decided to stay with him. After I realised that he is addicted to it, he asked me to help him in selling it because we could earn some money. So that’s when I started selling drugs. So, he would deal with the clients and they would come pick it up from me, pay the money to me. Because he was selling drugs, that’s when I started selling drugs. I was the one who volunteered to help. I wanted to earn some money. I just wanted to help him earn some money.”*

Separation from drug using/dealing intimate partners presented as another turning point in the women’s life histories. For example, Kusa’s (above) boyfriend was eventually arrested and imprisoned but left a large quantity of drugs in their home which she then both used and sold. In this case, spousal estrangement (alongside addiction) acted as a precursor to selling drugs. From this point on, Kusa appeared to seek out relationships with other drug using/dealing men to support her addiction either through the provision of drugs or money. She stated, *“those guys I dated on and off, they all didn’t treat me well. They all used drugs or sold it. I only dated these guys because they gave me money or drugs”*. Kusa’s boyfriends supplied her with drugs both to use and to sell. This necessitated a shift from drug user to a dealer. Sari also started selling drugs after her husband went to prison. She said, *“[I was not involved with drugs] until I met my husband. [He was the turning point], because he was addicted to drugs. My husband got arrested [went to prison], so I had to send him money. I started to sell on his behalf when he was gone.”*

Some women reported being imprisoned as a result of guilt by association. Som Kid, for example, had tried yaba “a couple of times” with her boyfriend but had not been directly involved in his drug selling business. Despite this, she is now in prison for drug distribution. Som Kid explained, “I found out that he [the boyfriend] deals with drugs. I lived with him, and I started using drugs. So, on the day that the police arrested us, the police wanted to arrest that guy [the boyfriend]. But then when the police came to the house, he ran away and then I was the owner of the house. Yes, the drugs were in the house. He ran away. So, I was there and got arrested.”

Sunee had “never touched any kind of drugs” but found herself in prison as the result of her boyfriend’s drug use. She recounted, “the cannabis wasn’t mine. It happened during the time my boyfriend was preparing to be a monk, so he had to stay at the temple. The police came to the house to arrest me. But the drugs belonged to my boyfriend, but he wasn’t there, so I got caught.”

Rutna ‘took the fall’ for her boyfriend’s drug offending. She explained, “that time I was staying with him [the boyfriend] at my place, and then the police came in and were about to arrest him. He already had eleven offences [prior arrests]. So, I told the police, please don’t arrest him. Can you please arrest me instead? He had children to care for.” Once incarcerated, Rutna discovered that her boyfriend had infected her with HIV. Pensri, who started using yaba as a result of her romantic relationship (see previous), was imprisoned because she took “responsibility” for her boyfriend. She narrated:

*“There was a friend who had a boyfriend who just got out from prison. And we constantly bought drugs from this friend. But then the last time we went to buy drugs from this friend the police were there. And then both my boyfriend and I got arrested. I told the police that it is all on me. So, I came in here alone, and my boyfriend did not. I once promised my boyfriend that if this kind of thing happened, I would take the responsibility. My boyfriend had already gone to prison once and if he had to go again, it would last more than two years. So, I decided to come in here for him. I love him very much.”*

Drug addiction will often result in problematic dynamics in romantic relationships and emotional distress. Thus, it was not uncommon for the women to recount broader intimate relationship dysfunction and the fracturing of romantic bonds. In the majority of cases, intimate partner infidelity was relayed and as demonstrated in the examples below, contributed to drug use and offending.

Sup’s husband and the father of her children were together for ten years, but he “brought a woman home. Like in the bed. And then he sometimes left the house on the motorbike. I started to think, why did he do that to me. I was hurt by my husband.” Sup started selling yaba to support her children because their father did not provide for them post-separation. Udomrut and the father of her children “broke up when [their] youngest child was just over one year old”. She explained, “my boyfriend had affairs. I couldn’t take it”. Udomrut “started to use more drugs after we broke up [because] at that time, it hurt when I found out that my boyfriend went out with other girls.”

However, some women also narrated the ways in which their drug addiction negatively impacted relationships. Savitri and her boyfriend had “had lots of arguments [because] I was quite obsessed with drugs. He used to ask me what I would choose between him and the drugs. I replied that I chose drugs over him. Then we had a fight” Wila was “addicted” to yaba. She syphoned familial funds to buy the drug, disappeared from the family home for days and eventually ‘cheated’ on her husband. She explained how this intimate relationship ended in divorce.

*“We got separated because I was too addicted to drugs. So, I lied to him that I must be away from him [and go] to another province for work. In the beginning, it was just three days, and then it became more and more like five days a week. I still asked him for money, each time I asked him for 30,000 - 40,000 baht each time. One of our friends felt sorry for him. I was with another guy too. That friend took a photo of me and let my husband know that I was with another man.”*

Further to infidelity, spousal abandonment and refusal to support women and children during the relationship or post-separation, were not uncommon. In reference to the father of her child, Winai said, *“he spent most of his time with friends, not me. At that time, I was pregnant, and he didn’t place importance on me and the baby.”* Ying similarly stated, *“I broke up with him [intimate partner]. He wasn’t responsible for our family. I had to take care of all three children.”* Ambhom’s boyfriend *“just disappeared”* leaving her to *“to take care of”* the children. She explained, *“when we broke up, there were no fights or anything. He didn’t physically abuse me. He just disappeared. [I sold drugs] because of my children, because I had to take care of them.”* Chatrasuda relayed a particularly harrowing story involving spousal substance abuse, abandonment, failure to provide, and loss of her young son to illness. She explained:

*“[My son had an] abscess on his leg. He passed away when he was four years and four months old. I didn’t have enough money to see a doctor. I used to call my ex-husband and asked for money to cure our child. He didn’t care. What he cared about was alcohol. And when I told him that our child had passed away, he didn’t even come. I had to do all the processes, such as reporting to the police, autopsy, and funeral. I needed to report to the police because my child just slept and died, so they had to investigate. I told them my child died because I had no money. What I could do was buy him cheap medicine. Sometimes, I had to skip meals to save money.”*

Some women reported that boyfriends/husbands had passed away, sometimes as a result of drug addiction. The grief and economic impact of this were acutely felt, contributing to both drug use and selling. For example, when Chanthira lost her husband, she went out *“at night”*, used drugs and had sex with men to deal with her grief. She recounts this difficult time in her life as follows:

*“After I moved back to Bangkok with him, I was staying with his family and they were really nice to me. And then suddenly he had a car crash, an accident and he passed away. So, I felt lost again. I started hanging out at night [and using drugs] and his parents didn’t stop me because they knew that I was really sad, and that time I met a guy who infected me with HIV.”*

In another example, before his death, Charoensri’s husband was addicted to heroin and yaba, sold drugs, was domestically violent, was imprisoned more than once and had numerous extramarital affairs. They had two children together. When their youngest child was only eight months old, Charoensri’s husband passed away due to substance abuse. She began selling drugs to support her family and using drugs because it enabled her to work longer hours. Charoensri told us her story as follows:

*“My husband, he sold drugs. That is what he did. His family members also did that. I didn’t know that he sold drugs until we got married. I’ll tell you the story. He used drugs and sometimes, under the influence of drugs he couldn’t control himself, he hit me, hurt me. But I tolerated that. He also had affairs with other women and didn’t come back home. I was just a housewife. I couldn’t go work. I had to wait for him at home. [We] had two children until when my elder child was two years old and my younger one was eight months, my husband passed away because of the overuse of drugs. Later, I had to continue to be a mother and earn some money for the house, that’s how I started selling drugs, and I started using it too. I start taking drugs because one of [his] family members said, why don’t you try taking drugs, if you take it you can sell not just in the daytime but also work in the night-time. So, I started trying it because I wanted to earn more money. So, I took drugs, and I went out to sell drugs in the daytime and night-time. I earned much more then.”*

## 5.3 Economic marginalisation and familial caretaking responsibilities

Most imprisoned women have a limited education, which resulted in poor employment prospects and in turn, socio-economic marginalisation. Poverty plays a key role in many women's pathways to crime and often intersects with familial caregiving responsibilities. This was demonstrated in Charoensri's story above. Imprisoned women are commonly mothers and recurrently their family's only source of financial support. This is particularly so in cultures like Thailand, where daughter duty requires women to provide financial support beyond their immediate family. Women are often faced with sole responsibility for their children (the fathers of the children regularly abandon them), parents, grandparents and other extended family members, but with low levels of education, and limited employment prospects, they can find themselves imprisoned as a result of actions they have taken to support themselves and those they love (Artz et al., 2011; Cherukuri et al., 2009; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2019; Khalid and Khan, 2013; Shen, 2015).

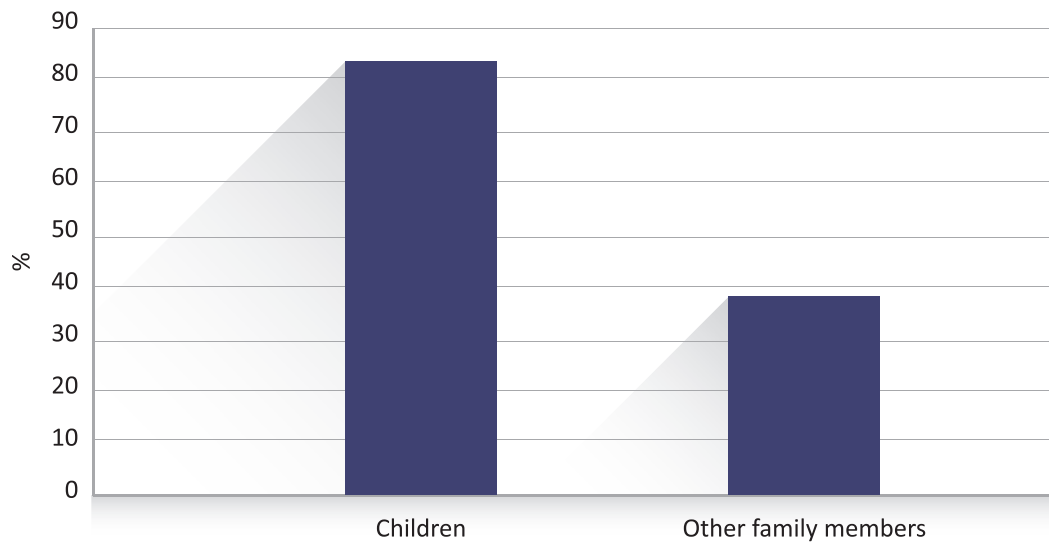
Nearly all the women in this study were mothers and/or had other family members (most frequently parents and grandparents) who were economically reliant on them (see Figure 5, below). Thus, and as was the case with Charoensri, drug selling often occurred within the milieu of familial economic provisioning. As explained by Rochana:

*"My boyfriend was the one who earned an income. But when we broke up, he stopped giving my children and me the money. So, I had to earn money by myself. I sold drugs [because] I was stressed that I had become a single-mother and I had to earn money. I had to do everything by myself. My older child went to school."*

Sasithorn only attended school until grade 1. This limited her ability to secure well-paying employment and led to lifelong poverty. She never used drugs but started selling yaba in her 50s to support her grandchildren because her drug-using adult son was unable to take responsibility for them. Sasithorn related:

*"The first reason is that I was poor, and I had no choice. It was because my son had three children. And he told me to take care of those three kids. My son is addicted to drugs. I was so angry that he didn't take any responsibility for his own children. And if I died, he wouldn't be able to take care of anything. So, I had to take care of my grandchildren. He didn't even help me with the money. I didn't receive a good education and I had to take responsibility for taking care of my family. One day, a teenager came to me and asked if I was okay with this burden. Because I had to pay for everything such as food, clothes, everything. So, I replied to him I had no money. I knew that he had drugs. So, he suggested that I take the drugs, sell them, then when I got money, I had to bring it to him. And that time was the time when I got arrested. If I used drugs, then it would be normal for me to sell them too. But I didn't use it. I had never used it, not even once in my life. I was fully conscious, and I knew that it is illegal. But I didn't know what to do. I knew one day I would be arrested. But I did it. I had no choice." (Sasithorn)*

Figure 5: Familial economic caretaking responsibilities



Shanoh had to take care of her children and other family members. She said, “I was the main source of income to provide for my father, my mother and my baby.” Toey “was the only one who was responsible for taking care financially of the children and grandchildren.” When asked why they started to sell drugs, Waen expounded, “I just wanted to earn money and send some money to my mum.” Pakpao related, “I wanted to earn money because of my kids then I wanted to earn money for his [husband’s] parents because they didn’t work anymore, and they are quite old”. Pundit stated, “the money wasn’t enough. I wanted to earn money for her [mother], not for myself.” Karawek said, “If I hadn’t dealt drugs, we wouldn’t have had enough to live. I have the grandchildren who need milk, need food.” Similar stories of familial caregiving are illustrated in the following quotes:

*“I didn’t think I wanted to quit [selling drugs] because my family always had problems. I taught them how to live. I didn’t teach them how to earn money because I always gave them money, so they didn’t know how to earn money for themselves”*

*“[I started selling drugs] when my mother was imprisoned. Because I had to take care of my sisters, so I had to sell drugs. I couldn’t do any other job, because I had to take care of my sisters. I had to be with them.”*

*“My life was changed when I was unemployed. I sometimes slept on the side of the street. And that was the point where I started to sell drugs. I had to take care of my children and gave my mother some money.”*

Other women reported using yaba because it “gave them energy” enabling them to work longer hours. Saengdao “only used drugs to keep [herself] working,” and Pen Chan “started using drugs because [she] had to stay alert at work for long periods of time”. Tangmo similarly stated, “My work has to start from 4 am [and lasted] until 10 pm. It is a long shift and I was kind of sleepy, tired. My body was really tired. My friend [co-worker] introduced me to drugs. Not for selling, he just gave it for free. I took it, eating it at first. Somebody said it is not good for my stomach, so I started sniffing instead later. I worked everywhere and I used my labour a lot since I was young. This drug kept me awake, it gives me energy. I can do washing, everything with energy. I was never tired of working or anything. This is how I started drugs”

Taeng rationalised how after separating from her husband who left her with children to support, she started using yaba because it enabled her to work harder and in turn, support her family:

*“When I was with my ex-husband, I didn’t have to work. So, I just stayed home and raised the child. After we broke up [because he had an affair], I had to find my own money. I was employed to mow lawns, cut trees, those kinds of work. I got some work at a construction site, like digging holes. Or sometimes, I was hired to build fences. When I did drugs, I had the strength to do the work and when I did work, I got money to provide to the family.”*

Several women who “worked at night” in bars, clubs and/or the sex industry began using yaba because it kept them awake and alert, enhancing their ability to drink alcohol with clients, lose weight and protect themselves. In establishments where women’s bodies and the promise of (or actual) sex are used to lure in male clientele, women are often bound by a set of rules laid down by employers to maximise profits. Female employees are frequently required to sell a set number of alcoholic drinks to clients each shift. Drinking with customers is the most effective way to meet drink quotas because men will purchase women drinks and consume more alcohol in their company. In addition, women are often required to maintain a certain body weight. Failure to adhere to drink quotas and stay thin can result in wage deductions/salary cuts (Empower Foundation, 2017). Waen and Lawan explained how they started using yaba while working “at night”:

*“[I had to work] pretty late. That’s how I found out all my co-workers were on drugs. They recommended that I took drugs and claimed that I won’t get sleepy and that it helps me remain skinny. [Yaba] helped me stay awake. I also got skinny because I didn’t feel hungry after I took it. Thinking about it, I wish I could turn back time as I wasted a lot of money on drugs.” (Waen)*

*“After a week of working at the karaoke place, I was still fat, and I wanted to be in shape. I drank alcohol and I used drugs. I started to drink alcohol when I worked at karaoke. [After using yaba] I wasn’t hungry at all. I didn’t sleep. [I used drugs] almost every day after that.” (Lawan)*

Methamphetamine is a stimulant. It can induce rapid weight loss and increase alertness. Being more vigilant on the job was seen to enhance earning capacity alongside a woman’s sense of safety. The perception (perhaps false) was that the chances of being assaulted by a client were reduced by the increased vigilance that yaba afforded and that alcohol consumption alone would compromise.

The association between drug use, ‘working at night’ and sex work was also underscored during prison officer’s focus group discussions. In the following dialogue, prison staff deliberate how working in these industries can lead to drug use, addiction and eventually imprisonment.

*“Some need to work at night so drugs help them. Yes, from our [intake] interviews, most of them are night-workers, bar workers, sometimes they use drugs with the customers. Many women need to sleep with their customers, so they need to take drugs. When working at night, they must stay awake. Then they must sleep with the customers. The customers will bring drugs for them to take for sex. They must follow the customer’s instructions and just get it over with [the sex]. When this happens more often, they become addicted to drugs.”*

The prison staffs’ comments regarding addiction were supported by the women interviewed. Invariably, using drugs within the context of employment can lead women down a pathway to addiction. Lawan, who ‘worked at night’ “used [drugs] almost every day”. Similarly, Waen explained, “*[I started to use yaba] because I had to work the nightshift. Some of my colleagues recommended I take it so that I won’t feel sleepy. So, I took it. And the more I used, the more addicted I have become.*”

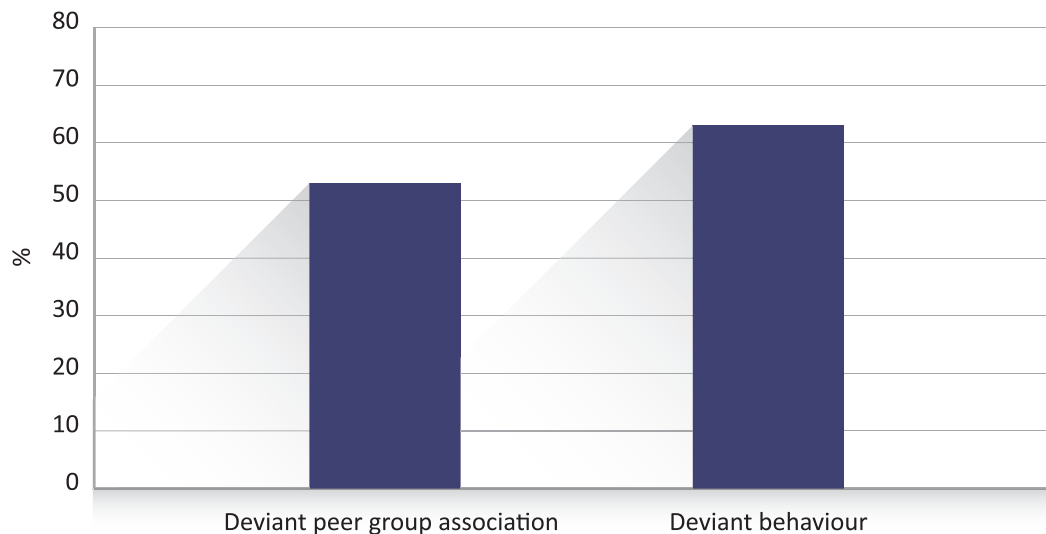


While most of the women who sold drugs for economic reasons were motivated by survival, the galvanising factor for a minority was material consumption, ‘partying’ with friends and the ‘night life’. Taeng Read said, “So all the money I earned from selling [drugs] during those times, I just spent it all on like going out at night.” Darika explained, “If I combined both the money I made from the drugs and the money from helping my mother from selling vegetables, it made a lot of money. I had a lot of money to spend on the branded stuff and all the expensive stuff. I could buy anything.” Likewise, prison personnel commented that while “poverty” and “family’s financial situation” was central to offending, some of the women in their prisons came from wealthy families and “only used drugs just for fun, for friends, for partying.”

## 5.4 Deviant friendships and childhood deviant behaviour

As illustrated in Figure 6 (below), over half the women reported deviant peer group associations during childhood and more than 60% had engaged in deviant/criminal behaviour themselves, including drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, skipping school, partying, using and selling drugs.

Figure 6: Childhood peer groups and deviant behaviour



Childhood friendships presented as central to women’s initiation into deviant/criminal behaviour, including drug offending (use and selling). One prisoner officer noted, “also it [the imprisonment pathway] is because of their friends and neighbouring people that they spend most of their time with.” Another stated, “teenagers are at the stage where they are curious to try, want to follow friends, which leads to usage of drugs and so on.” These sentiments were further reflected in the words of the women interviewed.

Amabil, for example, said, *“we were so close to each other [friends growing up]. We went everywhere together. At first, I saw them use drugs, but I didn't have any intention to try it. But later, they challenged me to use drugs, so I tried.”* Dok told us, *“my friend challenged me, so I tried it (yaba). They said I was a coward. And I showed them that I wasn't a coward by using drugs in front of them.”* Likewise, Kamlai narrated, *“I started selling it [yaba], and the reason I started was because of the friends in the neighbourhood. They asked me to carry the drugs and give them to the customers.”*

For some, childhood abuse/victimisation and other significant adversity invariably propelled them into deviant friendship groups and problematic behaviour during adolescence. The connection between child abuse and/or other adversity, deviant peer groups and deviance/offending has previously been illustrated, but is emphasised again in the quotes below from Ngam-Chit and Tup Tin:

*“At that time, I felt like my father didn't love me. I quit school; I started using more drugs because I had more issues with my family. I ran away from home and moved in with my friends. I got a new group of friends, and that's when I started using more drugs every day.”*

*“I was so happy when I used drugs. I didn't have to be sad about my parents [her mother had abandoned her, and her father was violent/abusive]. I just focused on having fun with my friends.”*

Other women were pulled away from loving families during childhood into deviance/offending by anti-social peers and the excitement associated with partying, drinking alcohol and eventually, using drugs. Prisoner personnel described these women as the *“spoiled kids.”* Araya, for example, grew up with her grandparents in a loving household. She explained, *“I'm close with my grandparents. I called my grandparents, my father, and my mother. And then I realised that I had another father, like a biological father, when I was a little bit older. But I don't feel like I am missing anything.”* She continued:

*“I would like to talk about how I started getting involved in the criminal act. It happened when I was around 15 years old when I moved back to Bangkok, when I started high school. I started enjoying hanging out with people from Bangkok, the nightlife of Bangkok. And then I started getting used to that life. And then I am dropping out of school. I started partying. At first, it begins by me just wanting to hang out in the cool area during the day. And then I started wanting to go out at night as well, so I asked my friends out. The reason, the cause of why I got involved in a drug offence, is probably because of the friends I met at nightclubs. That's how I started to begin getting involved with drugs and everything. I started partying every night and didn't go to school at all.” (Araya).*

Finally, like those who 'worked at night' (discussed previously), some women were introduced to methamphetamine by female peer groups during their teenage years as a panacea for weight loss. Body image often plays a crucial role in women's self-esteem, especially during adolescence. In Thailand, as is the case in many cultures, thinness is equated to beauty. Perceptions of attractiveness, as per the patriarchally defined societal standard, can morph into a central defining feature of an adolescent girl's assessment of self-worth (Pisitsungkagarn, Taephant & Attasaranya, 2013; Page & Suwanteerangkul, 2007). Friendships, the desire for thinness (in one case to impress a boy) and women's journeys into drug use and addiction are reflected in the quotes below:

*"[When] I became a teenager and wanted to lose weight, and that's why I started using drugs." (Janjira)*

*"I started taking diet pills to lose some weight. But it didn't work out. So, my friend suggested to me to start using ice. After a year, I lost about 20 kgs." (Yanisa)*

*"[I started to use drugs because] I was fat, and I wanted to be in shape. My friends introduced me to drugs. I was worried my boyfriend would cheat on me. He has never told me that I'm cute. He has never given me any compliments. So, I was scared that he would cheat on me. There was someone who said that he had a fat girlfriend." (Mint)*

*"At sixteen, I wanted so bad to get skinnier. Following my friend's stupid advice for weight loss, I had my first contact with amphetamine, believing that it can help my body become lean and firm. I was sure that I would never become addicted to it because I hated its foul smell in my throat. I started with one or two tablets at a time for once or twice a week. As time passed, I took it more and more and became addicted to methamphetamine." (Ning).*

By adulthood, every woman we interviewed had drug offending associates and over 62% identified these relationships as contributing to their imprisonment trajectory. Tida and Rune, for example, tried drugs for the first time in their 40s. Prior to this, they had led law-abiding lives. Both women were grieving because of the breakdown of their marriages and were introduced to drugs by "teenagers" in their communities. Tida explained, "I had some money from the divorce. I used this money to start a restaurant. Many times, teenagers come to the restaurant. They use drugs sometimes and introduced them to me. I used ice. I started using, hanging out with friends." Rune narrated a similar story.

*"It [drug use] started after I broke up with my husband. When I left my kids, and I stayed alone. I moved and rented a house, and, in that area, people used drugs. I was 40 something. I was lonely and bored. Some teenagers were asking me if they could use drugs [ice] in my house. I let them in and saw them using drugs. So, I just walked up to them and asked if I could try. They also offered me. And that was how it started. I saw those teenagers did it. So, I did it just like them. I was addicted to ice after that first time." (Rune)*

Like Tida and Rune, Thomya's involvement with drugs occurred later in life. Emotional distress at the breakdown of her marriage in her early 40s and a new job resulted in her meeting a new group of friends. She started to use drugs and ended up in prison as the direct result of a friend's actions.

*"I just wanted to try because I saw my friend doing drugs. I wanted to know how it feels, and I was stressed about my husband. [Using drugs] just felt good. [The day I got arrested] I was lying in my room. The police knocked on the door; they came in and searched it and arrested me because my name was on the lease. [I told the police it wasn't my drugs; it was my friend's drugs] but my name was on the lease [and] the police didn't believe me and arrested me. [The drugs] belonged to my friend's boyfriend. At the time, the boyfriend and the friend had gone out and it was only me in the room." (Thomya)*

When Phawta was asked if she thought her friendships impacted her pathway to prison, she responded, "I think I was influenced by the friends. Like the neighbours nearby my boyfriend's house [who used and sold drugs]". Phawta had used and sold drugs since her early 20s but managed to stop for a period. She explained how her loyalty to a drug using friend resulted in her eventual arrest and incarceration.

*"I felt sorry for [my] friend who asked me for my help to find some more drugs. So that's why I decided to contact this kid and get the drugs. I have always liked to hang out with the same group of friends. I know that people around me are using drugs, but I didn't get involved; I just quit. But I felt sorry for this one. So, I decided to do it." (Phawta).*

## 5.5 Emotional distress, substance misuse and help-seeking

Victimisation, other adversities (in childhood and/or adulthood), emotional distress, mental illness, substance abuse and offending are often interconnected (Drapalski, Youman, Stuewig & Tangney, 2009; Saxena et al., 2016). Adverse life experiences (including victimisation) will negatively impact emotional well-being and may lead to mental health problems. Drugs and/or alcohol can be utilised as a form of self-medication to numb the emotional pain (Bloom & Covington, 2008; Owen et al., 2017; Saxena et al., 2016). As noted by one prison officer, *“for those who use drugs only, it is probably because they are so desperate and so lonely.”*

As demonstrated above, adversity was a common feature in the lives of the women interviewed and the negative life experience/substance misuse nexus was frequently narrated. The following quotes reiterate the connection between life stressors, mental health/emotional well-being and substance use.

*“If there were anything that negatively affected my mental health, like my family problem, then I would use it (drugs).”*

*“[I] had problems with alcohol when I was stressed, and I didn’t know what to do or how to handle the problems.”*

*“I was stressed out after the breakup [with my boyfriend]. I miss him, I love him. My friends said that drinking alcohol can help me forget things. So, I drank. Every day.”*

Women's substance misuse is understood to be a defining factor in their offending/criminalisation, and it is argued that women's drug use is more closely related to their criminality than is the case with men (Willis and Rushford, 2004). Thus, many of the women in this research sold drugs (a serious offence under Thai law) to support their addiction. As narrated by one group of prison personnel:

*“There are often two reasons behind women selling drugs. One is to have money to self-support and the other reason is to have drugs to use. When the drugs are gone, they will need to have money to buy more, so they might have to sell. The profit received from selling goes to buying more drugs. One day they only use one to two tablets but before long, it could become ten per day. When the money is not enough, they would think selling would help.”*

Pitima and Saengdao also expressed this connection between drug use/addiction and dealing. Pitima explained, *“it was like we were selling drugs just to get money to use drugs. I went out with a drug dealer friend, stayed in the same house with them, and helped them transport drugs. I guess it was because I wanted to use drugs. I was probably already addicted then. It was an easy way to earn money, and I always had drugs to use.”* Saengdao said, *“I didn’t consider myself as a drug dealer or seller. Both my husband and I only sold drugs just so that we can get the profit, use the profit that we got by selling it to buy our own drugs to use.”*

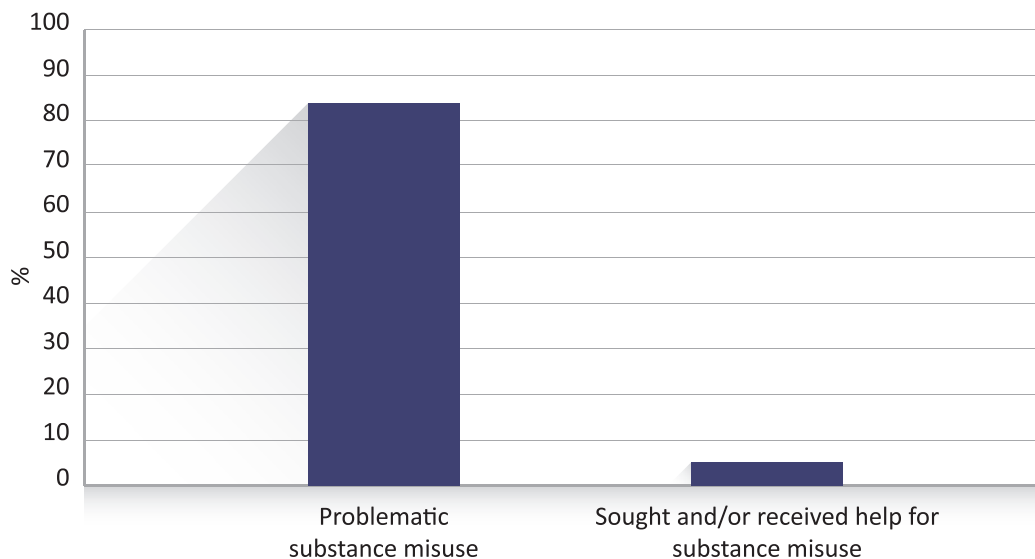
At some point in their lives, close to 85% of the women recounted problematic substance misuse in that they defined themselves as being *“addicted”* or narrated having used drugs and/or alcohol regularly, i.e. *“usually”* or *“almost” “every day”* (see Figure 7, below). Three women narrated their dependence on yaba as follows:

*"I was addicted to drugs because I need it every day. Sometimes my body cannot take it, so I go to sleep for a long time. But when I woke and need it again, I must take it. The amount that I take, 30 - 40 tablets a day. At that moment, it was like no way out. I was stuck in the drugs. Some moments, I am conscious, and I think it will be nice if somebody or some organisation would help me. But there is none. If you start taking drugs, you cannot go back."*

*"I don't really know why I kept using it. Probably because it felt nice, and I felt like I couldn't live without it. So, I used it every day. There was one time when I stopped using it, then it hurts my bones and all over my body. I also passed out at the hospital when they took me there."*

*"I think I was addicted to drugs. [I used] 3-4 pills per day, every day. Because I became moody when I didn't use drugs. And the moody feeling would be gone after I used them. It was moody like before girls have their period. It was that kind of moodiness."*

**Figure 7: Substance misuse and help-seeking**



Every woman who narrated drug dependence had used methamphetamine (yaba and/or ice), but some (16%) also described the problematic use of alcohol. As described by Som, *"It is everything, not only drugs but also alcohol, everything that people are addicted to [I am addicted to]."* Mook similarly relayed a reliance on both drugs and alcohol, *"it was around one pill [yaba] before going to work in the morning. Another pill or two in the evening after work. I drank every day. I carried a bottle with me to work every day."*

One woman reported addiction to ketamine. Solada started using ketamine due to stress. She related, *"I liked using the ice and yaba [but] it didn't make any difference. So, I tried to use the K [ketamine] instead and got drunk instead. Because I didn't want to be stressed out because at that time, I fought a lot with my boyfriend."* Another two women recounted forming a reliance on inhalants (glue and/or paint thinner) during their teen years, but their addiction shifted to yaba/ice as adults.

One cause of concern, given the connection between addiction and criminality, and the significant number of women in this research who reported problematic substance misuse, was that few had sought or received help prior to imprisonment (see Figure 7, above). Amy was addicted to ice and was the only woman who had voluntarily, yet unsuccessfully, attempted to get help in her community. She explained, *“There was a rehab centre for those who were addicted to heroin. One of my friends who used to [be] addicted to heroin went to the rehab centre. I was the one who went with him. He needed to go there every morning. So, I asked the nurses if they could cure ice addiction, but they couldn’t. They told me to quit it by myself since it depended on my intention to use or not use it. They suggest that I not look for ice. But my house was the place where people use it. I couldn’t avoid seeing it.”*

Only four women had ever participated in a drug rehabilitation programme pre-imprisonment, and none had attended at their own initiative. Rather, all were sentenced to serve time in government-run rehabilitation facilities. When asked about the utility of these compulsory drug rehabilitation programmes, two women explained that it had made no difference. They both went back to using drugs upon release. Sopa said, *“I didn’t want to quit and immediately went back to using post-release.”* Gamon was able to “quit” using drugs for a time but eventually started again after her boyfriend was released from prison. She explained, *“I went for 120 days for the rehabilitation. If I didn’t see it (drugs), then it would be fine. I wouldn’t feel anything, no craving for it, nothing. But if I went back to the same environment that has drugs, then I’m going to use it again. I couldn’t stand [resist] using it if I see drugs. [I] returned to [compulsory drug rehabilitation] for a second time, [and when I was released] my boyfriend was imprisoned, so I quit [using] drugs. But as soon as he was released, I started using again.”*

Lawana and Malivalaya stopped using drugs after being released from a compulsory drug rehabilitation centre. Both were eventually imprisoned for selling drugs due to the need to support the family financially. Lawana said, *“It was good. The military camp [drug rehabilitation centre] had good training [but] I had to sell drugs to support my family.”* Malivalaya narrated, *“when I was sent to [compulsory drug rehabilitation centre] for four months, after I left, I could stop using drugs. And then I reoffended again. I reoffended last year. I was in [the] centre in 2013 for the first time. I was there for 4 months. After I left [the] centre, my 63-year-old boyfriend ... he was old. Sometimes he didn’t have enough money. So, I’d help him get money. Sometimes I’d sell drugs. I had my own drug business. So, I sold drugs to support him.”*

## 5.6 Summary

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Previous research shows that women’s routes to imprisonment are impacted by an array of diverse yet interdependent factors and life events that limit and shape their behaviour and choices. The life stories narrated by the women in this study mirrored those of imprisoned women throughout the world. Many of the women’s lives were characterised by victimisation, disordered family lives and intimate relationships, growing up in neighbourhoods ravaged by drug use and offending, deviant peer group associations, low levels of education, and familial economic provisioning against the backdrop of financial insecurity. Drug addiction was also common and frequently arose within the interconnected milieu of victimisation, other life adversities and trauma. However, prior to imprisonment few women had sought help or received treatment for their reliance on drugs. In the following chapter, we move on to look at the women’s experiences of imprisonment.



**CHAPTER 6**  
**PRISON LIFE**

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, economic marginalisation, familial caretaking, victimisation, trauma, drug addiction, disordered communities, and familial, intimate, and peer group relationships are presented as crucial variables in women's prison trajectories. Thus, to aid re-entry, during incarceration gender-responsive/trauma-informed care/practice and programming should be utilised to empower and support women's healing. This should include the provision of a healthy rather than harming prison environment/experience alongside programme and support mechanisms to improve women's wellbeing and rehabilitation prospects. More specifically, the women's life histories suggest that the provision of substance misuse treatment/programmes and support/programmes around abuse, mental health and trauma recovery have salience. Additionally, due to the connection between economic marginalisation and offending, educational and vocational opportunities are key to supporting rehabilitation and community reintegration. Further, due to the centrality of caregiving and interpersonal relationships to women's lives, prison systems should encourage rather than fracture social connectedness with family and other loved ones. Family as well as relationships with intimate partners and friends are often imperative to re-integration. Finally, prison authorities should be planning for re-entry from the beginning of a woman's sentence. Re-entry programming and connections to post-release support services (i.e. through-care) are vital. In this chapter, we discuss women's experiences of imprisonment including: 1) prison environments and overall experiences, 2) connection and disconnection with family and other loved ones, and 3) rehabilitative programmes and support.

## 6.1 Prison environments and overall experiences

The women in this research had co-occurring needs related to experiences of victimisation, trauma, emotional distress and substance abuse. During interviews and focus groups, women and prison staff highlighted the ways in which the general prison environment impacted inmates in both positive and negative ways. In terms of overall positives, women's narrations culminated under the following common themes: 1) prison as an ameliorator, 2) prison as a medium to reprioritise relationships, 3) prison as an instrument for self-reflection, growth and empowerment 4) prison as a source of support and encouragement, and 5) prison as a supplier of learning and knowledge. Many of these themes were corroborated during focus group discussions with prison personnel. Each theme (discussed in more detail below) demonstrated how prison environments could be healthy rather than harming. However, prison environments could also be problematic. Negatives included issues associated with overcrowding and access to necessities, an inability to source additional provisions, and the anxiety of being separated from family and other loved ones. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

### 6.1.1 Prison as an ameliorator

Some women described how imprisonment ameliorated their problems by forcing sobriety and removing them from the hardships that faced them outside prison walls. In reference to her yaba addiction, Pitima, for example, expressed that *"being in here is like [drug] rehabilitation itself."* Saengdao stated, *"it [prison] is good because I am able to quit the drugs now."* Kanda similarly noted, *"if I had not got arrested, I would still be using drugs and dealing drugs. I cannot stop myself"* and Phaelin narrated, *"I realised, in here, that I shouldn't use drugs. In a way it is good to be here or else I wouldn't have been able to stop using drugs. It is good that I am able to stop using drugs."* Solada explained how forced sobriety in prison led to her *"partner saying that it was good that I was imprisoned; we get to speak more. Usually, I don't really speak, especially when I have taken drugs."* Similar sentiments are expressed in the following quotes:



*“If I didn’t get caught, I probably wouldn’t have stopped using amphetamines. But because I’m in prison, there’s a lot of restrictions and an environment that got me to change my way of thinking, made me stop, and now I’m no longer an addict.”*

*“If I was still out there and had not been arrested, then I might not be able to quit drugs. I can’t even imagine what my life would be like if I didn’t get caught. But now I know that I can really quit drugs. And this is because I was imprisoned.”*

Som and Aom’s imprisonment helped to separate them from dysfunctional and abusive intimate relationships. Both women had lived with domestically violent drug-using men. For them, prison provided a respite from victimisation. Som illuminated, *“deep in my heart, I’m a bit glad that I’m imprisoned because I could be away from my boyfriend”*. Aom expounded, *“I feel like being in here, it is so much better than living with my boyfriend. I felt like I was in prison when I was living with him. He was jealous. He got jealous easily, I couldn’t really go out or leave the place. I feel better living here than living with him. He got mad. He physically abused me almost every day. It was extremely violent.”*

For Rune, prison had provided a respite from the loneliness and monotony of life on the outside. She explained, *“being home is more stressful because I am alone. I had a lot more fun in prison.”* Likewise, Siri expressed, *“I have good relations with staff and friends here. But when you go outside, it is different. It is a totally different world. I don’t have many friends outside. But in here, I have a lot of friends.”* During focus group conversations, prison staff similarly expressed, *“some of the prisoners who have been released told us that when they got out, they feel like they are invisible. They are nobody. On the other hand, when they are here, they are someone for somebody.”*

Thomya was fearful of release because life inside prison provided her with a reprieve from poverty. In prison, Taeng felt *“safer.”* She expounded, *“I’m still worried about my life [outside of prison]. Sometimes I didn’t have enough money to buy food. I ate one pack of instant noodles. But in here, I have three meals, I have food, shelter, I have a blanket. I even have a mosquito net. So, it is safer. But outside, I don’t know what I’m going to face.”* Likewise, Pimchan told us, *“life outside prisoner is crueller than the one inside prison.”* Imprisonment as a reprieve from lives ravaged by poverty was also discussed during focus group discussions with prison personnel:

*“The scary part is that there are many prisoners who think that being in jail is more comfortable than being outside. If they are homeless or poor, being in jail is more comfortable. Some of them cry when they are released because they do not want to go out as they do not know where to go or where they should be after that. Some of them have already planned to get caught and be put in jail again, it is very scary. [One woman] she has no family and no home in which to live. She was living under the bridge. She intended to come to prison. Her life has nothing. She prefers to stay in prison rather than under the bridge.”*

### 6.1.2 Prison as a medium to reprioritise relationships

Women explained how imprisonment helped them to reassess the value of family, leading to reprioritisation of these relationships over problematic peers and intimate partners. As explained by Araya, *"the prison makes me think more. I know who really loves me. I only have my mother and this time I'm in prison, I'm in prison for my boyfriend."* Pimchan explicated, *"like for me, I feel like if I was never imprisoned, I imagine that I would be even more of a mess. But it's made me realise a lot of things, and I really see who has always cared about me [family]."* Prison staff explained how imprisonment can *"soften them [prisoners] as a person, they become gentler. They never hugged their parents, but when they are imprisoned, and their parents come to visit, they are able to give them hugs."*

### 6.1.3 Prison as an instrument for self-reflection, growth and empowerment

Women expressed that prison had given them the space to self-reflect on their lives and on themselves, feel stronger/empowered, and develop patience, self-discipline and frugality. In terms of self-reflection, Kanda commented that *"the good thing [about prison] is that I get to spend my time here pondering deeply over my life."* Som said, *"I even know myself better"* and Lawana verbalised, *"at least, I could organise my thoughts and sort out my life."* Khim stated, *"I think that being imprisoned and being alone with yourself has made me become more aware of myself and I understand how I need to behave after I get released so I won't come back here."* Benjawan conveyed, *"I'm glad that I'm in prison because it made me think more. It gives me time to think about what happened in the past and focus on my life."*

Other women explained how prison had made them stronger and quelled their impatience and temper. Amabil expressed, *"I became a stronger person"*, and Janjira aired, *"prison taught me to be stronger, tougher, and better"*. Ning stated, *"I learned self-discipline"*, and Rune narrated, *"the positive thing about prison is that it teaches me how to be patient."* Tida remarked, *"it taught me to be more patient. In the past, I was very impatient and hot-tempered."* Mook similarly observed, *"in prison, there are many rules and regulations, and I have to behave according to that. So, I must control myself, live by the rules, so I think that will help me outside."* Phaelin noted, *"I think there's a lot of discipline and it made me better in terms of discipline."* Prison personnel similarly expressed, *"we teach them discipline. You must be disciplined to stay in prisons"* and further explained that, by *"empowering"* women, *"they can [better] survive"* outside prison walls.

In terms of frugality, Mint specified, *"I know more about spending money wisely."* Ning affirmed, *"before, I worked really hard but also spent money needlessly. Now, I'm in prison, I don't have any money. It's totally opposite, but I still survive."* Likewise, during focus group, discussions prison staff highlighted the development of frugality as a positive perceptual change for incarcerated women:

*"It can change their perception. They used to spend thousands per day, but in jail, they can only spend a hundred a day. Some of them used to be surrounded by brand names and live a luxurious life, but once they stepped into the jail, they only have five outfits, a blanket and eat at the cafeteria. They can still survive! This proves that we can change some part of their perception already. It makes them realise that they were too materialistic. Some of them used to have ten bottles of perfume; once in jail, they realise that this is not necessary."*

#### 6.1.4 Prison as a source of support and encouragement

For some women, the most positive feature of prison life was that it provided them with a source of encouragement. Saengdao told us, *“I have a lot of people to talk to [in prison] because outside I don’t have many people to talk to. In here, they give [me] words of encouragement.”* Malivalaya expressed that *“encouragement”* from prison staff and inmates *“is the best thing.”* Solada similarly articulated, *“relationships with other people”* is the best aspect of prison life, *“having people talking to you and giving you encouragement.”* Pimchanok voiced, *“among my group of friends here, they all encourage me”*, and Nat similarly communicated, *“my friends encourage me a lot. I have one good friend who spends a lot of time together [with me] in here, and we encourage one another.”* Prison staff confirmed, *“we try to encourage them”*, and *“what makes us prouder is that we see them encourage their friends.”*

Encouragement emanated from positive relationships with prison staff and fellow inmates. The women recurrently narrated the constructive nature of their friendships with other prisoners. *“Meeting good friends”* was viewed as a positive of imprisonment because it enabled women to *“openly talk”* about their *“problems,”* receive *“help”* and *“support”*, particularly when they were feeling *“stressed.”* These sentiments are echoed in the following quotes:

*“We like share problems, and we share solutions together, here they will let you eat and sleep with the people from the same house, work together, live together. So, you get to hang out with the same group of people all the time. So, when we have a problem, we talk. We are friends with each other. So that’s good.”*

*“I talked to my friend in prison about the violence that my boyfriend did. And I told my friend about why he did that, how often. I talked to my friend, and it helped.”*

*“I have got good friendships in here. I’m in a group of friends here who are always willing to help and support me.”*

*“I am close with the seniors who are the head of the workers. And they often give advice to me about work. And if I like anything or if I need anything, I can go to them, and they will help.”*

Additionally, the women expressed that prison staff were *“friendly,” “nice,” “kind,” “supportive,”* easy to *“talk to,”* and *“helpful.”* The narrations indicated a level of sensitivity by prison personnel toward women’s needs, and thus, staff aptitude in gender responsive/trauma informed care/practice. Waen articulated, *“if you’re stressed, you can go to talk to the officers directly and they would listen to your problems”*, and Nong Yao said, *“the prisoner officers are kind. The officers do not see me as a prisoner. They see me as a person.”* These feelings of positivity toward prison staff and sensitivity they expressed are further demonstrated below:

*“I have a really good relationship with the prison staff. The staff are really helpful. I assume that they have studied psychology. They can help, talk me through stuff.”*

*“I have a good relationship with the prison staff. They give me support, or sometimes I don’t feel well, and I can turn to them.”*

*“One of the officials, I am very close to her, I talk to her, she comes and asks me how was the visit today? I will tell her that my sister came and visited me today. I share my story, my private life with that officer.”*

*“I have a good relationship with the staff. For example, I work in the factory, sewing stuff. One of my friends had a visit, and when she got back, she cried. And the staff go to her, try to talk, give advice. They are very friendly and very kind and understand us.”*

*"I work in prison, and the head of that factory cares about me a lot. Especially when my husband passed away, the situation, she asked me every day, are you okay? Do you need help or anything? [The prison officer] is taking care of me and makes sure that I am okay. My health, my mental health is okay, makes sure that I am happy."*

### 6.1.5 Prison as a supplier of learning and knowledge

Finally, while prison programmes are discussed in more detail below, gaining knowledge was highlighted more generally by the women as being a positive prison experience. Waen said, *"they [prisons] provide you with tons of knowledge"*, and Pakpao expressed, *"they [prisons] give us knowledge that some prisoners actually use out there."* Chan stated, *"the good thing about being in prison is you get knowledge, like for example, the pre-release programme, they teach you some knowledge and how to do a job and everything."* Araya similarly expressed, *"the programmes are very good. I started from not knowing how to do many things, I learned all of them in here."*

### 6.1.6 Overcrowding and access to basic necessities

The most common hardship expressed during interviews were problems associated with prison overcrowding. Overcrowding was *"stressful"*, made women feel *"rushed"*, *"uncomfortable"*, and like they were constantly *"competing."* As argued by June, *"sleeping spaces are small. It is difficult, it is uncomfortable, the space is very crowded."* Kosum expressed, *"when we all had to take a shower together, I had to notice what other people do but felt anxious that other people might look at me."* For Kaarlo, *"being around so many people, I am kind of afraid."* Thong similarly narrated, *"the hardest thing about being in prison is being around many people. I never stayed anywhere with lots of people like this. So many people around me."* Sanoh told us, *"I must compete all the time, each day. I must compete with time like eating food and activity each day. Like I have to compete all the time."* Likewise, Prija remarked, *"[the hardest thing is] showering and eating. There are a lot of people, and we have to fight for water and food."* Kik declared, *"there are a lot of people here, so I have to rush with doing everything. I have to shower fast, wash my clothes fast."* Klong Toey expounded, *"there were too many people, everything is chaotic, and I have to keep up with everyone else no matter what. Before, I took an hour to shower and get dressed, and now I must rush and finish showering in ten seconds. Count one, two, wash with soap on three"*.

In addition, yet connected to overcrowding, women expressed concerns over an inability to access necessities, including water, quality food and mattresses for sleeping. Kla voiced, *"it is difficult because I have never lived like this before. I have never slept like this or showered like this or eaten food like this."* Kate noted, *"sometimes there isn't any water to use when you use the toilet."* Manow stated, *"the food here is not like the food outside. So, yes, it is difficult"*, and May said, *"mealtimes [is the hardest aspect of imprisonment]. The rice comes out raw."* Concerns over a relative lack of access to basic resources are elucidated further in the examples below:

*"We don't really have enough water and mattresses. But I don't know if other prisons are like this. Maybe this is normal. I don't know. The place where we sleep is very crowded because there are lots of prisoners. Maybe that's why there isn't enough water."*

*"Sometimes, the water stops running. There's no water in the toilet when I want to poop. When it's time to take a shower, we only got ten bowls of water each, sometimes only one. It wasn't enough and can't clean everything."*

*"There's insufficient water, and some days I don't even get to shower since the water's not running. It's bad in here. Some days even the drinking water doesn't run."*

*"I find taking a shower is the hardest thing because they only give us one can per time. So, we get to take a shower twice a day. In the morning, we only get one bucket for shampooing and everything. And we must wait in line before we can shower. So that's the hardest thing."*

#### 6.1.7 Inability to access additional provisions

While access to necessity items may have been stressful and sometimes less than optimal, women never went without food, water or bedding. Still, prison life could be markedly improved for those who engaged in paid work and/or had family able to deposit money into prison accounts and/or provide provisions. With money, prisoners can purchase additional items from the prison shop (i.e. food, drinks and toiletry supplies). However, the capacity to access supplementary provisions depended on several factors. First, formal work was not always available to everyone. Second, familial economic hardship, which was frequently exacerbated by the incarceration of the main economic provider, meant families were not always able to provide support. Thus, for some women, the economic marginalisation experienced outside continued inside. As noted by Sasithorn, *"[the hardest aspect of being in prison is] necessities, especially for those without relatives, it's really hard to get what you need."* Min explained, *"the sanitary napkins are too short for me. So, I had to use my own money to buy the pads using money from the dividend. But if you [did not have work or a family] visitor, then they couldn't buy these types of things."* For those without familial support, prison staff and/or fellow inmates may step up to provide aid. Som explained, *"I have a close friend. Sometimes they gave me something when my kid did not come for a visit. I stress out, and they give me the stuff that I want. But the prison also has the stuff provided if you really need it, and you can ask the staff if you don't have money."*

#### 6.1.8 Separation from family and other loved ones

For many women, separation from family was the most difficult feature of imprisonment. Dok Rak stated, *"I cry a lot because I miss my children so much"*, and Isra said, *"it makes me feel depressed to live apart from family. I really want to go back and live with them."* Kamala articulated, *"I missed them [family] very very much, and I really want to go back. I want to start all over again. I want to start a new life. And sometimes, when I missed them very much, I would get a bit teary."*

In addition to the emotional distress caused by estrangement, the women agonised over the well-being of family members. As shown in the previous chapter, many women were the primary caregivers of children, and they were financially responsible for extended kin. Thus, the question of how families were coping financially and with the care of children was a source of immense angst. Boon Mee verbalised this by noting that a difficult aspect of her incarceration was *"worry about how imprisonment will impact the family financially"*, and Rochana conveyed, *"I'm worried about money in the family. I'm worried whether they will have enough money."* Meen stated, *"I'm worried about many things, my babies, my mother, that she will have to take care of all of my babies and me."* Phet also expressed, *"I miss my family. I am worried about how they can financially support themselves. I specifically worry about the grandchildren, whether they will have food to eat, whether they get to go to school."*

Other women worried about the health of their loved ones. Shanoh stated that *"I am worried about my boyfriend; [he] has diabetes."* Malee also worried about her *"husband's health"*, and Taeng was *"worried about my parents because they are old, and they have health conditions."* Chan stated that *"I really miss him [youngest child] because when the older kid came to visit me, he said that the little one gets sick very often. I kind of worry about him. I feel bad that I can't be there with him."*

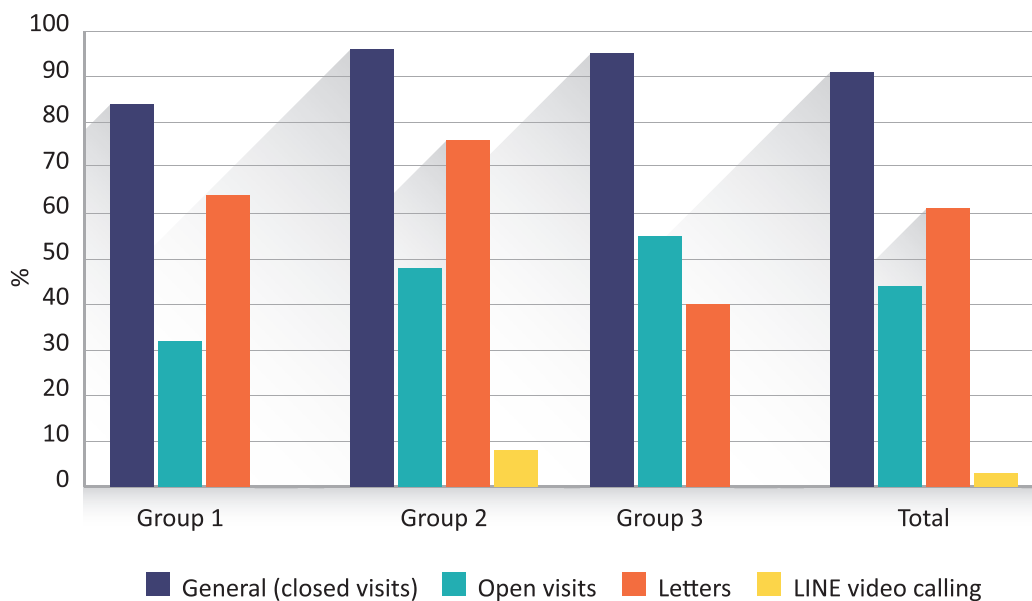
In a final example, Sasithorn was imprisoned because she sold drugs to support her grandchildren. The children's father, Sasithorn's adult son, was addicted to drugs and generally inept. For Sasithorn, the most difficult aspect of imprisonment was the constant state of anguish she felt over the fate of her grandchildren in their father's care. She explained:

*"I am worried about my grandchildren. I didn't know what to do. And my child, he is not a good person. He had three children, and I had to take care of them. I'm so worried. I have raised and taken care of them since they were born. They called me mother, and I call them as if they were my own children."*

## 6.2 Staying connected to loved ones

As noted above, separation from family through incarceration can be distressing. Further, we know that social connection especially to families can aid women's re-entry success. Thus, prison systems that support the preservation of familial bonds are crucial to the well-being of women both during and post-incarceration. The prisons where these groups of women were housed made every attempt, within the confines of prison overcrowding and resourcing, to support connectedness with family, friends and intimate partners through the provision of visitation (both open and closed), letters and LINE video calling. Each is discussed in more detail below but as demonstrated in Figure 8, most women had been in contact with the people whom they cared about at least to some degree during their term of incarceration. Overall, general/closed visitation was the most common way that women stayed connected, followed by letter writing. However, a not insignificant number of women had also attended open visits, although this was more likely to take place in the Bangkok Rules Model prisons (i.e. Groups 2 and 3). Line video calling was only mentioned in one prison.

Figure 8: Contact with the outside world by type of connection and prison



Overall, women commented that staying connected to loved ones provided them with hope, happiness and encouragement. Leila said, *“I think it is happy to wait for a letter. It is a part of my encouragement”*, and Nin commented, *“I am very happy every time I see my family.”* Duanphen stated that visitation *“encourages me a lot.”* Similar sentiments are expressed below:

*“I feel very happy when they come to visit. They give me a lot of encouragement. I feel very very happy when they come.”*

*“But now [during visits] my family gives me encouragement and gives me support. My mother visits me once a month, and my son came to visit me during school summer.”*

*“I’m already happy just hearing them announce my name [for general visitation]. Everyone here is the same. Every Wednesday, I’ll be sitting here waiting to see if my name will come up.”*

*“[Open visitation is helpful]. I can meet my children. Because I miss them, and I want to see them. They would encourage me as well.”*

### 6.2.1 General / closed visitation

The women explained that general or closed visitations were available at their facilities on specific days each week and tended to run between five to 20 minutes per session. On busy days, usually weekends, women reported that visitation times were restricted due to higher visitor volume. This is likely also related to concomitant prison overcrowding. Screens divided women from guests, and communication occurred through a telephone. When asked how they felt about general visitation, most women conveyed satisfaction with the environment, while some felt it was too *“noisy”*. Some women were satisfied with the allotted times, while others felt it was insufficient. Each sentiment is illustrated in the following excerpts from the interviews:

*“I am satisfied with the environment, and for the time, sometimes I get 10 - 20 minutes. It depends on the number of the visitors and I don’t have much to talk about anyway. I think the time is enough for me”.*

*“The place is okay, but the time is too short. I get to visit every Wednesday, and every other Sunday. On Wednesday, I’ll get 15-20 minutes, but on Sunday, it is less. The time is too short for me.”*

*“I got 15 minutes per session. I’m quite satisfied with the amount of time. But I think the voices of other people are too loud for me. They will try to talk as much as possible. The voices are too loud.”*

*“Every Wednesday I will get 18-20 minutes depending on the number of visitors. On Sunday I will get less than 5-10 minutes. It depends on the number of visitors. I think the*

### 6.2.2 Open visitation

Open visits materialised from a couple of times per year to every few months and tended to be longer than general visits with women reporting session times of “25 minutes” to “half a day long.” The most positive feature of open visitation was the removal of the screen and the ability of women to physically connect with loved ones. No one objected to the environment or the designated times but saying goodbye to family was often difficult. Rochana explained, “I feel good that my family visited me, but when they left, my heart went with them.” The generally positive experience of open visitation and the importance of this medium for promoting familial connectedness is exemplified in the quotations below:

*“The open visit I have is for 25 minutes per visit, and I feel good about it because I get to touch my babies, my mother, my father, my husband. And the place for open visit is great.”*

*“I was happy because I missed them very much and got to hug them. Got to hug the father, the baby and my brother as well.”*

*“With the open visit, I was totally happy because I was able to hug and kiss them on the cheeks. I think it’s good because it is half-day long. It is the most important thing for me. It is my main encouragement.”*

*“Each prisoner got two-hour session for an open visit and we’ll sit at the table in the canteen, and each prisoner gets to see less than 10 relatives for one visit. I like it. I get to hug my father.”*

*“I was ecstatic. I forgot about all other people around me and only saw the family. [I feel like]there was only them [my family] and me. And then I got to hug them because normally for the regular visits, I only get to see the faces through the glass.”*

However, open visitation was not accessible to everyone. Several women expounded that those classified as “lower class”, serving short terms and/or sentenced for more than one offence were disqualified from open visitation. Ink told us that she “didn’t have an open visit because my class is still the bad one and because I’m here for a short period. So, my class wouldn’t be good enough for an open visit.” Taeng similarly noted, “I’m in the lowest class prisoner, so they won’t allow me to have an open visit with anyone. You need to be a middle or upper class to get a visit like that” and Araya explained, “someone who reoffended doesn’t get the open visits. Only those who came here for the first time.” Dok was also ineligible for an open visit because she “came in with two cases, so I don’t get the open visit.” Information obtained from the prisons confirmed that open visitation was contingent on prisoner classification. Repeat offenders and lower-class prisoners were excluded altogether.

### 6.2.3 Letters

Letters may also be sent and received. However, the women explained that prison staff read all outgoing and incoming mail to check for inappropriate content or what Sawatdi described as “bad words.” The women did not seem perturbed by this arrangement and explained that prison staff would quickly read their letters and send them out. Aom said, there is “no problem, when I write, the officer will check it and then send it right away.” While there was “no limit in receiving letters,” restrictions were reportedly placed on the number of letters inmates could write and correspondence length. Prison overcrowding likely necessitates such restrictions.



Further, as was the case with open visitation, the right to write letters reportedly varied according to prisoner classification. Suda explained, *"I think the system is good but here, who gets to write letters, depends on your class. They limit the number of letters you can write. In the best class, the maximum that I can write is two letters a week. And then the lower class it is once a week. The third class gets twice a month."* Kornkanok concurred, *"for the highest-class prisoner, they can write two letters per week. Very good and good prisoners can write one letter per week. But for middle class or lower-level prisoners, they can write one letter every two weeks."* One prison confirmed that the number of letters women were permitted to write each week depended on classification. Lower than average class prisoners could send letters twice a month. Those of *"good or higher class"* had a quota of two per week while average class prisoners could send one letter each week.

For some, letter writing was not an option because they *"cannot remember the address"* and/or their family members had literacy challenges. Mild stated, *"when I write a letter to him [father], it is hard for him to reply because he doesn't know how to write."* Others expressed that their letters took a long time to reach family members. Kla stated, *"it is delayed; the system is delayed. It takes a long time for letters to reach back home."* Finally, one woman commented that it was difficult to buy stamps and envelopes. She explained, *"I need to buy them. They sell it only on Saturday at the Welfare Shop around the working area. So, if I don't work, I won't be able to get the envelopes and stamps. I want them to sell it every day. The only way I can contact my family is through writing letters. Now, there is a black market where prisoners buy the envelope for 4 baht, then sell it to the others at 10-20 baht. If the prison staffs sell these things every day, then there will be no black market. That's why I want them to sell the envelopes and stamps every day."*

#### 6.2.4 LINE video calling

LINE video calling was operating in every prison but appeared underutilised. This communication tool gave women an additional way to stay connected. Prison visitation can be difficult for family and other loved ones who reside in areas located long distances from the prison. As explained by Fa Ying, *"they started to use this about one to two months ago. It is more convenient, because our visitors don't have to travel here to the prison, but we can see each other through the device."* Kosum's mother was only able to visit her *"once a year"* because she lived in a province that was *"far from"* the prison. Since the introduction of LINE, Kosum now speaks to her mother on a weekly basis. She said, *"it is very good. It doesn't matter how far you are if you can see each other's' faces. You don't have to spend time travelling to the prison. [My mother] is far from here. It is five hours."* Once again, however, eligibility depended on prisoner classification. Dok Rak explained, *"I cannot use that because of the prisoner class that I'm in."* Information gathered from one prison corroborated that women classified as lower class were disqualified from video calling.

## 6.3 Disconnection from loved ones

Despite provisions for visitation, letter writing and video calling, at some point, 67% of women still recounted disconnection from loved ones. Children, parents, intimate partners and/or other family members of central importance to the women either rarely made contact, were communicative at some point but then broke off contact, or became completely estranged. Rochana, for example, stated, *“my children have never been here.”* Lawan's parents *“they didn't visit me that much”*, and Waen's boyfriend visited for a while but then stopped. The reasons for this varied. Some women did not tell their loved ones that they were in prison. Others explained that visitation was simply not feasible for their loved ones because of distance and/or financial constraints and/or age. For others, children did not visit because their caregivers or the women themselves did not want them too. Finally, family and/or spouses simply disappeared without explanation. Each point is explored further below.

### 6.3.1 Women not informing loved ones of their imprisonment

Some women explained that they had lost contact with family, spouses and friends because they never told anyone about their incarceration. The reasons for this appeared threefold. First, relationships were already fractured. For example, Palinda's familial connections were splintered by childhood abuse, parental substance misuse and on-going neglect. She narrated, *“I have been alone most of my life. All my life, I've been mistreated a lot by my family, relatives and cousins, except my older brother”* and *“I can survive alone.”* As such, the only people that knew Palinda was in prison were her father (he provided financial support) and brother, who was the only person Palinda felt close to. Palinda's mother had no idea that her daughter was imprisoned. Palinda told us, *“my mother doesn't even know that I'm in prison. She doesn't know because I asked my father and my brother to conceal it.”*

Second, women did not want to cause their families undue stress or worry. Chomesri explained, *“my family doesn't know that I'm in prison. I will contact them after I'm out of the prison. I have the phone number. I've never told them. I don't want them to be worried or overthink about it.”*

Third, feelings of guilt and shame impeded women from contacting family. Chuasiri expressed, *“I don't want my children to know that their mother used drugs and is now in prison. So, I didn't contact anyone during these three years in prison. I have had no visitor for the whole time I'm here.”* Likewise, Alisa noted, *“the prison staff were surprised because I'm here for more than two years without any visitors. I chose not to contact my family because I know I was wrong.”*

### 6.3.2 Infeasibility of visitation

Some women were housed in prisons located a long way from their families. This made visitation difficult, if not impossible. Shanoh's family could only visit *“around once a month”* because they *“live far away from this place.”* Not seeing her family resulted in Dara feeling *“sad and a little bit mad.”* Darika stopped asking her boyfriend to visit due to distance. She explained, *“he [the boyfriend] would come for the regular visit if I write to him and ask him to, but mostly I don't ask him to come. It is far. I told him not to come. I only ask him to come for close visits occasionally.”*

Travelling long distances costs money. Several women explained that their families could not afford to come and visit. Taeng Read expressed, *“my family only visited me once. They do not have enough money and live far away. That makes me feel stressed and sometimes upset.”* Amabil expounded, *“they visit me once a month and for open visit, it will be like every four months because they don’t have money”*, and Dok Ban Yen said, *“my family came to the open visit last year. But then this year I told them not to come as it is difficult [long distance] and it uses a lot of money, it is a lot of money for the family.”*

Once a woman is incarcerated, the care of children frequently fell to aging parents and grandparents. Travelling, especially over long distances with limited money, can be a chore with small children and for older adults. These points are demonstrated in the quotes below:

*“When my mother comes to visit me at the prison, my mother never brings the baby with her because my mother says that it is a long way to prison, and it is inconvenient for the baby. I just told my mother to not visit me anymore because it is difficult for my mother to travel, and I’m going to be released soon.”*

*“My baby stays with my boyfriend’s parents, and they are very old. So, they cannot come to visit. I am feeling like so-so. But after this, it will be harder to adapt myself because we have been separated for a long time. It will be kind of hard for me to reconnect with him [baby].”*

*“I didn’t want them to come to the open visit because we didn’t have enough money. The taxi fee is around 400 - 500 baht. My husband, when he travels here [for the regular visit], he comes here by bus in the early morning. He is 72 years old.”*

### 6.3.3 Concerns about children in prison

Concerns about children in prison either came from those caring for the women’s children outside the prison walls, the women themselves or their children. Yanisa conveyed that her aunt, who was caring for her child, *“doesn’t want the baby to get involved in anything bad. She didn’t allow the baby to come visit me.”* Ning’s son was being cared for by his paternal grandparents. She explained that her child did not *“know I am here”* because *“no one wanted to tell him about this. So, my child doesn’t know. The grandparents told my child that I work abroad.”* Jasmine did not want her child to see her in prison. She explained, *“I want him [my baby] to visit me, but I don’t want him to see me like this.”* Fa Ying’s grandchild would not visit because facing his grandmother/primary caregiver in prison was emotionally distressing. She explained, *“my oldest grandchild, who is now 17 years old, hasn’t visited me. He said that he doesn’t want to see me in the prison like this. He said he couldn’t stand it.”*

### 6.3.4 “People just disappear”

Finally, for some women, loved ones simply disappeared. Hanuman explained, *“my first child used to visit me a lot. But now he has disappeared. Both he and his girlfriend. They have been gone for two months now.”* Kalaya’s adult daughter *“disappeared too.”* She explained, *“the last time she visited me was in February (six months ago). But now she’s gone. I can’t contact her.”* Sunee *“wrote a few letters asking my boyfriend to visit but he never replied”* and Benyapa’s *“mother was gone, I have no one.”* Familial and spousal abandonment left women feeling confused, rejected and alone. This is illustrated further in the following narrations:

*"So, when he [husband] knew that I was in prison, in the beginning, he came to visit me every two weeks and then later, he had to work. So, it became once a month. Now it has been three. He never visits me. I don't have contact with anyone."*

*"No one visits. The last time that my mother came to visit me was in March last year [16 months ago]. Now they only send the money. I don't know what is going on in my family, and I think they don't want me to know."*

*"[I'm] Sad. Because no one visited me. I don't know why. No one sends me money. I send letters but they did not reply. It is hard because there is no visitor. I don't see my child. He is four years old now. The struggle in here is real because there is no visitor. This is the lowest point in my life."*

*"Another thing is that the very first time I was imprisoned, my mother visited me every day. But this time, my mother is gone. So, I told myself not to be concerned. I have no one."*

*"Just during the first year [I had visits]. My child and my husband came to visit. They came once a month for one year, and then they stopped since December last year [six months ago]. I didn't know why they stopped contacting me. So, I wrote to them three to four times, but I didn't get any letters back."*

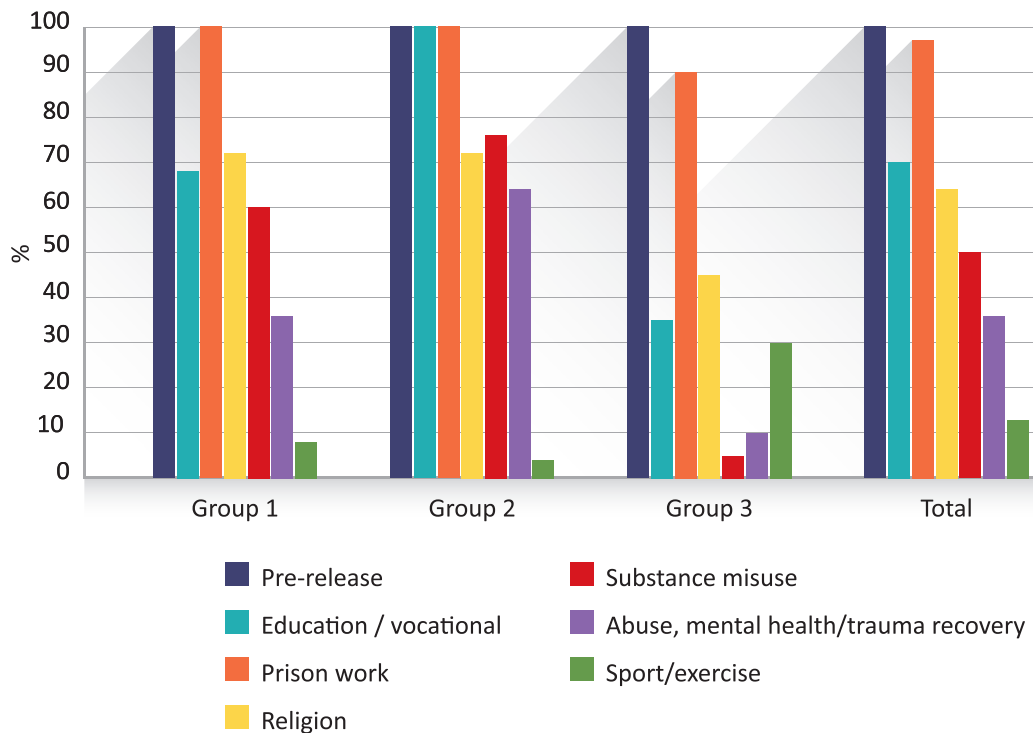
## 6.4 Rehabilitative programmes and support

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As noted previously, prison authorities should be preparing women for re-entry from the beginning of their sentence and ideally, support and programming should be targeted to address the factors that led women on a pathway to prison. For the women in this research, exploration of prison trajectories suggests programming/support aimed at addressing the following would be useful: 1) substance misuse, 2) abuse, mental health and trauma recovery, and 3) economic marginalisation via meaningful educational, vocational and work opportunities. Re-entry planning, programming and connections to post-release support services with post-release through-care are also vital. Each is discussed in more detail below.

A broad overview of women's participation in programming/support is provided in Figure 9. As can be seen, every woman participated in a pre-release programme and most engaged in vocational/educational training and/or work. Involvement in substance abuse programmes varied by prison. Women in Group 2 (Prison B, a Model Prison) were more likely to participate in programmes and receive support for substance misuse. A not insignificant number of women also received programming/support for substance misuse in Group 1 (Prison A, a mainstream prison). However, substance misuse was only addressed for a small number of women in Group 3 (Prison C, a Model Prison Plus). Support and programmes for victimisation, mental health and trauma recovery were generally limited and tended to occur in the context of drug rehabilitation. However, it is important to note that religious programmes, sport, exercise, vocational/educational training and work also play a role in respect of women's emotional well-being (also discussed in more detail below).

Figure 9: Prison programmes / support



#### 6.4.1 Planning for re-entry, programming and through-care

During focus group discussions, prison staff explicated that re-entry preparation began at intake with individualised sentencing plans. These included directives regarding treatment, programming and support. However, prison overcrowding and concomitant low staff-to-prisoner ratios did pose challenges in terms of supporting women in complying with these plans. These points are illustrated in the below dialogues between prison staff:

*“We have a sentence plan from the day they walk in to the day they walk out. We set up the plan for them individually but since we have many prisoners and not enough staff, less than the United Nations’ requirement, we cannot control everyone. If they do not take these courses, we cannot punish them. We can only guide them. But some of them are nice, they follow our plans strictly.”*

*“[Rehabilitation/re-entry planning] can only be done with a small group of people. It cannot be done with a massive group of people. We have a lot of prisoners, but we can only empower them just as a small group.”*

Every prison provided women with a re-entry programme. These programmes took place from between one year and a few months pre-release, were compulsory and ran from three days to several months, depending on the prison. Pre-entry programmes aimed to prepare prisoners physically, mentally, and intellectually for community reintegration while also advising them about through-care post-release. As explained by the prison staff, *“this project [is] useful. We educate them and inform them about what they are going to see outside when they are released. They would know that they still have social support. If they have any problems, they would know by now who they should go to for advice.”*

The content of the re-entry programme varied by prison, but we were told it generally included the following aspects:

- Mental health support/empowerment
- Life skills development/training
- Vocational training
- Understanding the law, including the legislation governing illicit drugs
- Religion and ethics
- Family re-unification
- Connecting women with post-release support services

Universal re-entry programmes were targeted at all offender groups in Prison A, B, and C (Group 1-3). Prison A and B (Group 1 - 2) had both generalised and a more targeted pre-release drug rehabilitation programmes for drug offenders. The latter took place over three days and ran for 15 hours while the generalised drug rehabilitation programmes were conducted over 480 hours (in four months) and 60 hours (in 12 days). Prison C's (Group 3) universal re-entry programmes ran for 30-100 hours. Further, and as noted previously, a more extensive pre-release programme was being piloted in Prison C. Every woman in Group 3 had participated in this trial re-integration programme (see Text Box 3, below for more information).

### TEXT BOX 3: the Model Prison Plus programme

Model Prison Plus is a pilot collaborative pre-release programme for women prisoners executed by the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ), aimed at providing pre-release supports considering the women prisoners' background, gender, and socio-economic context while taking advantages of the network of expert and civil society groups in providing for such needs. The programme targets the social reintegration necessities, including mental empowerment, money management and financial literacy, career guidance, business planning, family reintegration, and post-release supports.

The Model Prison Project was first started in Ayutthaya Provincial Prison in July 2019 with 33 women prisoners who had less than a year remaining incarceration period. It covered approximately 250 hours of classes within three months, with a collaborative effort of up to 10 independent groups of external experts, therapists, and facilitators whose knowledge and skills that are potentially suitable for helping those who have been criminally convicted prepare for life after release.

Further, re-entry planning was technically available to all prisoners via a one-on-one meeting with prison staff. CARE (Centre for Assistance to Reintegration and Employment) (see details in Text Box 4, below) was available in all prisons to aid women with pre-release planning; prison staff interview prisoners to determine their needs and plan for re-entry. Links with re-entry accommodation, work and support services could be established and prison staff might contact women post-release to see how they are doing. Once back in the community, women could also contact CARE for advice/support.

Overall, at all three facilities, women expressed positivity about the available re-entry programmes. They explained that these initiatives taught them to plan for their release. Isra said, “the programme asks the prisoner what we will do, what is the plan for the job, the career after the release.” Kik explained, “like I have to plan where to live. I have to plan ahead before being out there in the community.” Likewise, Phloi stated, “they helped prisoners to think about after release, where will we go, what will we do, I am already thinking about what I will do after release.” More specifically, women noted that these programmes gave them guidance about post-release accommodation, “work”, brief vocational type training (e.g. how to make washing detergent), “life skills”, and where to go for support when they returned to society. This is illustrated in the following descriptions provided by the women of the re-entry programmes:

*“Mostly, it is revolving around employment, and then they teach stuff about the household as well, they teach the prisoners how to make deodorants, the things that you use to wash your clothes. They also help people who do not have any relatives. If a prisoner does not have any relatives, the prison will give them money.”*

*“[The re-entry programme] it includes [information] about housing and employment. They tell us who to contact or where to contact to get this information after we are released. They also teach us how to do something like dish liquids, like washing liquids, and so we can sell it after we leave this place.”*

*“They provide us with skills to [get] work outside of prison. Like how to make deodorants, the things that you use to wash your clothes and they give us the contact details and how to contact the CARE after we are released. They also have advice and suggestions and help in finding the funds to start a new business outside of prison.”*

*“The programme teaches about everything. It teaches some vocational skills. It teaches the life skills. The programme mentions the care centres, if prisoners need any help, they can come to the CARE centres.”*

*“The programme talks about how to live your life after you leave the prison, how to reintegrate and adapt yourself back into society and that we have to stay away from the same things that got us in here and how to find jobs. They also advise us on where to go to if we cannot find jobs.*

*“The programme, there would be someone outside came to prison and talked about life planning like advice about a job, advice about educational opportunities, these kinds of things.”*

*“If I was released and unemployed, then I could contact them and ask for help. They told us where to get help.”*

#### TEXT BOX 4 : CARE programme

The Department of Corrections established a Center for Assistance to Reintegration and Employment (CARE) in 2018 to be a centre of various supports and coordination for both prisoners and those released. Each prison in Thailand has CARE centre to provide direct support for released prisoners. The main objectives are to help released prisoners to find jobs and become self-reliant for their successful reintegration.therapists, and facilitators whose knowledge and skills that are potentially suitable for helping those who have been criminally convicted prepare for life after release.

The women in Group 3 who were incarcerated in Prison C also related that the pilot re-entry programme provided information about re-entry planning, including accommodation, work/employment and, post-release support. Additionally, numerous positive psychological impacts were mentioned. Women explained how the programme helped them to feel supported, develop problem-solving skills and aided self-reflection, including understanding of imprisonment trajectories. Kulap noted, *“the programme taught me to think about my past and what I’ve done, what to do when I’m released, and to know myself more.”* Isra commented that the programme helped to address her *“internal scars.”* Wanwisa said, *“we have to really dig down really deep into our mind. I was crying too. I felt relief and not stress anymore. I felt like I’m not scared anymore.”* Kamlai added, *“it helped and encouraged me. I understand my feelings better. It helps me psychologically.”* Sinn stated, *“they taught me about how my life was before I came to prison and taught me how to solve the problems in life.”* Waan expounded, *“they help me think about myself more, realising what happened in the past and what I’m feeling right now”* and Taeng felt that she was better able to *“cope with stress, I feel way better after I joined it, I feel relief and I understand my own feelings. I can organise my thoughts. I can speak about my feelings, and someone is there to listen to me.”* Overall, and in contrast to the re-entry initiatives at the other prisons, this programme presented as a psychologically insightful and empowering experience for women. These points are demonstrated further in the quotes below:

*“I’ve learned more about myself from this programme. I learned how to plan and think more carefully for my life. In the past, I didn’t think about cause and effect of certain things I had done. Now I have some time to reconsider everything.”*

*“It helps me improve my concentration. I used to dislike listening to people talking. When I don’t pay attention, I will keep moving, changing position and looking around, not focused. But since I joined this programme, I can pay attention.”*

*“From this programme at first, I didn’t really want to attend the programme at all. But then I learnt to love myself more, know myself more and how to love other people around me better, how to live with other people, especially with my family and kids.”*

*“They taught us that even if it doesn’t go as planned, how to think to solve problems. This is helpful. They prepare our mind before the release. Learning about myself more actually helps making me want to solve the problem after this.”*

However, despite the provision of programmes, individualised pre-release planning and post-release support, women still expounded concern about a lack of preparedness and post-release community-based assistance. In theory, women were able to meet individually with prison staff for re-entry planning, yet many appeared unaware that this service/support provision existed. Tup Tin expressed, *“I don’t see the CARE [staff]. I don’t even know who they are. They came here only occasionally. I can’t randomly go to someone and ask them for suggestions [about re-entry planning].”* Janjira was also oblivious and recommended that individualised pre-release planning should be implemented. She explained, *“I think it is useful to have someone go through all the plans with me. Now I have two months and a bit left. I still don’t know what to do with my life. I think when I get out, everything is going to be so blank. So, I need someone to help me with that.”* Songsuda similarly endorsed, *“it would have been helpful to have someone to sit down with, one of the prison staff or social workers or someone, and sit down and talk through your pre-release plan? Because in that way, they could give some advice and provide new alternatives”.* Yanisa said, *“I think it would be very helpful to have someone to help me think and go through the [re-entry] plan and steps.”* Further, some women were unaware that through-care support was available to them post-release. Finally, On Choi detailed, *“I think it might be a good idea to check on the released prisoners and see if they really need a place to stay or need funds to open a business. Probably a month after release. The staff should go out there and keep track of them and see if they need help with anything, like housing or money.”*



The above disjuncture between the availability, awareness and provision of pre-release planning and through-care may be another problem associated with prison overcrowding. High prisoner-to-staff ratios make the relaying of information logistically challenging. Further, under such conditions, the provision of individualised pre-sentence planning and post-release support becomes virtually impossible.

#### *6.4.2 Vocational / educational training, support and/or work*

As outlined in the previous chapter, economic marginalisation was often central to women's imprisonment trajectories. A significant number of women in this research had low education levels. This limited their employment prospects and led to socio-economic disadvantage and offending. Poverty was further exacerbated by familial economic provisioning. Oftentimes, women found themselves in prison for selling drugs to support themselves, their children and their extended family. Thus, within the prison walls, it is imperative that women are provided with education, training and work opportunities to increase their prospects of accessing meaningful and adequately paying employment post-release. Every prison provided educational/vocational training and work opportunities. The prospects offered are listed below. This information was gathered from the women and prisons.

- Educational programmes
  - o Basic literacy
  - o High school certificates
  - o Vocational certificates
- Vocational training, including formal prison work
  - o Beautician
  - o Massage therapy
  - o Barista
  - o Arts and crafts
  - o Cooking
  - o Information technology
  - o Business management
  - o Tiling
  - o Call centre
  - o Jewellery making
  - o Rubber making
  - o Packaging production
  - o Paper bag folding
  - o Manufacturing automobile spare parts

It should be noted that vocational training is difficult to delineate from formal prison work because the latter nearly always results in women learning new employability skills. However, unlike vocational training, formal work had the added advantage of dividend payment. One woman explained, *"I don't have family to visit me. So, I needed to work somewhere to earn a lot of money. The staff told me to join the gold factory. So, I joined. And the dividend was okay. So, I just stayed there."* Prison staff explained during focus groups that formal work allowed women *"to make money in here. They have bank accounts from the jobs they do. So, when they go back, they can have money with them."* However, most women in formal work told us that they were paid too little to save any money for re-entry. Despite this, having money to spend in prison did make life more comfortable. Still, some were able to save, and they reported that having this financial buffer would aid them post-release. Consider Sopa's story:

*"Work. Like, for me, I was thinking about what I should do [after release]. I saw on the notice that work with roasted pork was opened for registration. So, I signed up for it. I got paid, and I saved money. I get around 4,000-5,000 per month. I have around 18,000 baht in savings. [By the time I get released] I will save up my money, probably around 20,000-30,000 baht. Then I [will use this money] to learn more about hairdressing and eyebrows skills [i.e. training post-release] because my mother owns a hair salon. [I can use these skills] and generate my own income."*

Some women participated in informal work, namely, undertaking menial tasks (e.g. laundry) for other prisoners who then provided remuneration, sometimes monetary but usually in the form of goods, such as food and toiletries. Women worked informally because formal work opportunities were unavailable to them and/or families were incapable of providing financial assistance due to estrangement and/or impoverishment.

In general, women expressed positivity about the educational/vocational training provided and participation in formal paid work. Engagement in these activities lessened the pains of imprisonment. By giving the women something to do, vocational/educational training and/or work made the days go faster, alleviated boredom, overthinking and stress while also allowing a space to learn new skills. Waan noted, *"I didn't want to stay idle; it made my mind kind of like worry too much."* Mind explained, *"at first, I had nothing to do. I couldn't stay like that. I had to do something. So, I joined the courses to keep myself busy. But I learned something from those courses."* Tup Tin expressed, *"it is useful because I don't have to stay idle. I have something to do"*, and Araya told us, *"they have vocational training for us. So, I had something to do, and it helped me to cope with stress."*

Involvement in vocational/educational training (as was the case with other programmes) also led to prisoner reclassification and concomitant sentence reductions. When asking why she decided to participate in vocational/education training programmes, Yanisa said, *"the first reason is for my sentence reduction, everyone that joins get certificates, and it is very useful ... helpful for sentence reduction."* Likewise, Taeng Read stated, *"every time that I join this kind of activity, I get one signature, and 25 signatures get one level better in the classification of the prisoner. So, the classification of the prisoner will have an impact on the amount of sentence reduction."*

Women conveyed belief in the utility of formal work, educational/vocational training post-release. Hom stated, *"I think all the programmes are helpful for me and have prepared me to be ready when I get out. I think most of the people will feel the same."* Pimchan noted, *"I find these kinds of programmes, like cooking or handicraft, really helpful and really useful for those who really want to use these skills after they get released."* Likewise, Prasert said, *"it is going to be beneficial because the skills that they teach here, I can use them outside. Like cooking, massaging"*, and Kamlai narrated, *"it could be useful because all the skills that they teach in here, they are skills that could be useful for employment."* Similar comments are presented below:

*"I find it really useful, especially the Thai massage. After I am released, I will take like additional class, Thai massage class outside of this, and then I will probably join the family business, they have a Thai massage place, in the future."*

*"I think it is useful for me because I never knew how to use a sewing machine. Now I know, and when I get out, I can do this kind of job, like change a zipper, fix clothes and everything."*

*"They taught me how to make detergent and dishwashing liquid too. I can make and sell it after I'm released. They told me everything, like the ingredients and where to get them."*

*"Before I went into prison, I didn't know how to make coffee, and now I do, and I intend to open my own coffee shop after I get out of prison. It is the vocational skills that I got."*

*"I find all these programmes helpful because I have got more skills than before I got in here. For example, for the handicraft training. I'm proud of myself for being able to sew the bags and the patterns using my own hands and not the sewing machine. And, about the Thai massage class. I find it helpful because now I have these skills to use after I leave this place."*

*"Yes, actually, I thought about selling some crochet sweaters and bags after I get released. I've known how to do crochet even before I got into prison, but I didn't do it because I was hooked on drugs."*

However, prison staff and other women were more dubious about the transferability of prison-based vocational skills to the outside world. During one focus group, prison personnel stated, *"they will get to have professional training, and they will get to study, but it is not really practical for them when they go out. We need to know what skill they need on the outside so we can train them when they are inside."* Yanisa noted that while these initiatives were *"useful"* in prison, likely due to the reasons stated previously (i.e. passes the time and reduces stress) she *"might not use it outside prison. It's useful to know but not practical."* Dok Rak stated, *"it might not be useful outside, but it helps me when I am in here because it helps me kill time."* Likewise, Maprang communicated that these types of programmes may be beneficial for *"learning"* in prison, but their usefulness beyond that was negligible. She said, *"I joined the handicraft-making programme but personally I am not going to do any business involving these kinds of products anyway. It's useful in terms of learning it, but it is not useful in terms of me using it in the future."* Other women expressed that the skills learnt may be helpful for household/family life but not so much for making a living. Phawta explained that she had *"learnt how to make salted eggs"* but did not *"know if it would be useful because out there, people sell many things, and I'm not sure if I could really sell them. It might be only for household usage."* Likewise, Tha Kai Bok explained, *"I learnt how to make massage oil. It is a little bit difficult and risky to sell the massage oil on your own. But then you can make it and use it within the household."* Finally, Phueng was extremely cynical, expressing, *"I don't think the programme is useful when you go outside. But then it is useful to learn new things, and for me, I joined the programmes because I want to get the certificates for my release and for me, I also want to learn something new. But I don't think any programme will be useful. When you get out, you cannot use anything you learn here outside."*

A supplementary concern expressed by the women was that accessibility to vocational training and formal work, like open visitation and letter writing, was contingent on prisoner classification and sentence length. Aice explained she was not able to attend any vocational training programmes because *"my sentence was short, so I'm not qualified to join. I wanted to learn to make coffee because at my house, it is near the market and our family has our own grocery store, and my father sells corn, and if I can learn to make coffee, I can open a coffee shop."*

Thong Thaem explained that *"it is also related to the class of prisoners"* and Sanoh said, *"I was a re-offender, so I couldn't join."* We were able to confirm with one prison that to participate in formal work, convicted prisoners needed to be sentenced to more than five years of imprisonment.

Further, formal work and vocational training places were limited, a problem undoubtedly exacerbated by prison overcrowding. Si Mok explained that *"there are a lot of programmes, but the number of prisoners that can join is limited. Like, first come first served."* Older prisoners and pregnant women were also reported to have restricted access. Tida illuminated, *"I'm Pok 1 [classification category for work]. I don't have any work now. I need to be in Pok 2 in order to get paid. Pok 2 prisoners are taught how to knit and crochet. They also have salon courses. Old prisoners and those who are stubborn are categorized in Pok 1. I'm in the old-prisoner group."* Ning told us that *"I cannot join [vocational training or work] because I'm pregnant. The prison doesn't allow pregnant women to do anything at all. Just sit in the room downstairs all day."*

Within the compass of employability, what women wanted most was a programme or support mechanism that connected them with jobs post-release. Peach desired *"information about jobs outside"*, and Fah explained that it would be helpful if the prison could provide her with *"some channels to get a job at least."* Madee stated, *"we need a programme"* that at least *"identifies the names of the companies"* that could employ us. Nan similarly wanted *"more options about possible employment that ex-prisoners can apply for"*, and Arunprapa stated, *"it would be great if let's say the prison checks with us if we want to work afterwards. If we do, then they have a place for us to go to work."* Women's appeals for prisons to more actively connect them with employment post-release is reiterated below:

*"I think one of the most important ones would be job hunting. Maybe just providing us with lists of what we can do or listing out names to check if we are about to be released, what should be put into a programme that provides us with a list of the jobs or any options outside of prison so that we can know and plan for what we are going to do in the future."*

*"I think what we would like the most is activities or programme involving the job that we can apply for after we are released. Because of the criminal record, it would be best to know where we can apply for a job. A list would be great."*

*"I wished there were job offers provided so that the prisoners don't have to struggle to find jobs by themselves because it is hard and difficult for people who don't have a backup."*

Prison staff concurred with the women's comments. They expressed disquiet about their inability to connect women with employment. Whilst they had *"prison [vocational] training, there should be someone to really help them find jobs. CARE is not that good at this. The Department of Labour needs to help us. Or public organisations. Why can't they find jobs for [women] who did wrong but now became good?"* It was suggested that work-based day release presented as a feasible mechanism to connect women with employers prior to release. However, departmental day release policy was deemed too restrictive. It was explained that *"there are some companies that come to us and say they have a lack of workers and need our prisoners, but we have restricted rules on how long we can release women for"*. According to prison regulations on convicted prisoner's work release (2018), it requires an approval of the Director-General of Corrections Department to allow women prisoners to work outside prison compound. They will then must return to prison before 7 p.m. on the same day.

In a similar vein, some women thought it would be useful if prisons could supply training and support to open a small business. Sup wanted *“a course that taught her how to find funds to open a business”*, and Kanokwan wanted to know *“if there is any organisation that helps me with the funding. It would be great if there is, because I can start my business right away.”* Phloi said, *“I think having information about how to run a business would be useful. I want to open a salon, but I am also interested in selling facial moisturizer online. I want to know how to do that. Another good thing would be proper funding, if they can provide us with funding to start a business, or else we will just go back to selling drugs to find money again.”* We were informed that loan schemes were available in two of the prisons. However, there were several caveats to eligibility. These included: being responsible, diligent, honest, of good behaviour and in financial need (i.e. no savings / from an economically disadvantaged background); having a business plan, the ability to provide a residential address and contact details post-release; and agreeing to provide the prison with follow-up details regarding progress. Only first-time offenders qualified.

#### 6.4.3 Substance misuse programmes

As previously discussed, substance misuse is profoundly intertwined with women’s offending. Most of the women in this research recounted the problematic use of drugs and/or alcohol at some point in their lives, but few had ever sought or received treatment. During their current term of incarceration, only half the women had participated in a drug rehabilitation programme, but this varied by institution. Prison B had the most extensive and intensive substance misuse programming, and women incarcerated in this prison were the most likely to receive drug rehabilitation. A not insignificant number of women also participated in programming/support for substance misuse in Prison A. However, few women received substance abuse treatment at Prison C.

Both Prisons A and B had a therapeutic community (TC) programme. This programme was targeted at women with a drug use history, provided intensive rehabilitation and ran for four months. Everyone who participated in TC expressed positivity. The programme was described as informative, engaging, supportive, healing, inspiring and useful for post-release planning. TC encouraged women to strive for a drug-free life that motivates them to stop using drugs.

Solada described TC as the *“best thing”* about being in prison. Mook said TC *“impresses me the most”* because it was *“intensive”*, *“helped”* with *“life planning”*, *“thinking about what to do next”*, and *“you can talk about your feelings, let it out.”* Saengdao appreciated TC because *“she wanted to learn the rehab methods so that I wouldn’t go back to using drugs again.”* Sopa said that after participating in TC, she does not *“think I would go back to drugs anymore”*, and Gamon stated, *“the [programme] activities are helpful, and I think I’ll never use drugs again.”* Lawana verbalised, *“I think the programme is good, it teaches me how to think, how to live my life more carefully. I realised that I won’t be involved with drugs anymore.”* Likewise, Malivalaya pronounced, *“in this programme, they teach me the consequences of drugs. So, I know how badly the drugs will impact on me, both short-term and long-term and these skills, it helps me to stop me from going back to use drugs again.”* Phaelin was inspired by the utilisation of ex-drug users/prisoners as guest speakers. She explained, *“[In TC] they have ex-prisoners [talk to us] and all those who have been through drug addiction and then they stopped using drugs came inside the prison and talked about their experiences of when they went outside. I think that is very useful and I can compare that to myself, that they can do it, why can’t I do it too?”* The inspiration imparted by ex-drug users/prisoners and subsequent incentive to change was also outlined by Thong Thaeng, who explained how TC directed her to post-release support:

*"It teaches how to avoid drugs, how to avoid hanging out with friends that do drugs. They will have people from outside that used drugs and then stopped using drugs came into the prison and talked about their experience. They said that if the prisoners are released to outside and cannot stop using drugs, they can call the centre [narcotics anonymous]. The centre will provide help, help me to stop using drugs. I know that people that came in to give experience, they can stop using drugs. So, I can do it too. it teaches me a lot, and I don't want to waste my time [on drugs] anymore."*

Shorter term drug rehabilitation programmes were also available. In Prison B, there was a "drug rehabilitation programme for drug addicts" that ran for 60 hours over twelve days. In Prison A, women described being involved in a "BMC [Behaviour Modification Curriculum] programme, a rehabilitation programme for those who are drug-user and small scale dealer. BMC ran for 60 hours over 12 days." TC was available to first-time offenders, and appeared open to everyone with a substance misuse problem who had not previously participated in prison drug rehabilitation. TC programme ran for 480 hours over four months.. BMC was described as a shorter version of TC. Phaelin said, "the TC programme is the same as the BMC programme. But the BMC programme is just for one month." During focus group discussions, prison personnel explained that "there is TC or Therapeutic Community which is a 4-month course for those severe drug addicts. BMC or Behaviour Modification Curriculum takes 12 days. It is like an in-patient and out-patient programme for drug addicts." As with TC, women expressed optimism about these condensed rehabilitation initiatives:

*"I find the BMC programme useful because there are guest speakers from outside coming to talk to us about our offence and asking us about the motivation, why we used drugs in the first place and why we sold it. It's all based on our own case, so we get that chance to realise why we did it in the first place. For example, in my case, I realised that I need to stop hanging out with friends with bad influence because they introduced me to nightlife and drugs."*

*"They tell us, for example, to focus ahead. So, the programme taught me to think ahead, focus on the future. For example, myself, I want to continue school. So, [one] side of my brain says do drugs, do drugs, and the other side says focus ahead, you are still young, you must study. I think it is useful because when I go back to the community, I think I will be in the same environment. So, it is easy for me to get access to drugs. But the way they taught me; it will surely make me think differently. So, I think it is very useful."*

In the latter comment, the problem of returning to a drug-using environment was raised alongside the determination needed to face this challenge. Imagining the possibility of a drug-free life on the outside may be easier said than done. While nearly all the women recounted motivation to change, to stop using drugs, life on the outside may pose numerous challenges. For example, Rune explained that while desisting from drug use post-release "depends on ourselves", it was also contingent on "the environment that we are going to be in after release." Waen explained that the BMC programme resulted in her being "determined not to ever use drugs again." However, Waen, like other women, had used drugs to lose weight. Outside the prison walls, she felt pressure to conform to distorted societal standards of feminine beauty. Inside the prison, these expectations dissipated, but Waen knew she would need to face them again post-release. She explained, "I have already gained 10 kilograms, I do hesitate that I sometimes want to use it [yaba] again. Everyone would definitely never want to use it again [when they are in prison], but the pressure, stress, we might go back to it again." Thus, while drug rehabilitation programmes provided the motivation to change and resulted in many women determined to stay the course of a drug-free life, the women's capacity to achieve this post-release may be challenged by wider social circumstance.

#### 6.4.4 Abuse, mental health and trauma recovery

Victimisation, other life adversity, emotional distress/mental illness, substance abuse and offending are often interconnected. Adversity was common in the lives of the women interviewed, and the nexus between emotional distress, substance abuse and offending was frequently recounted. Prison programmes aimed at addressing histories of abuse, mental health and trauma are therefore essential to meeting women's needs and aiding re-entry. Prisons recognised the correlation between these factors. Women's descriptions of the TC and BMC programmes were indicative of this, while pre-release programmes also provided support for emotional well-being. More targeted approaches were also evident via the establishment of Happy Centres in every prison. These centres provided women with a physical space to heal from trauma. The prison's described the centres as being "a life-changing room" where activities were conducted to "help prisoners recover from emotional pain, give them "inspiration", "psychological therapy/mind healing" to "prepare prisoners for reintegration back to the society." In addition to the Happy Centres, every prison provided one-on-one counselling/psychological support to prisoners, and one woman mentioned that she had received psychological support through an art therapy programme.

Jane explained, "we have one psychologist. I'm not sure psychiatrist or psychologist. She is here all the time. So, I talked to her." Other women appeared oblivious to the existence of more targeted mental health programming and support. Aom stated, "there are no counselling services provided to any of us. I don't know what the happy centre is." Morin said, "I did not receive this kind of improvement of mentality [support /programmes to support mental health]." Agun, who had endured both childhood abuse and domestic violence, "never joined" the Happy Centre, and "never heard of any programme" apart from "educational and vocational training, not like an actual programme for mental health." She further expressed, "If there is [a mental health programme], I want to join. I want to know how my mental state is, I want to know where I am."

When asked what the prisons could do better to aid re-entry, a few women suggested the need for more directed mental health support. Tukata stated, "it would be great to have therapists. I strongly believe that if there were therapists, there would be lots of prisoners who would go to them and ask for advice. Some prisoners seem to be quiet and not stressed, but deep inside them, they are stressed."

Also of note, the direct addressing of women's victimisation experiences was negligible from the women's perspectives. Only one woman reported receiving information about domestic violence even though this, along with childhood abuse, played a central role in both her and other women's imprisonment pathways. Khun Mae, a victim of domestic violence, noted that, "in TC, the lecturers talk about domestic violence, how to prevent it. They mention how they were sorry about the violence." However, "I don't know if it changed the way I look at my relationship with my boyfriend [who was domestically violent]. He [the lecturer] talk about many things. I am sorry that my boyfriend did that to me and that I still lived with him."

#### 6.4.5 Religion, exercise and sport

Like vocational training, work and other prison programmes, religion and exercise/sport can lessen the pains of imprisonment. These programmes give women something to do, help to alleviate stress and improve psychological well-being. As noted by Wipa, "I attend a Buddhist programme because I don't want to stay idle." Isra said, "having nothing to do makes me paranoid about things going on outside. So, I decided to join [the Buddhist programme], so I wasn't always thinking so much." Atid told us that participating in the "Islam" programme "helped me psychologically." Nat explained that "yoga makes me feel good. No stress, no thinking. I don't want anything else."

Nutchka expressed, *“it feels good [to pray] because it kills time, it makes time fly faster, and I also pray a lot too. And it feels like kind of like provides mental support.”* Wila explained how participating in a Christian programme in prison resulted in her conversion from Islam. She now *“thinks my life is better”*, and Christianity had become her *“main psychological support.”* Faith and prayer more generally provided women with a sense of comfort and guidance. View related, *“I have been believing in God since I was outside, but I didn’t get a chance to turn to the [Christian] religion because of my environment. But then when I am in here, all my friends became Christian, and they said that if you pray to God, believe in God, it will happen the thing that you believe. So, I decided to believe in God, and I pray, and it works. [It will help me] in the future [post-release], and for now, it supports me like mentally when I’m feeling something bad, I pray, and it helps me with that issue.”*

Religious programmes were viewed by many women as transformative, providing an opportunity to learn, focus thoughts, become calmer people, and as such, helpful not only during imprisonment but also post-release. Chalermwan stated, *“I have become more of a calm person because at first, I was obstinate”*, and Winai imparted, *“the Buddhist meditation programme helps me to be calm and helps with anger management.”* Hom expounded, *“when I first entered prison, I was a bit of a hot-headed person, impulsive. But by attending the Buddhist meditation programme, I have become more of a calm person.”* Sarunya related, *“the Buddhist religious programme is beneficial because it gets me to concentrate.”* Hansa said, *“it teaches me to calm down and stay focussed.”* Aice imparted that *“listening to stories allows us to relax because it’s like they’re using Dharma to teach us. The stories are both entertaining and educating.”* Finally, Benjakalyani explained, *“I liked the Buddhism training programme because it is kind of like an educational programme, like attending a lecture and that tells the story about the history of the Buddha, and I sat there listening to them explaining about the history of the Buddha. It made me think, it made me feel peaceful. [It will help me when I leave] because it helps me to think better, think clearer and concentrate better.”*

## 6.5 Summary

Imprisonment, by its very nature, is oppressive. It severs social ties and can exacerbate rather than address the underlying causes of women’s offending. However, for the women in this research, concrete attempts were being made by prison authorities to ameliorate stress and social/community detachment, and meet women’s specific needs through programming and support. This was evidenced through:

- Prison environments that generally endeavoured to support and heal rather than harm,
- Comprehensive prison visitation regimes,
- Across-the-board delivery of re-entry programmes and attempts at post-release / through-care support,
- Widespread vocational/educational training and prison-based work initiatives,
- Establishment of substance misuse treatment programmes in most prisons,
- Attempts to provide psychological support, address trauma and women’s victimisation histories,
- Provision of other curricula that lessened the pains of imprisonment and supported women therapeutically, i.e. religious and exercise/sports programmes.



Yet despite the best efforts of prison authorities, overcrowded conditions lead to a number of problems. In terms of the general environment, overpopulation meant women felt rushed, uncomfortable, stressed and like they were continually competing for space, water and food, which were sometimes in limited supply. Over-capacity prisons also impacted women's connectedness with loved ones. It likely led to restrictions on the number of letters women were permitted to write and shortened visitation during peak periods (i.e. weekends). Further, low staff-to-prisoner ratios tendered challenges to individualised pre-sentence planning and post-release support / through-care while also necessitating limitations on formal work and vocational training places. Prison overcrowding is a problem of punitive drug laws that have caused exponential prison population growth. This problem is beyond the power of the individual prisons to address. It can be tackled only by governments. In addition to the dilemmas of prison overcrowding, the following are also of concern.

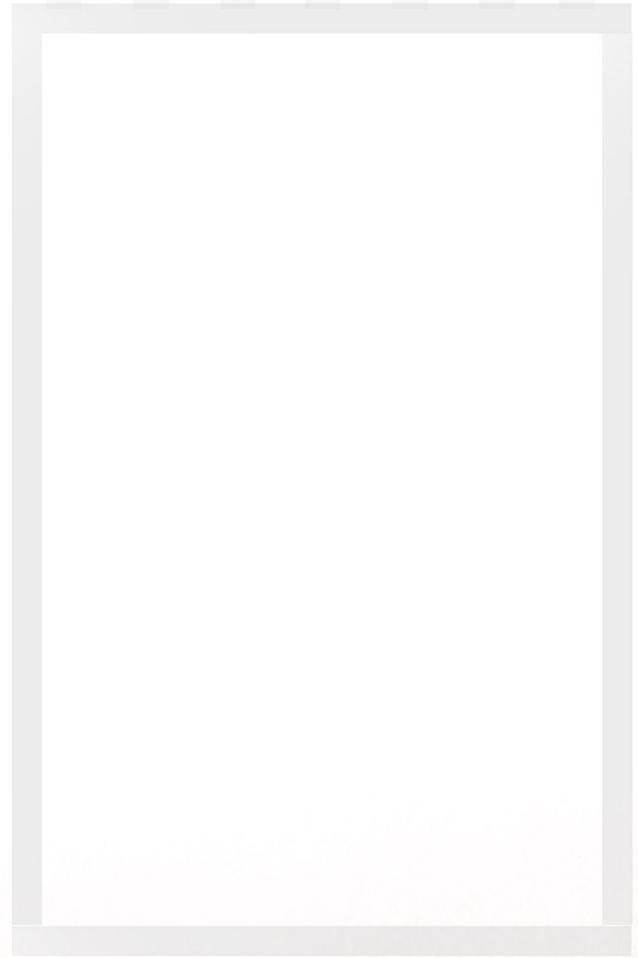
First, despite optimal effort, some women were disconnected from family and other loved ones. Oftentimes, this resulted from external factors beyond the control of prison authorities. Familial distance and economic marginalisation made visitation impractical. However, what also became clear was that prison policy restricted connectedness on the basis of prisoner classification and sentence length. Open visitation, video calling, and the number of letters women were permitted to write were circumscribed for those with a lower classification (e.g. re-imprisoned women). Women serving short sentences were not eligible for open visits. Access to vocational/educational training programmes and work was also restricted on the basis of classification and sentence length, and of pregnancy and being of older age. Obstructing admittance in these ways is counter to the principles of rehabilitation and re-integration. It presents as an additional and seemingly pointless form of punishment. Re-imprisoned women, older and pregnant women likely constitute especially vulnerable groups. For example, being imprisoned and trying to re-integrate back into the community can exacerbate many of the issues that brought women into prison in the first place, including trauma and poverty. Thus, re-imprisoned women may need additional support and care. Excluding pregnant women from the acquisition of employability skills when we know that poverty and familial caretaking contribute to offending further penalises mothers. The provision of educational/vocational training and work opportunities for older women is also important. Elderly women in this study tended to be incarcerated for trying to support their grandchildren through drug offending. Preventing women from participating in programmes and connecting with family/loved ones because of sentence length is also counterintuitive to rehabilitative and re-integrative ideals.

Second, dubiousness was expressed about the transferability of prison-based vocational skills/work to the outside world. While these programmes successfully operated to reduce the pains of imprisonment, it is imperative that women are provided with education, training and work opportunities that increase their prospects of accessing meaningful and adequately paying employment post-release. Women's pathways into prison are frequently characterised by economic marginalisation and familial financial responsibility.

Finally, there was a relative lack of substance misuse treatment/programmes in one prison and an overall sparsity of directed mental health care, particularly regarding victimisation and trauma. This is troubling, given the connection between women's victimisation, trauma, mental health, drug use and offending.

In the next chapter, we consider expectations and experiences of re-entry.





**CHAPTER 7**  
**EXPECTATIONS AND**  
**EXPERIENCES OF RE-ENTRY**

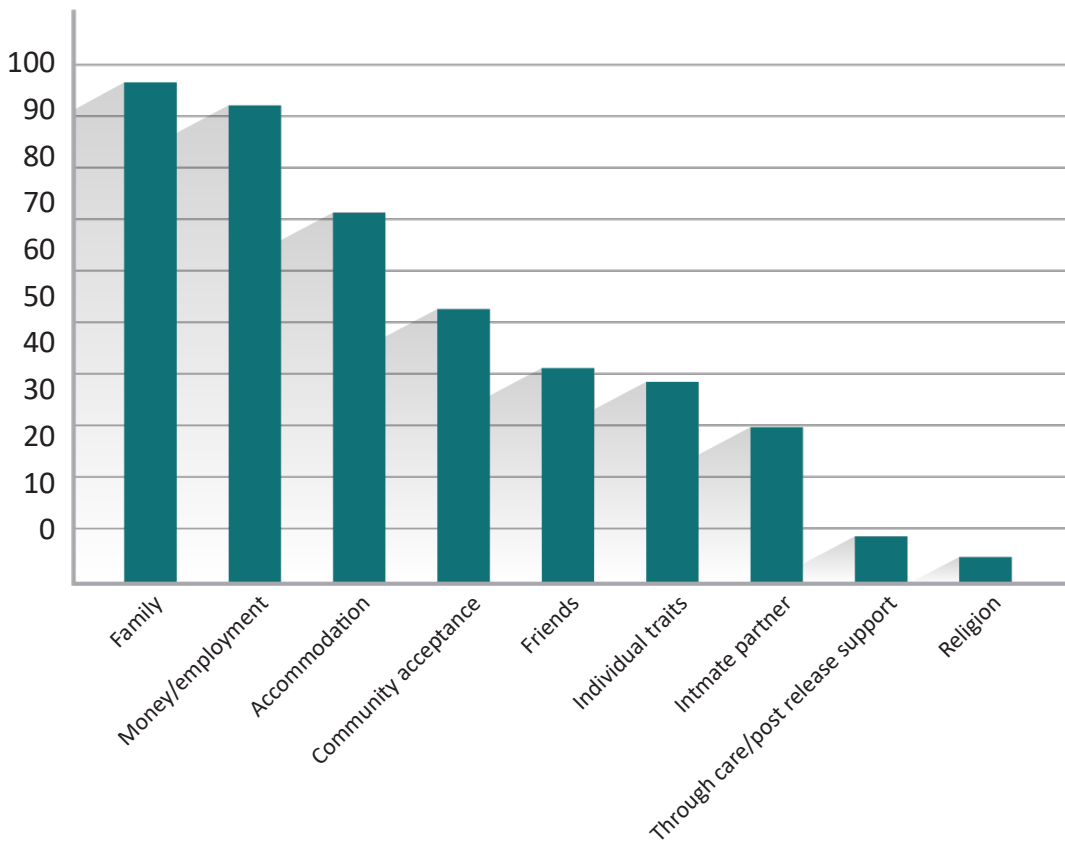


Pathways into prison and experience of imprisonment are inherent in re-entry. As demonstrated in both Chapters 5 and 6, the women who participated in this research had multifaceted and intersecting needs. The particularities of women's requisites and background set them on a pathway to prison, impacting incarcerated experiences and rehabilitative needs prefacing re-entry. In this chapter, we explore women's re-entry expectations and experiences. Utilising the women's voices and those of prison staff, we consider women's re-entry needs, challenges and successes.

## 7.1 Re-entry needs and challenges

A general overview of women's re-entry needs and challenges appears in Figure 10 (below). Overall, family, money/employment and accommodation were underscored as being the foremost factors in women's re-entry. Community acceptance, friendships, intimate partners and individual level traits (e.g. personal fortitude and motivation to change) were also deemed pivotal. Some women mentioned that through-care / post-release support and religion were important. Each of these needs and challenges is discussed in more detail below.

Figure 10: Women's re-entry needs and challenges



It is important to understand that women's re-entry needs and challenges were invariably interchangeable. For example, connection to nurturing, encouraging, normative families were perceptually positive while re-establishing bonds with drug using/selling family members presented as a challenge. Similarly, establishing income security may increase the chances of re-entry success while an inability to establish financial well-being denoted an impediment. Further, the needs/challenges listed in Figure 10 cannot necessarily be siloed from each other. For example, family may be needed to meet women's needs for accommodation, employment and/or money. The ways in which these needs and challenges intersect become clearer below.

### 7.1.1 Money / Employment

Economic marginalisation and the need to financially support families frequently underpinned women's offending. Within the prison system, efforts were being made to equip women with skills and/or support to increase their chances of post-release economic survival, although the transferability of these skills was being questioned. Further, women often faced the prospect of leaving prison with no savings. It will be recalled that the dividend paid for prison work (for those eligible for formal work) was not substantial. Thus, at the point of release, as expressed by Ratana, *"you have to start from zero."* Concurrently, the ex-inmate label posed challenges to post-release economic security.

For prison staff, the women's ability to secure a livelihood was pivotal to re-entry. As noted in one focus group, *"if they go out and find a good job, they will not come back."* Imprisoned women mirrored this sentiment by expressing that what they needed post-release was *"to make money"* and *"find a job."* Hom explained that her chances of re-offending (i.e. selling drugs again) *"depended on if I would be able to get a job or not, would I have enough income."* Leila similarly expressed, *"if I have stable work, I won't go back [to selling drugs] again."* Charoenrasamee explained, *"I think the challenge would be finding a job. Because if I find a job, I will be able to earn money. I will have a good life. But for those who couldn't find a job, these people might come back to committing crimes."* Thus, securing employment is important, but it does need to be stable and adequately paid.

However, both prison personnel and women expressed that there could be challenges in securing a post-release living. Areeya reflected on the angst felt: *"I think the issue in here, what everyone has in common is that no one knows whether they will get a job."* This uncertainty came from the realisation that employers may discriminate against formerly incarcerated women. Pop noted, *"I'm an ex-prisoner, some employers might consider that as a big issue."* Likewise, Waan said, *"it could be very difficult to apply for a job because I now have a criminal record."* Khemkhaeng expressed, *"I'm afraid they won't accept me to work"*, and Kla concurred, *"I feel like when we are about to be released, maybe the community or people don't accept us. I feel that [women in prison] are scared that they cannot get work."* Prison personnel agreed that many pre-release women were worried that *"if they apply to a job, will they check the criminal record? If so, will they fire them? Some of them have been employed over a year, then the company secretly checked their criminal records. They just want to have a legal job to look after themselves, but there is no way for them to do so [because of their criminal histories]."* Further, finding work requires money. Aice expressed, *"I worry about the money because it takes money to find a job, to travel, to get to work [the potential place of employment]."*

The economic marginality women face prior to imprisonment may thus be exacerbated by serving time. As outlined in Chapter 6, formal work within the prison paid little and post-release savings were rare. Women regularly left prison penniless, and this, alongside the ex-inmate label, restricted their chances of finding stable and adequately paying work. The concerns expressed pre-release were not without basis. Re-imprisoned women (in Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4) narrated post-release financial insecurity as a central theme in their re-offending. In the interviews with women post-release (Group 5), economic insecurity was also narrated as a key challenge.

Aum struggled to find employment post-release because she had no savings and needed money to find work. Despite these challenges, she did find employment in a factory but was laid off after a year. Up until this point, Aum had not used or sold drugs. However, despite her best efforts, Aum could not find another job and needed to provide for her children. This was her turning point back to drug using, selling and eventually re-imprisonment. She explains:

*After I was released, it was a struggle. I had nothing after I got out. I had no money from living in here [prison]. When I was in here, I didn't get to work. Before this, I had been selling drugs to earn money. So, when I was released, I was confused. I didn't know how to begin my life again. I didn't have any clothes. I didn't have a job. Everything was very difficult. When you apply for a job, there are many expenses that you must cover. A mode of transport you must drive there, clothing, medical examinations, things like that. Some factories, you must also pay for the uniforms yourself. And the medical examination for some factories cost over 1,000 baht. I started working. It was [financially] difficult. I worked in a factory for over a year but then didn't have a job. I couldn't find another job. I tried. It costs money to find a job. At that time, everything was a burden. I had to ask my mother for some money, while her income wasn't all that good either. I had to send my children to school. After that, I stayed at home and sold drugs.*

Som Wang similarly struggled to find work post release, and as result returned to drug selling to support herself and her child. She explained, “some friends suggested legitimate jobs for me. But then I applied for it, and I didn't get the job because of the record and then I got pregnant. And after I had the baby, I started to think a lot more about the money, and I couldn't get any job. So, I got back to delivering drugs.” Lawan also explained that she was unable to find work post-release due to her ex-inmate label. She expressed angst over the disjuncture between what she had been told in prison and what she faced outside prison walls:

Honey had cycled in and out of prison several times. Post-release, she was always able to secure work on construction sites with the aid of her husband, but it was unstable and low-paid, and her husband was domestically violent. Honey wanted to leave her husband but stayed because of the work they were able to secure together, inadequate though it was. Honey invariably re-offended because *“the work at the construction site wasn’t that stable. Sometimes, they didn’t have any job for me to do. If there was no job for me, then we couldn’t afford the electricity, water bills and rent. If we [she and her husband] didn’t have any construction work that month, then we are broke. And I had to support my family. [The income] wasn’t stable [but] I always get money when I sell drugs.”*

Prison staff explained that the problem of securing employment meant that *“most of the women who became successful are not company employees; they are freelancers and business owners.”* Aom similarly noted, *“I think that after I’m released, I must start from zero again. So, I’ll probably have to be a merchant since it’s the only job I can do. It would be hard to apply for any other job.”* However, becoming a freelancer/merchant/business owner requires money to begin with. Pre-release Totsaken had wanted to start her own business but explained, *“I have no funding”*. She stated, *“I have to [find] work or do something to earn money first.”* Pitima said, *“but in order to be selling things or doing anything else, we would need to start from having funds and no one released would have any.”* In a post-release interview, Supichaya narrated that since her return to the community she had been able to secure only low-paying unstable employment as a general labourer. She explained that with financial backing to start her own business, life might be easier:

*“I would like to receive some funds. It would be better if I had a chance to invest in a small business, like selling things. So, I could make some profit. Because having 50-200 baht per day is not enough. I do whatever they hire me to do. It can be anything. Like these days, they hire me to cut the grass. My job is not stable. Someday there is a job for me, but someday there is no job. Lacking money is the main challenge out here. Sometimes, it is not enough to pay the electricity and water bills.”*

Mae Noi was serving her second term of imprisonment. When released the first time, she planned to become a small merchant selling products to people in her community. However, once again, a lack of funding prevented this from happening. Mae Noi had limited education, and a mother and children to support. She could only find low-paying and unstable work as a general labourer. She narrated how in desperation she started to sell drugs again:

*“When I left prison, I wanted to get money and start selling things. Because my house is in an area where I can sell stuff. I wanted my children to have a better life than I had. My babies were still young. I was responsible for my mother. I have a low education. I don’t have someone to help on the outside. Everything was empty for me. I didn’t know where to start. I had to feed my babies and needed money for it. I applied but couldn’t get a job, so I had to work as a general worker [but] it depends on the day. The money wasn’t enough, so I went back to selling drugs. I didn’t want to do it, but I had to do it.”*

During a post-release interview, Chaveevan explicated how her plans to start a sewing business were not going as expected. She also needed to source/save money to 'get her business off the ground', but this was not forthcoming. At best, Chaveevan could be described as barely surviving on the money she was able to earn as general labourer. She said:

*"I had nothing when I left the prison. I can't do anything because they [the prison / the organisation providing post-release support] didn't give me money and I don't have equipment. I haven't received any money for my business. I don't have any income for now. Only the money is the obstacle. Money. It would make my life better. But I don't have money to [start my business]. The income I'm receiving these days [working as a general labourer] is just enough for day-to-day living but I don't get my earnings every day. I only receive it when I work."*

Ubol also desired to have her business. During a post-release interview, she narrated that "money" was her biggest challenge. She wanted to "buy some cheap clothes, then sell them in the community", but securing the funding was difficult. Finding employment was challenging. Ubol was only qualified to work in factories but they "don't like ex-prisoners." Eventually, she secured a small loan from a post-release community service provider. This helped for a time. However, Ubol "didn't have more money. Like I bought 20-30 outfits, then that's it. I couldn't make more money from selling these clothes. The money is now gone."

### 7.1.2 Family

We know that familial bonds can aid women's re-entry success, including reducing the likelihood of re-offending. Families are a crucial source of assistance, providing both emotional and practical support. Thus, the maintenance of family ties during incarceration is important and as demonstrated in the previous chapter, prison authorities were making every effort in this regard.

The importance of familial connection was evidenced by the fact that nearly every woman prior to release highlighted the centrality of family to re-entry (see Figure 10). The women told us that "family is very important." For example, Madee expressed, "I used to think that family isn't important to me. But now I've changed and think family is the most important to me. They are the only things I want to start my life again." Prison staff concurred that "family; this is the most important factor" for women post-release.

During pre-release interviews, families were narrated by the women as offering love, encouragement, understanding, emotional security, strength, a sense of purpose, belonging and responsibility. Women expressed that family "are the biggest encouragement," "love you," "always stay," "give you support by fighting for you in every way," "never leave your side," "support you with everything," give you "courage" and are the "most important thing" in life. Phloi told us, "I think the relationship with the family is really important because when I moved in here, I got to realise who loved me the most. We all know now that families always stay." Yindee said, "I'm not afraid at all [of re-entry]. Everyone around me, including my sisters, they all are there for me. They support me with everything." Baifern confirmed, "I'm not worried much [about re-entry] because I have my family to support me, I have the children, I have the grandmother and I can take everything step by step." Kamlai told us, "I think the family is very important because the family will be the first one who understands me. If my family will not understand me, no one else will. I think that's why family is important."



Taeng explained that for her, her responsibility to her family would give her purpose post-release. She wanted to repay her family for the hardship caused by her imprisonment. Taeng's family had stood by her throughout her incarceration, and when she re-entered the community Taeng wanted to *"help them back. They never left me alone even when I am here and sometimes, they don't have money. It is my turn to pay them back."* Likewise, Yanisa explained that once she was released, *"I will earn money. And I will let them [family] take some rest. I'll be the one who takes care of them. I will ask my grandmother to quit her job and stay home. I will be the one who works and earns money."* Sanan Nam similarly verbalised, *"I am not planning to get involved in the drug business again because my mother is getting old and I have to take care of her."* Comparable sentiments relating to the sense of purpose and responsibility offered by familial relationships appear below:

*"I plan to sell grilled pork and give some money to my oldest kid. Because when I am in here, he sometimes works at the construction site, collecting wood and everything. And when he got the money, he gave me the money. He didn't continue his school right now. He's only 18. And also, I have to take care of my mother."*

*"My mother is 57 years old, quite old and she doesn't have a husband anymore. She is by herself. I feel pity for mother that she is getting old. I want to take care of her and my kids."*

Corresponding with purposefulness and responsibility, families also afforded an incentive for change. Prior to their release, women frequently identified families, particularly mothers, grandparents and children, as giving them the motivation to stop drug use and offending. Mekhala explained that for her, responsibility to family gave her purpose and the determination not to return to prison. She said, *"I have a family to be responsible for. So that is important for me. I hope to go back and live with my baby, with my family and get to work and earn some money to provide for the family. I can't go back to where I was. I don't want to end up here again."* Nutnicha said, *"I will get a job. I won't be involved with drugs anymore. I will make my children proud of me."* Chompoo similarly expressed, *"from now on, I will behave, especially for my mother because she faced difficulties because she has to send money for me in here."* Other examples of the nexus between familial responsibility and motivation to change are presented below:

*"I don't want to bother them [family] anymore. This time that I am going to be released, I will try my best to establish myself and be able to take good care of them. I will not be a bad person again. I will not go back to drugs. I will not leave my children like that ever again."*

*"This time it is going to be very much different [I will not re-offend]. Because I intend to help my mother in selling vegetables because my mother is very old now and my younger brother is very .... he takes up a lot of the burden because he must be responsible for me and the family. I feel like I don't want to be anyone's burden. I feel sorry for the family."*

*"I am a mother. I have a child and I have another one that I adopted. We have become good family. He makes himself study, finish his education and works at 7/11. He tries his best and my son needs me most. So, I cannot do any wrong. My son wants us to be a happy family. Don't do it again mother, he is talking like that."*

*"I already felt bad for my children. I miss them so much. And I don't want to go back to prison again. I want to be with my children. For me, it's not too late to have a new life and be a good person."*

*"I do not want my children to struggle, I don't want my children to meet me through the mirror during the visit. I want my children to study, to stay with me."*

During interviews with the women post-release, similar sentiments pertaining to the centrality of the family to women's emotional well-being were conveyed. Ittiporn explained that since she had left prison, her family "support and encourage me." Chilai expounded, "I can see how important my family is. If I didn't have them, then my life would for sure be a mess. But now, I know that my family is always here by my side. They give me good advice and support me." Dok Rak explained how her family gave her the impetus for change: "I used to think that there was nothing I can do, and my life would be like a cycle of going in and out of the prison due to the drug-related issues. But now, I have changed. My thoughts have changed. I don't want to be separated from my family anymore." Likewise, Isra described how her family gave her the motivation to change and supported her to remain drug-free. She said, "I used to be someone who did not listen to anybody, not even my family. But after I was released, I listen to them. And I feel like I want to do something for them. I know that they are important to me." When asked whether she had ever been tempted to return to drugs since returning to her community, Isra explicated, "no, not at all, because I'm surrounded by family who always makes me concerned about the negative effects of drugs. My children always ask me about where I am heading to. And if I left home for too long, they would call or come after me."

Conversely, the chances of re-entry success were thought to decrease for women who experienced familial estrangement and dysfunction. This was explicated during the pre-release interviews. Women reflected on the difficulties that others might face when trying to return to society without familial backing. Earn said, *“I think it would be harder [re-turning to community] for them [without families], because when we have family, we have all the support. That is why it is harder for them if you don’t have a family.”* Gypsiaa explained, *“for me, yes, I can say no to the drugs. But for others who have no relatives, they have no choice”,* and Jenny explained, *“I think reoffenders are the people who do not have a family to go back to. So, they go back to the same path and just repeat.”* Chet illuminated that in prison, there were two groups of women - those with families and those without. The latter, she said, were particularly defenceless at re-entry, *“there is another group they don’t have any family members or relatives to visit them at all. These people are in need most. This group, they are vulnerable.”* Som Kid expressed concern for those women with problematic familial dynamics. She said, *“once you go back [to the community] some people have a problem with family or lack of love, that may be the problem [why women re-offend].”* Chet continued, *“I have talked with many girls here, many times they come back. Their families have broken down, and they stay here since they are teenagers and come back because of the drugs and do it again. Family is not there anymore, separated parents. I saw many cases like this. Some other cases, they are over 30 years old, this group doesn’t know where to start, they don’t have relatives to visit them, they are struggling in their lives with drugs.”*

In addition to emotional support, families were narrated as being crucial for practical assistance, supporting women’s re-integration via the provision of money, housing and employment opportunities. Ying explained how her family would support her in finding work post-release *“I got my aunt, she already offered me a job. I think family support is important for me. This is because my mother plans the whole thing for me, including the job with the aunt.”* Sup’s stepfather had found her employment: *“my stepfather said that he already got me a job with his friend. It has something to do with selling spare parts for telephones.”* Fon told us that her adult daughter would provide her with both accommodation and financial support: *“my [adult] daughter asked me to just stay home, and not work anymore. And she is happy. I’m happy too. So, I’m quite relieved that there is someone out there for me. Someone who loves and cares about me. I’m glad that I’m not forgotten. My family, my daughter. She will take care of everything.”* Likewise, Thidarat planned to live with her adult daughter who would provide her with purpose and financial support: *“family is my goal. My daughter asked me to raise grandbaby for her and she will give me money. Asked me stay home and raise my grandbaby.”* The importance of family in terms of accommodation and financial support is similarly demonstrated in the quotes below from the women pre-release:

*"My plan would be going back to live with my mother and my children. My father already talked to me about this, and he offered to open a grocery store for me at my mother's place so that we can sell and earn a living from that."*

*I will go back to where my great-grandmother lives. She is old, and my mother wants me to go back to live with her. And if I want to open a shop or sell anything, my mother will help financially support."*

*"My mother and father told me that I should go back, stay with them, and help them with the rubber trees, so I won't be back to those drugs again. They showed me how much they love me and that they really love me. They asked if I will be able to do that. And my answer is yes."*

*"I will go home and make mongo paste. I have all of the equipment. What I need would be money for the ingredients, and that's it. This is something I like, and I could stay home while making the paste. My children would give me money. They always give me money."*

*"My mother says that she will handle everything for me. And my mother assures me that I will not have to be afraid or worry about anything, no matter money, work or the house or anything."*

Post-release, the importance of practical familial assistance was also narrated. Ittiporn told us that her family *"give me some food; they let me stay at their place and go to work."* Dok Rak explained, *"I had nothing when I left the prison. But my family provided me some money, clothes, and a place to stay,"* and Isra's *"siblings support me with a place to live."*

On the other hand, during pre-release interviews, women explained how familial disconnection meant women *"don't have a home, they don't know where to go. Who will 'provide for them, offer them a job?'"* Araya said, *"I have the family who is ready to support me in all aspects of life, if someone doesn't have the family to support them, they have to think a lot about things like how do I get to eat today? Where do I go to live?"* Yanisa similarly narrated, *"I think it must be really hard [for women who do not have family to support them] because they do not know where to live or where to get a job. So, they don't have any plan."* Janjira expressed, *"if I didn't have family out there, then I wouldn't know where to go or what to do",* and Rune explained, *"I think it's really good to have family outside compared to those who don't because I can move in with them and start a life."*

Overall, family connection was thus presented as crucial to re-entry success and re-offending reduction. In contrast, women without families and those deprived of familial love and support were perceptually more likely to face post-release challenges. Further, for some women, post-release family reunification meant having to grapple with the same issues that led them on a pathway to prison in the first place. This included issues associated with the intersection between economic marginalisation and familial caregiving responsibilities as well as returning to families ravaged by drug abuse/offending.

For example, prior to imprisonment Shanoh sold drugs because she was her family's "main source of income". Pre-release Shanoh explained that while she did not want to sell drugs again, this depended on "the income of my family. If I would be able to get a job or not. Would I have enough income" to support my family. Thus, Shanoh was still attempting to grapple with the issue that had brought her into prison in the first place; economic deprivation, likely to be exacerbated by the ex-inmate label, against the backdrop of daughter duty. Sasithorn was in prison for selling yaba to support her grandchildren because her drug-using adult son was unable to take responsibility for them. She expressed concern prior to release about how she would support herself, and the need to provide for her grandchildren weighed particularly hard on her. Sasithorn had a grade 1 level of education and because she was older had not participated in any meaningful vocational/educational training in prison. She expressed grave concern about her release saying, "I never told anyone. Not even the prison officers. This is the first time I'm telling this. I cannot depend on my children at all. I want the children to stop using drugs and the grandchildren to go to school. I'm a bit afraid that my [adult] child will go back to addiction again. My [adult] children are lazy. They don't work."

Kannika explained how her "family environment" would be the biggest challenge she faced post-release because "I will see my cousins [who use and sell drugs] when I'm released. They still stay at the same house [her re-entry accommodation] that I was arrested in." Likewise, Pitima said, "I might get tempted to get drugs again if I stay in the big family house or go back to see my kids [who use drugs]. My kids are grown up; they are married. There is no need for me to go and see them, visit them. I don't want any opportunity to get tempted and be involved in drugs anymore." Rune also recognised that returning to her familial accommodation compound might pose a challenge for her. She explained, "I will live with my mother, my brother, my son, my daughter-in-law, and my daughter". Rune's brother and son used drugs, but she said, "I won't let any drugs be in my housing area. If someone brought it in, then I would cut him/her out of my family. I'm in trouble because of drugs and because of them." While Rune's determination is admirable, her ability to expel drug-using family members may prove difficult.

The challenges faced at re-entry as a result of economic marginalisation, family environments and caretaking were also highlighted during interviews with re-imprisoned women (in Group 4). Consider the following narrative from Ink, who had recently returned to prison:

*"I got arrested this time because I went back to the same environment where my mother-in-law was selling drugs. Even though she got arrested before me this time, I had to sell drugs in the same family environment. I did try to talk to my husband about moving out because she was still selling drugs constantly. And the reason she was selling drugs was because her children didn't provide her any money. They didn't support her financially. And they left her many grandchildren to raise. So, she had to sell drugs to earn money. And we lived with her so we couldn't get away from selling. It's because of the financial situation of my family. We had children and couldn't afford to rent our own place. So, we lived with her."*

Finally, and mirroring the women's narratives, the centrality of family to post-release outcomes, both positive and negative, were highlighted by prison personnel. This is demonstrated below, in excerpts taken from focus group discussions:

*"I think that the primary factor that misled them [post-release] is their family mostly because they do not have good family support. If they have family who they can talk to or give support, they are likely not to re-enter. They need to have someone who understands them. Drugs are like ex-boyfriends, they are always in the heart, they will always be missed and ready to go back. There is one thing, if the family do it [drugs], they cannot escape. If they have a family, we are not so worried about them, that means they have a home to live in. We are more worried about those who do not have family. And those who have family are likely not to re-offend. But those do not have anyone are more likely to re-offend. If they have kids, they need to financially support them. If the family are old, they need to support them."*

### 7.1.3 Accommodation

For the women in this research, securing "a place to live" post-release was a fundamental re-entry need. As demonstrated in the previous section, locating a home very much depended on familial connections. The extended family networks so central to Thai society provided many women with an accommodation safety net, both before and after imprisonment. Consequently, while many women acknowledged that having accommodation was important, it was not something that concerned them personally because: "I already have a home," "I already have a place to stay, so its fine."

For most, the re-entry plan was to live with family. Rarely, this encompassed intimate partners and male family members. More often, women narrated that their post-release homes would be with female kin, namely mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins or adult daughters. Thus, the women told us: "I will go back to where my great-grandmother lives," "I will go back to live with my mother," "basically I would go back to stay with my mother," "I will stay with my grandmother," "my sister told me that she wanted me to stay at home with her," "I will stay with my sister," "my cousin, I'm going to stay in her house," "my aunt and mother want me to go live with them," "my daughter asked me to be with her and just stay home." For those who were mothers, female family members (usually the woman's mother or grandmother) had typically been the primary caregivers of children while the women were imprisoned. Thus, returning home to female kin also meant reuniting with children. As noted by Rochana, "my plan would be going back to live with my mother and my children."

However, as also noted above, going home could mean resuming life in contexts characterised by familial drug use/offending. In addition, some women felt anxious because their post-release accommodation was in a “red zone.” Living in familial homes where drug use/offending is normative and/or in atrophied communities decimated by illicit drugs is likely to increase the risk of re-offending and re-incarceration. Amy explained that she did not want to go “back to the (slum area/red zone), I might get addicted to drugs again.” Likewise, prison staff explained that the chances of re-offending increased for women who “live in the drugs red zone.” Additionally, Phairoh feared being targeted by the police because her post-release accommodation was in a red zone. She explained, “but to be honest, I don’t want to live there. I’m afraid. I always got arrested in that area. I’m not going to be involved with drugs anymore, but I’m still scared because when the police know that I’m released, they would keep an eye on me for sure.” Prior research has shown that law enforcement in Thailand’s red zones tends to be aggressive and involves injustices, human rights abuses and corruption. This includes the arrest of seemingly innocent people (Hayashi et al., 2013). Phairoh’s fears are thus not without substance. Aware of the risks posed by living in these types of areas, other women explained they could not return and needed to find alternative accommodation. Thus, Chan explained that while she “considered returning to the area where I lived, there are lots of drug addicts and teenagers who used drugs around that area, a lot of drug problems,” she decided to “live with my aunt” because “there’s not a lot of drug problems” in that area.

The importance of pre-release accommodation was also explicated by re-imprisoned women whilst reflecting on their repeat offending. Phitsamai was estranged from her family due to her drug addiction and had experienced homelessness at certain points in her life. At one point, she resided in a red zone with her drug using/dealing intimate partner until they separated. She explained that when she was released from prison the first time, she had no money and nowhere to go. Phitsamai narrated, “I didn’t know where to start; housing was the hardest thing. When I was released, I was homeless. So, I stayed on the side of the road.” Phitsamai eventually returned to the red zone where she had previously resided with her boyfriend. Here drugs were easily accessible, and Phitsamai sold them to support herself. Seven months later, she was back in prison. At the time of the interview, Phitsamai was due for release in a few months and expressed, “I’m worried about housing.” However, during her current imprisonment term, Phitsamai had managed to reconnect with her mother through written correspondence, and in the interim, at least, her pre-release plan was to “go and see her [mother].”

Another re-imprisoned woman, Bow, had lived with poverty her entire life. Bow had no family support; her mother had recently passed away, and she had no other family. The first time that she was released Bow had attempted to live with her mother, who resided in a home provided by a “housing programme for the poor.” Unfortunately, “the head of the village didn’t want me to stay in the house because I deal with drugs and everything.” Bow was then essentially homeless. She couch-surfed, living at the homes of friends and moving from place to place. Couch surfing denotes a secondary form of homelessness characterised by moving from accommodation to accommodation with no fixed address. She explained, “I lived at my friend’s house and changed house to many different houses.” Eventually, a few months after being released, Bow sold drugs to support herself. Prior to release this time, she told us that “housing and money” remained her biggest pre-release concerns. Bow planned to “go back to the housing programme for the poor first” but felt uncertain about whether “the head of the village will allow me to stay. Because I’m an ex-prisoner. If he doesn’t allow me, then I’ll have to go. But I don’t know where to go.”

Similarly, during a post-release interview, Ratanaporn narrated that she was struggling to find a place to call home. Ratanaporn was couch surfing between the homes of different family members. Her *“house is too ruined to live in. No one could stay in that place. There are holes everywhere, and all the trees and unwanted plants cover the whole house. It is now very dangerous, from both the very old structure and the thieves.”* Ratanaporn’s unstable living arrangements were not likely to dissipate anytime soon. She explained, *“I want to live in my own house [but] I don’t have money to do so because the income I’m receiving these days is just enough for day-to-day living.”*

Thus, the ability to secure a stable and suitable home was an important post-release need. However, this posed a challenge for women without family and/or economic means, or for those returning to familial or community environments where drugs proliferated. We know that there is a strong correlation between poor accommodation and negative outcomes for formerly incarcerated women. There is evidence for this in the prior research and above. Given the importance of accommodation to women’s re-entry success, during pre-release interviews, several women suggested that initiatives should be put in place for at-risk women. Aom advocated for women to receive support to find *“a place to live after this because lots of people have no idea where to go to after they are released.”* Suda proposed, *“if we have more info on where we can really move to, that will be great because that means we will get more options for our life. Some people that I know went to live in the dangerous zone, the red zone, like in the slum or someplace like that, and that’s the reason why they got involved in criminal activities again. If there is a programme or a list to help us know what we should do after this, that will be great.”* Pimchan said, *“many people when on their release, they don’t have home, they don’t have accommodation. So, it will be nice if the prison helps to find a place for them to stay or live comfortably. Not in my case but I see many friends who have that problem, and I want it to be improved.”* Ink submitted, *“I think there should be a foundation for those who don’t have a family, a home to go back to. So, they won’t go back to the same path.”*

### 7.1.4 Intimate partners

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, women’s victimisation and associated trauma via intimate relationships contributed to their imprisonment pathways. Thus, unsurprisingly, abusive and criminal partners were also found to create difficulties for women leaving prison. Abusive men can make re-entry hazardous. One consequence is women returning to drug use as a coping device. Consider the post-release stories below and Sroy’s previous narrative (in section 5.1.2).



*“After I left prison, I had no idea what to do. At first, my mother told me to go to my aunt’s house in Bangkok. But the plan changed. She told my older brother to pick me up, but he never showed up. Then, I didn’t know what to do, so I went back to my boyfriend’s house. After that my life went downhill again [started to use drugs]. My boyfriend was a very jealous type, he got pissed and whiny because I sometimes didn’t pick up the phone. One day, he called and told me that he was waiting in front of my street and asked where I lived. He was drunk. And you know when he’s drunk, he’s always out of control. He accused me of having an affair, pushed me into the car and hit me several times. I was shocked, stunned and embarrassed by people who saw. We reconciled for a bit after that. Then, he was mad again. He kept calling me but never listened to me. He got angry. Once he grabbed a knife and chased after me.”*

*“I had a new boyfriend. This one was the worst. He kicked me and physically abused me. He was addicted to drugs. I started using drug again. My life is gone. And I didn’t know what to do”*

Women in abusive relationships may also feel pressured into further drug offending. Gam explained that after being released from prison the first time she had *“a boyfriend and he is the reason why I’m here. This one, he used drugs, he sold it. He is also addicted to gambling and alcohol. He hit me even harder than the previous one. He hit me so hard that I lost my teeth. My boyfriend’s friend called and asked my boyfriend to bring the drugs for him, but my boyfriend was sleeping. So, I did it on his behalf. Once I was driving back home, the police just showed up And I was arrested.”*

Even if intimate partners are not overtly abusive, romantic relationships with drug using/selling men can set formerly incarcerated women on a pathway back to prison. Consider the following accounts from re-imprisoned women. In every case, women had committed themselves to a drug-free post-imprisonment life. Initially, all succeeded in this goal but were eventually derailed by romantic relationships with drug-offending men.

*“At the time, I only wanted to stop using drugs after release. I didn’t really think about my needs from others. I only wanted to go back to my home and stop using drugs. But I think the reason I started using drugs again is because I went back to my boyfriend’s house.”*

*“I was busy with my restaurant. I sold food every day, and I got customers too. I didn’t get involved in drugs again until my boyfriend was released from the prison. It went back to the same thing. I went back to drugs again. I didn’t open my restaurant every day. I sometimes just closed it. My life went back to the same old things. It was just like before he went to prison.”*

*“After I was released, I didn’t use drugs for two years. Then I met my other boyfriend. He sold drugs. One day, he was arrested. But the drugs were still there. I was so stressed. So, I sold them. I started using drugs again, and the money I received from selling drugs, I gave some to my boyfriend in prison. “*

Another post-release theme was that of men causing women anguish by having extramarital affairs. It will be recalled that infidelity was also recounted in women's stories of their pathways to prison. Here, the fracturing of intimate bonds by unfaithful husbands/boyfriends was common, and women would start using drugs to deal with the emotional angst this caused. Similarly, post-imprisonment, the upset instigated by adultery invariably triggered a return to drug use as a form of self-medication. Dok Rak left prison to live with her boyfriend, who *"had an affair. So, I moved back home, and I was so addicted to drugs this time. I was so sad."* Likewise, Lamon told us how arguments with her unfaithful husband caused her to return to drugs post-release. She said, *"then later we had arguments because he cheated on me. And when I got home, I used drugs. That was the turning point. Every time that we had arguments, I used drugs every time. I didn't know what to do."* Yu-Phin and Naadir had arranged to return to their intimate partners post-release. However, when they arrived home, they discovered other women in their place. In that moment, it felt as though the women's re-entry goals and dreams were smashed, and they turned to back to drugs for comfort.

*"I planned that I would go back to my husband-the one who is the father of my child. Then I would sell something, like a small business and not use drugs again. But I found out that he had a new wife. So, I had to change the plan and find a new place to stay. And now, I'm trying to find a job. At that time, I was sad. So, I went back to drugs. I didn't understand what or why things were like that." (Yu-Phin)*

*"The plan was that after the release, I will go to meet my boyfriend and ask him for some amount of money, enough for me to start a new business. What happened in real life is that when I went to that place, he already had a new family. So, I didn't get the money, and I started using drugs again." (Naadir)*

During pre-release interviews, only two women explicated romantic relationships likely to provide post-release comfort and support. Chaem Choi described her husband as *"the best"*; he *"never used drugs, alcohol or anything."* In this case, Chaem Choi's drug offending had occurred within the context of her friendship groups. Her husband was clueless until Chaem Choi was arrested. She explained that her husband *"hated"* drugs. During imprisonment, Chaem Choi's husband had stood by her, depositing money into her prison account and visiting her *"every week."* On release, Chaem Choi planned to refrain from future drug use, living and working alongside her husband in their *"pet food shop."* With the support of her husband, Chaem Choi was certain that she would achieve her goals. Also, Leila was in prison because of friendship. She had never used drugs. Leila explained that the police *"found drugs in her [friend's] handbag."* They were together in Leila's car. She recounted, *"because the car belonged to me, I was arrested."* Leila's husband had nothing to do with drugs and was a good man. Like Chaem Choi, he had supported his wife throughout her incarceration. Post-release, Leila *"had a plan and my husband is totally supporting me. If I want some money, he would give me some money. I plan to open a small restaurant. I am luckier than many other people."*

For the other women, intimate relationships formed prior to imprisonment were constructed in one of two ways. First, women appeared oblivious to the perils tendered by re-constituting dysfunctional (sometimes abusive) relationships with the drug-offending men who had contributed to their original imprisonment pathway. Da, for example, planned to return to her boyfriend post-release even though *“he was the one that I dated at the time I was arrested, it was the exact same situation, the same case, the same charge.”* She had *“confessed”* to the police to protect her boyfriend from *“13 years”* in prison. The police explained that if she confessed both would be imprisoned but for relatively short periods. Serving time together for the same crime was construed by Da as a romantic bonding experience. She said, *“because I loved him, I wanted to be here [in prison] and go through this together.”* Her boyfriend had recently been released from prison but *“now that he has been released, he never came back to visit.”* Despite this, Da *“plans on going back to him.”* Likewise, Bam was looking forward to living with her boyfriend, who would be released from prison *“a month”* before her. She said, *“I’m not going to do drugs. I plan not to use it even if he starts using it again.”* Kaarlo expounded that her re-entry plan was to *“go back and live with my boyfriend,”* even though he misused drugs and was domestically violent. Kaarlo seemed confident that her boyfriend would not hurt her again and all would be well. Aligning with the women’s narratives, prison personnel voiced alarm about the re-integration hazards posed by dysfunctional romantic relationships alongside exasperation at women’s blindness when it came to dysfunctional romantic love: *“There was this one case where she came for advice about whether she should choose her own family or her boyfriend. She was about to go out, she did not want to associate with drugs again. And in this case, she ended up going to her boyfriend because she loves him. They cannot think.”*

A second group of women articulated an awareness of the risks posed by such romantic entanglements. These women either planned to completely stay away from these intimate relationships (past or future) or intended to sever romantic bonds if boyfriends/husbands drug-offended in the future. Oftentimes, these decisions were made within milieus of maternal concern and love of family. Kamala explained how, with her mother’s input, she decided to separate from her boyfriend. She told us, *“I’m not going to stay with my boyfriend anymore. I am afraid that if I go back to live with my boyfriend, things will come back to how they used to be. My mother asked me to cut the ties to him. She desperately asked me [to do this]. I have decided to live separately. I feel okay about losing my boyfriend but not my mother.”* Chompoo was also empowered to sever ties with her *“selfish”* drug-offending partner. Like Kamala, Chompoo’s mother encouraged this decision. She said, *“I am sure that I am not going back to him. Because he has never visited me while I’m here in prison, he has never asked about me. Also, my mother will help me to stay away from him. She wouldn’t let him meet me.”* *“I must be strong and chose my own family over him. He is very selfish.”* Ittiporn was more definitive, exclaiming, *“so, I think no more men. I think it is time for me to take care of things. Men are not good.”*

Chailai and Anchali were more tentative. They recognised the risks involved but wanted to give their romantic relationships another chance. Chailai said, *“he [the boyfriend] told me he will not be involved with drugs anymore [after he leaves prison]. He promised me that he won’t go back to drugs, if he went back to drugs, then I will have to break up with him.”* Anchali similarly declared, *“I’m worried about whether he [the boyfriend] will start doing drugs again [after being released from prison]. We have been talking, if I am released, I will set up my life and if he cannot stop, we just have to separate.”*

Hence, like a connection to family, romantic relationships may assist as well as challenge women at re-entry. As was the case with families, intimate partners were a potential source of emotional and practical support. However, what became clear from the women’s stories and focus groups with prison staff, was that in contrast to family, husbands/boyfriends were more likely to be harming than supportive. Post-release intimate relationships with abusive, unfaithful and drug-offending men, meant contending with the same issues that led women on a pathway to prison in the first place.

### 7.1.5 Friendships

Like family and intimate relationships, friendships could provide women with crucial support, as they are sources of practical aid and emotional assistance. Prior to leaving prison, a small number of women elucidated the ways in which friendships might help them post-release. Yong-Yut explained, *“I think it’s really good to have friends outside compared to those who don’t, because I can move in with them and start a life with them.”* Kittibun said that the *“first challenge”* she would face at re-entry was *“help for the budget”* (i.e. money to start her new life) but *“I have a friend who I think can help me.”* Likewise, Hom stated, *“I plan to borrow some money from my friend to set up my business when I am released.”*

Sinn, Chuachan, Taeng Read and Bun Ma expounded how friendships formed in prison would help them to achieve their re-entry goals. Sinn elucidated the sense of emotional well-being provided by a friendship forged during her incarceration that would likely continue post-release: *“I feel like I have enough support now to prepare me to re-integrate into the society. I have my father and my ex-inmate friend. She is such a good friend; we are still in touch. She was released during the previous amnesty just recently. We are always in touch and she writes me letters. She transferred the money to my father so that he can deposit it for me. We are more like sisters, she has always been there for me. I’m happy.”* Chuachan planned to open a clothing business post-release and *“one of my close friends in prison, she has already left; she will be one of the models. I plan that if I open the business, I will have her pose with my shop on the internet so I can get more money.”* Taeng Read said, *“that woman that I am close to [from prison], she now works in a bakery factory [outside]. Basically, I would start looking for a new business [when I am released] with my friend, together. Bun Ma pronounced that she “planned doing business with friends from prison” and juxtaposed her prison friendships against those that led her into prison in the first place, “now I know whom to hang out with. Those who do not do drugs, I will not get involved with them [pre-imprisonment drug-using associates] anymore.”*

As outlined in Chapter 5, associations with drug-offending friends played an important role in women's imprisonment trajectories and, as such, posed challenges post-release. When asked why women re-offended, prison personnel stated, *"when they are out, they usually go back to how things were, they go back to the same group of friends which is the same environment."* The challenges of past friendships to post-release success were not lost on the women. Bun Ma (above) was clearly aware of this. Tup Tin voiced, *"my friends who use drugs [outside prison walls, present as a challenge to re-entry goals]. They will visit me when I'm released. But I have to stay strong."* To prevent the likelihood of re-offending, Amabil, Dok and Phawta spoke of the need to stay away from these peer groups post-release. Amabil stated, *"I won't associate myself with them. I am afraid that if I connect with them just like before, I will reoffend again."* Likewise, Dok said, *"I don't plan to go back and get involved with any of them because I don't want to get involved with drugs anymore."* Phawta communicated, *"I plan not to hang out with any of these friends anymore. I think there won't be any factor or anything that is going to cause me to come back here because I plan not to get involved with the same group of friends because hanging out with them led me to this place."* Araya similarly conveyed, *"I think it [chances of re-offending] depends on whether we are strong enough not to go back to the same circle of friends. I even get scared myself whether I'm going to join with my friends again."*

As was the case with dysfunctional intimate relationships, familial bonds played a central role in women's decisions to sever problematic and potentially risky pre-prison friendships. Rune said, *"I don't want to meet them again, partly because my mother would scream at me for doing so."* Tida aired, *"it is important to reconnect with the family but not with friends. Because I realised that your life also depends on the group of friends you have, and I often tell my son to be careful who he hangs out with."* Thomya stated, *"I would be with my family and I won't be with those friends anymore."* Finally, in her pre-release interview, Kanda narrated:

*"I'm absolutely not going to be associated with drugs in any way. I don't know, but I don't think that I would return here. I'm going to change myself and not hang out with these types of friends. I feel like my mother and stepfather have always been telling me that I'm the way I am because of my friends. I told them that I recognize the influence of bad friends in my life, so I'm going to have fewer friends. I don't even want to talk to any friends who are still associated with drugs. It's made me realise that all this time, only my parents have supported me. Even though some friends were with me at the time, they had never actually supported me in anything. They haven't even come to visit me once."*

The potential re-entry problems posed by deviant peer group associations was authenticated during conversations with re-imprisoned women. Pitima told us that she *"didn't think I'd come back [to prison], but I hung out a lot with the [same] circle of friends who all did drugs, so I got sucked back into the life."* Likewise, Phitisamai explained that she returned to drugs after being released from prison because *"I was still in the same environment, such as my friends."* Vanida said, *"at that time, I was back in the same environment. I saw people using drugs. All my friends were addicted to drugs. I became a good person for a while. But later, I met more friends, and I started to use drugs too."* Correspondingly, when she was released from prison, Pimchan planned *"not to be involved with drugs anymore"* but *"went back to drugs again"* because *"there were lots of drugs around. I saw my friends use drugs, so I used drugs too. I didn't stop. Then I was arrested for the third time."*

Like women's pathways into prison, post-release antisocial peers pulled women into the excitement of partying, using drugs and selling drugs. Phaelin conveyed, *"I liked to hang out with my friends during that time. It was the same group of friends from my childhood who used drugs from the beginning. After release, I only worked and didn't have time to see them. But after a while, I started seeing them and using drugs again. I wanted to hang out with my friends at night. I couldn't go to work after a night out. On the day I was arrested, I was hanging out with my friends using drugs at their house."* Araya was also drawn back into selling drugs by her friendship group. She expressed relish about her growing drug business and enjoyment of the partying lifestyle: *"I just wanted to get back to helping my parents sell vegetables. In the end, I couldn't do it and I got back to drugs again. It is because I met friends who sold drugs. So, I wanted to get back to selling drugs again, and I started to sell bigger and bigger amounts of drugs. I also went partying with my friends every night."*

During one post-release interview, the possibility of severing ties to antisocial friends via post-release through-care was explicated by one woman. Over the course of her life, Chilai had journeyed in and out of prison. Reflecting on her previous re-entry challenges, she explained, *"I had a lot of friends, and I was in that cycle where there were lots of drugs; drugs were everywhere around me."* In the past, Chilai was invariably drawn back into drug offending because of antisocial friendship groups, happiness and money. Chilai had no familial support. This time Chilai was living in a half-way house, received on-going re-entry assistance and had formed close familial type bonds with the other residents. She was no longer "scared" and felt truly "happy." She continued, *"compared to the other times, it is a better life this time. I don't have to be scared. I'm happy. And this happiness is different from the happiness in the past. In the past, the happiness was that I had lots of money. But now I'm happy although I have no money. Because here, we consider each other as family members. I felt like I have sisters here."*

Once again, relationships presented as both a blessing and a curse on women's re-integration. Friendships provided emotional and practical support but could also contribute to women's re-offending. Like intimate partners, although perhaps not as starkly, friends presented as being more confuting than supportive of women's re-entry ambitions. Deviant peer group associations contributed to women's original prison pathways. Post-release, reconnecting with drug offending friends set women back on a journey to incarceration.

### 7.1.6 Community acceptance

Prior research has shown that women need to feel accepted back into the normative society once they are released from prison. However, prior to their release, the women in this research narrated concern that they may face stigmatisation. Noon said, *“I am a little bit afraid that society won’t accept me.”* Gam narrated, *“for me, when I’m released, I will be an ex-prisoner, and there will be stigma and people will look at me in a different way, and I will be afraid to face people for a while.”* Aum explicated, *“many of my friends are afraid of the labelling, like when they go back to society, and people won’t accept them because they were in prison before.”* Re-imprisoned women communicated similar sentiments. Reflecting on the last time that she was released, Dao said, *“there is like still kind of a “you are a prisoner, selling drugs and all,” so they [people in the community] don’t want to help with anything.”* Kamala communicated, *“sometimes the people outside are much worse than the people in here.”* Prior to her release, Nat felt additional angst regarding community acceptance because she was also HIV-positive. She implored, *“I really want society to accept me, as I am an HIV patient [and ex-prisoner], I am quite scared.”*

The potential impact of stigma on women’s re-entry manifests in several ways. First, as was seen in section 7.1.1, employers may be circumspect about hiring ex-inmates. Second, securing housing may be difficult. Housing and financial security are both crucial to re-entry success, and negativity of the ex-inmate label can impact both. Additionally, stigma may be psychologically stressful, result in social withdrawal and herald a return to drug use/offending. Anchali explained, *“if society didn’t welcome you it would be difficult, you might go back to drugs.”* Kaarlo said, *“if I have stable work”* (which is itself impacted by the ex-inmate label) and *“society accepts me, I won’t go back drugs again.”* The challenges and consequences of community rejection were similarly extrapolated by prison personnel:

*“Women are afraid of what others in society would think about them. They have been punished in prison for what they have done already; they would not want others in society to judge them anymore. Changing the mindset of people in society it is such a big issue, but it really needs to be changed. Otherwise, people in the society will surely be part of the reason; they will push women back into prison again, as they cannot live outside.”*

Some women expressed awareness of the stigma they might confront but felt that familial support could buffer the ill effects. Sunee said, *“I think there may be some stigma, but I don’t care. I care only about my family, and they accept me.”* Dok Rak voiced that her *“neighbours would for sure look at me in a negative way. I think that would be my only obstacle [post-release], but my family are very good to me, and they accept me.”* Arya stated, *“there is sure to be stigma, but I am not afraid because I have my family.”* These comments support results presented in section 7.1.2 about the centrality of family to many women’s re-entry journeys.

Other women explained that the ex-inmate label was of little consequence because they lived in red zones/slum areas, non-normative societal locales where drug offending was normative. Amy verbalised, *“I don’t have any concerns that people around me would have stigma or anything about me because everyone in the neighbourhood has the same history, the same experience. I think everyone would accept me.”* Prisoner staff also said that some *“prisoners with a drug-dealing background will not be concerned or worried about their social status because once they are released, they will find the same society that they were in before going to jail.”* However, and as noted previously, residing in communities personified by drug offending creates its own reintegration challenges (see 7.1.2).

### 7.1.7 Emotional distress, trauma and substance misuse

As was demonstrated in Chapter 5, many women's lives were characterised by victimisation, disordered families and intimate relationships, growing up in neighbourhoods ravaged by drug use/offending, deviant peer group associations, low levels of education, and familial economic provisioning against the backdrop of financial insecurity. Drug addiction was also common and frequently arose within the interconnected milieu of victimisation, other life adversities and trauma. However, few women had sought help or received treatment in their communities for their substance misuse. Behind prison walls, numerous attempts were being made to ameliorate the pains of imprisonment. However, women still faced several challenges. This included problems associated with living in overpopulated prisons, familial disconnection, access to and transferability of prison-based vocational training/work, an inability to access directed mental health care, and in one prison, substance misuse treatment. Further, as illustrated in this chapter, re-entry was not without challenges, many of which were multifaceted, interconnected and likely to instigate further emotional stress, trauma and substance abuse. While women never directly narrated emotional distress, trauma or substance abuse as specific re-entry challenges, each is woven through the women's narratives of family, intimate relationships, money/employment, home, community and a return to drug use/selling. Namely, living with poverty, insecure/unstable housing, stressful and oftentimes abusive intimate relationships with drug-offending men, and returning to dysfunctional families, communities and peer group relationships. Thus, for some women, the imagination and/or reality of re-entry intensified suffering, presented as traumatic and overwhelming. Though never explicitly articulated, emotional distress, trauma and substance abuse present as additional re-entry challenges.

### 7.1.8 Through-care

For a variety of reasons, as seen throughout this chapter, reintegration can be challenging for formerly incarcerated women. Oftentimes, these difficulties are beyond the individual's control, i.e. community stigma, inadequate familial support, financial insecurity, the inability to secure safe and stable housing, emotional distress, trauma and, in turn, substance abuse. The challenges of re-entry could be mollified through the provision of through-care / support services that connect women to institutional and community anchors outside prison walls. This possibility was illustrated in Chailai's post-release story. The accommodation and social support provided by a half-way house enabled Chailai to feel better equipped to deal with the pains of re-entry (see section 7.1.5).

During pre-release interviews, other women observed the general benefits of post-release care/support. Reinforcing Chailai's experience, Rinrada argued for *"a foundation for those who don't have a family, a home to go back to. So, they won't go back to the same path"* (see section 7.1.2). Tha Kai Bok suggested, *"check [up] on the released prisoners and see if they need a place to stay or funds to open a business. Probably a month after being released. The prison staff should go out there and keep track of them and see if they need help about anything, like housing, or money"* (see section, 6.4.1). Leila also explicated that, *"I think if there is support after the release, this would be useful."*



As previously discussed, every prison did in fact offer through-care support, at least in theory. This was evidenced through individualised re-entry planning and the work of specialised centres and units to link women with re-entry accommodation, work and support services. Prison staff could also follow up with women post-release. Further, once back in the community, women were able to contact these prison-based centres and units for further advice/support (see section 6.4.1). Thus, prior to release, Waan indicated that if her re-entry *“plan fails, I might come back here and contact the care centre because they can help me.”* However, as discussed earlier, there appeared to be a disjuncture between the availability, awareness and provision of these services/supports (see section 6.4.1).

It is noteworthy that none of the women mentioned the need for through-care substance abuse or mental health support. Substance abuse, trauma and mental distress were common themes in women’s pathways into prison and presented as a challenge outside the prison walls. As such, connecting women with relevant support services in the community would likely aid women’s reintegration.

Finally, while release on parole or other post-release supervision order may provide a ready-made avenue for service provision and support (including substance misuse support/treatment), during pre-release interviews, every woman explained that they were *“just going to be released.”* Further, none of the women currently back in the community had returned with conditions attached. However, during pre-release interviews, some women did advocate for a post-release system of parole/probation. This reflected women’s more general need for through-care support. For example, Ploy stated, *“I think it would be very useful [parole or probation]. I have a low education. I don’t have someone to help me think when I was outside [last time]. Everything was empty for me. I didn’t know where to start.”*

Only six of the re-imprisoned women relayed having previously been released with supervision conditions. However, rather than being rehabilitative/re-integrative through the provision of support services, official post-release requirements presented largely as a tool of surveillance and risk management. This approach forced some women to stay drug free, at least short-term, but failed in respect of long term rehabilitative/re-entry needs.

For example, Jira explained, *“the first time [I left prison] I was released on parole, and I had to report in every 12 days for 2 months. I didn’t receive any help. I just had to report, and they checked if I used drugs by testing my urine. I didn’t use drugs during that time, so the results were negative. Afterwards, I went back to the same old place where I did the same old thing.”* Similarly, Pereda *“had to report to the officers two times. The first time I had to report three days after I was released. Then after one month, I had to report for the second time. I don’t think it’s useful. But I had to follow the rules. They checked my urine for drugs, so I just didn’t use drugs during that time.”* Waan was *“released on early parole”* and *“the condition was for me to report in once every month for the first three months and then once every four months. They didn’t know that I was using drugs because when I know that the appointment is next week, I will stop using drugs for a week. They didn’t give any advice of information about housing or employment.”*

Mayuree was more positive. Her story indicates how parole/probation post-release can either support or impede re-integration. Myaree's first experience of post-release probation had been positive, but more recent involvements suggest a conceptual shift in parole/probation from rehabilitation/re-integration to surveillance/risk management. The latter, according to Mayuree, was not at all helpful. Further, more broadly, and as explicated by Mayuree, probation/parole systems need to be cognisant of women's other reintegration needs, in this case, the need to make a living.

*"After my first imprisonment, I must report to the probation office once a month for five months. The good thing about having to report was that the probation officer asked me to join social service activities. I talked openly to the probation officer. That first time I had a good relationship with them. It was good to have the probation officer because I got to talk to them, and they also gave me advice. I talked openly, and I admitted I still use drugs because I had to work [provided energy], and they didn't say anything. The first time, they didn't check my urine. But the bad side about it is that you must miss your job. Then the second time to the fifth time, they check [my urine] every time. I did drugs, so I didn't want to see them. It might be useful for them; they would know how successful they are in rehabilitating me. It is not good for me; I stopped going."*

### 7.1.9 Individual traits

A not insignificant number of women maintained that re-entry could only be successful if they were motivated to change and had the personal determination it took to be successful. Pre-release, women verbalised that "everything is up to your own mindset", and you just needed to "be strong if [you] see drugs again, you have to be strong and not get involved." Similarly, other women said, "I think I'm strong enough to say no;" "It depends on my intention. If I had no intention to quit drugs, then it wouldn't work;" "I must be strong. I think that really depends on myself;" and, "I think it depends on the human nature of each individual." Reflecting on why she re-offended post-release, Sanan Nam explained, "it was because of myself and my decision. I was weak. I tried to be strong and tried not to go back to drugs. But it didn't work. So, it was because of my weakness. It all depended on me. Sometimes, I cried. It was all because of me. I made bad decisions."

Although motivation and will power may be important to re-entry success or failure, individual level capacity is often constrained by social circumstances beyond the women's control. During pre-release interviews, nearly every woman (84%) expressed certainty that they would not return to prison. Leila, for example, stated that she was "one-hundred per cent sure that I will not re-offend." All but one of the re-imprisoned women also explained that prior to previous prison releases, they too had been confident about not re-offending. However, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, reintegration may pose significant challenges, many of which are outside women's control, e.g. stigma, impoverishment, homelessness, victimisation, and dysfunctional and thus stressful relationships and environments. Si had served prior imprisonment terms. During her pre-release interview, she drew on her prior experience of re-entry, explaining that, "[This time] I intend not to use drugs or get involved with it again. I also thought like this every time I got released, but it also depends on the situation. If it gets bad [financial insecurity in the context of needing to support her mother and child], I might start doing it [selling drugs] again."

Like Si, women who expressed uncertainty around whether they would re-offend did so because they were cognisant of external conditions and the difficulties these might create. Nick explained that she was only “50 per cent” certain she would not use drugs again because *“there will be problems for sure, maybe the environment [intimate partner and familial drug use/selling].”* Pingpong recognised that economic marginalisation may set her back on a path to prison. She was “70 per cent” sure that she would not sell drugs again, but *“for the remaining 30%, that depends on if I can find a job.”* Likewise, Wipa was “80 per cent” certain that she would not go back to selling drugs. However, she was *“afraid that when I’m released, and I’m not successful with my job.”*

We should be cautious about delineating re-offending as a problem inherent in individuals. Rather than being weak, the women in this research are better viewed as survivors. Throughout their lives, they had demonstrated fortitude in the face of adversity. Many endured hardships prior to incarceration (e.g. poverty and abuse) and fought battles against addiction. They survived the pains of imprisonment and once released, were likely to withstand many more provocations. Some had/would return to drug use/offending. The challenges and adversities of the outside world can be overwhelming. While offending may be an individual level choice, it is one that is made within constrained social contexts, and as such, women’s slippage into re-offending is a burden that society must also bear. Further, as will be seen shortly (see section 7.2), it is ludicrous to position re-offending as the only indicator of post-release success. Despite the odds being stacked against them, many formerly incarcerated women make remarkable strides when they return to their community.

#### 7.1.10 Religion

For several women in this study, religious programmes in prison had made incarceration bearable (see section 6.4.5). Women explained that faith had helped them to manage anxiety and anger, grow as people and gain focus in their lives. During imprisonment, these skills were seen to have post-release value. Pre-release, some women recounted that religion would provide them with a source of strength when they returned to their community. Lita explained that *“while it depends on yourself [stopping drug use/offending]. And you had to be strong. I think the religious activities [Islam] will help [me] a lot.”* Likewise, Rochana expressed that she would *“do everything to do my best”* to not re-offend and, *“if I’m feeling down, I will go to church.”*

Once she was released, Mekhala planned to *“get ordained”* again as a Buddhist nun and reside at a local temple. She expressed no qualms about her ex-inmate status impeding her ability to return stating that *“they’re fine”* with me to return. Mekhala had cycled in and out of prison many times and had always been welcomed back. For Mekhala, ordination provided a ready-made means of both emotional and practical support. She planned to return to the temple *“right away”* and explained, *“the temple provides a room, a place to stay. I’d prefer being surrounded by nature at the temple. I can’t even fall asleep in prison. Some prisoners come from a poor family and must go back to support children and family; they might have to find a job or start a small business. But for me, I don’t have anything to worry about. I’d be happier at the temple.”*

None of the women drew on faith to support a fatalistic outlook in which post-release success was perceived as being out of their control. Rather, as shown in section 7.1.9, many women believed that what happened post-release was dependent on them as individuals. This may reflect the fact that most women identified as Buddhist (see Table 4). The concept of karma is central to the Buddhist faith. Karma denotes agency/action, and there is a causal relationship between karma (one's actions) and outcomes (Reichenbach, 1988).

## 7.2 Post-release successes

The needs of women prior to release were also a proxy for how women perceived re-entry success. As discussed in detail throughout section 7.1, and in addition to abstaining from drugs and not re-offending, the following presented as key indicators of success for women before they returned to the community: a) securing financial security, b) re-establishing familial relationships, c) finding a place to call home, d) staying away from environments ravaged by drug offending, e) extricating themselves from problematic intimate relationships and friendship groups, and f) staying strong notwithstanding the challenges they might face. Interviews with re-imprisoned women and those who had already returned to society demonstrated that many of these successes could be realised. When asked what they had achieved post-release, these women spoke of securing legitimate work, exiting dysfunctional intimate relationships, reuniting with family, refraining from selling drugs, ceasing or reducing drug use, and staying strong.

Thus, Solada told us that after being released from prison the previous time, she “stopped” using drugs “for three years” and secured on-going factory work, “I didn’t touch any kind of drugs; I never touched it. I succeeded.” Sopa worked “at a supermarket warehouse” and refrained from drug use for “a year or two” despite having reunited with her drug-using boyfriend. Sopa was proud that she had managed to “stay strong” for so long. She said, “They were the two big successes in my life that time [stopping drugs and working].” When she was released, Vanida reunited with, and took primary responsibility for her children. She explained, “I was a good person; I didn’t use drugs for two years after I was released. All my children were with me. The environment was full of drugs. All my friends were addicted to drugs. I watched them using drugs, but even when they asked me to use it, but I said no. I just helped my mother [earn a living]. And I took care of my children.”

Prior to serving her first term of imprisonment, Som had both sold and used drugs, expressing that she had an addiction. After being released from prison, she never used drugs again but eventually started to sell drugs to support her family. Likewise, Saengdao “didn’t use drugs after I left prison the first time because in prison, I stopped. I knew I didn’t want to have drugs around. I only did drug dealing. I never touched it again. I just needed money.” Mook explained that when she had returned to the community, “I didn’t use as much [drugs] as before”, and Gamon said, “I helped my sister in selling things and barely did drugs. But sometimes I bought drugs for my friends.” Som “sold drugs but not as much as before,” while Lawana never sold drugs again but continued to use them.

Ink's post-release successes were reuniting with and parenting her children alongside separating from their drug using father. When asked what she had achieved during re-entry, she said, *"I went back to live with my parents. With my son. I broke up with the boyfriend when I got into prison the first time."* Oh similarly narrated, *"he [the husband] went back to drugs. So, I planned that I won't be with him anymore after I got out if he is still using drugs and hung out with the same friends. He went back to drugs, so we separated. But he kept coming back to me because he didn't want to break up. I decided to run away. I went to live with my sister and to sell stuff in the market."*

Finally, post-release interviews with women currently back in the community also revealed success in not returning to drug use, reuniting with family, securing employment and staying away from people and environments characterised by drugs. Only one woman had reported the fracturing of familial bonds, and as a result, she had used drugs again, but this was narrated as a 'one-off incident'. All but one woman had found employment, and the woman who was currently unemployed was *"looking after her children."* Every woman had managed to stay away from what they described as *"bad influences."*

### 7.3 Summary

The women who participated in this research had multifaceted and intersectional needs which directed their pathways into, during and out of prison. Overall, re-entry success was deemed contingent on obtaining an adequate and secure source of income, reconnecting with family, finding a safe and stable place to call home, severing bonds to dysfunctional relationships and communities while being welcomed by normative society, motivated to change and staying psychologically strong. Religious convictions were sometimes helpful. Post-release through-care was deemed beneficial but lacking, while post-release parole/probation likely countered women's re-entry needs.

In many cases, the re-entry challenges women face mirrored those leading them into prison in the first place, namely, victimisation, disordered families and intimate relationships, neighbourhoods ravaged by drug use/offending, deviant peer group associations, low levels of education and familial economic provisioning within the milieu of perpetual poverty. In addition, as the result of imprisonment, women must re-establish their lives with the added burden of the ex-inmate stigma, oftentimes with a resultant depletion of social and economic capital. For some, despite their individual convictions to stay the course and not return to prison, the pains of re-entry can be overwhelming. When returning to the community, some women will use and sell drugs again. Their capacity for agency is constrained by broader social circumstances. However, it is foolish to position re-offending and a return to drug use as the only indicators of post-release success. Despite the odds regularly being weighed against them, formerly incarcerated women can make extraordinary headway when returning to society. As the women in this research showed, securing legitimate work, exiting dysfunctional intimate relationships, reuniting with family, refraining from selling drugs, ceasing or reducing drug use and staying strong should also be counted as re-entry successes.





**CHAPTER 8**  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thailand has witnessed substantial growth since the 1990s in the number of women imprisoned. This escalation has been propelled by punitive drug law, policy and criminal justice practice and has disproportionality impacted women. Compared to men, drug offenders constitute a higher proportion of Thailand's total women's prison population. At present, over 84% of imprisoned women in Thailand are 'doing time' for a drug offence. This compares to 79% of the male prison population. As the number of women in Thailand's prisons grows, so too does the number of women who return to the community. Accordingly, one of the challenges confronting Thai society is the successful re-entry of mounting numbers of formerly incarcerated women.

Most women returning to society from prison in Thailand will have been incarcerated for a drug offence. Utilising the voices of women (imprisoned and formerly incarcerated) and of the prison staff tasked with their support inside prison walls, this research sought to understand the needs, challenges and successes of drug offending/criminalised women re-entering Thai society. This is the first assessment of women's reintegration in Thailand. Previous knowledge in this space has come almost entirely from studies of male prisoners returning home in Western societies. This is a significant oversight. Facilitating the fortuitous re-entry of women in Thailand requires specific understanding of their needs, expectations, experiences, challenges and achievements.

The limited extant Western research on re-entry illustrates that women's re-integration does not occur in a vacuum. Facilitating women's re-entry requires knowledge of their pathways to, experiences of, and journeys out of prison. Gender structures both the social world and women's experiences of offending/criminalisation, imprisonment and re-entry. Studies illustrate that female prisoners and those returning to the community constitute special populations with multi-layered and interconnected needs. The gendered particularities of lives pre-imprisonment collide with women's incarceration experiences, manoeuvring their post-prison life.

First, previous research shows that women's imprisonment trajectories are impacted by a collection of diverse yet interdependent factors/events that limit and shape their behaviour and life choices. The life stories narrated by the women in this study mirrored those of imprisoned women throughout the world. The lives of many of the women were characterised by victimisation, disordered family lives and intimate relationships, growing up in neighbourhoods ravaged by drug use/offending, deviant peer group associations, low levels of education, and difficulties in familial economic provisioning against the backdrop of financial insecurity. Drug addiction was also common and frequently arose within the multidimensional milieu of victimisation, other life adversities and trauma. However, prior to imprisonment, few women had sought help or received treatment.



Second, the particularities of women's requisites and background not only set them on a pathway to prison but also determined their experiences and needs within prison walls. Imprisonment is by its very nature oppressive and can exacerbate rather than address the underlying causes of offending. Prison regimes are generally established to support the needs of the male majority. This can result in women's gender-specific needs being marginalised. Imprisonment can be an especially harming experience for women, further compounding the trauma and marginalisation that compelled them into prison to begin with. Thus, to aid re-entry, prisons should be utilising gender-responsive / trauma-informed care/practice and programming to empower and support women's rehabilitation.

Gender-responsive prisons provide women with a healing rather than a harming environment/experience alongside programme and support mechanisms to improve well-being and rehabilitation prospects. Thailand places a high priority on the gender-specific contexts out of which offending arises and the different needs of women in prison. The Bangkok Rules make a strong statement about Thailand's recognition of and commitment to the fair and equitable treatment of women in prison. Many of the women in this research were housed in Bangkok Rules Model Prisons. These correctional facilities consider women's unique circumstances through the implementation of policies, practices and programming that are more sensitive to the life circumstances and realities of women's experiences.

Through the interviews and focus groups, this study found that re-entry success was contingent on women obtaining an adequate and secure source of income, reconnecting with family, finding a safe and stable place to call home, and severing bonds to dysfunctional relationships and communities while being accepted by normative society. Women's motivations to change, their ability to stay strong and their religious convictions were also deemed relevant. Post-release through-care was especially beneficial, albeit lacking, while parole/probation presented as obstructive. The challenges women faced at re-entry mirrored those bringing them into prison in the first place. Namely, victimisation, disordered families and intimate relationships, neighbourhoods ravaged by drug use/offending, deviant peer group associations, low levels of education and difficulties in familial economic provisioning within the milieu of perpetual poverty. In addition, women had to re-establish their lives with the added burden of the ex-inmate label and depleted social and economic capital.

This research showed that tangible efforts are being made within women's prisons to meet women's unique rehabilitative and re-entry needs. This gender awareness operated in every prison, not just in those compliant with the Bangkok Rules. This was evidenced through: 1) prison environments that generally endeavoured to support and heal rather than harm, 2) comprehensive prison visitation regimes, 3) across-the-board delivery of re-entry programmes and attempts at post-release / through-care support, 4) widespread vocational/educational training and prison-based work initiatives, 5) establishment of substance misuse treatment programmes in most prisons, 6) attempts to provide psychological support, address trauma and women's victimisation histories, and 7) provision of other curricula that lessened the pains of imprisonment and supported women therapeutically, i.e. religious and exercise/sports programmes.

Nonetheless, despite these accomplishments, overcrowded prison conditions led to a number of problems for imprisoned women, including: 1) increased feelings of anxiety, competition over space and access to necessities which were often in short supply, 2) restrictions on visitation, 3) challenges to the ability of prison staff to undertake individualised pre-sentence planning and post-release support / through-care, and 4) limitations being imposed on formal work and vocational training places. Prison overcrowding and the difficulties this creates for women is a problem of punitive drug law, criminal justice policy and practice. This is not something that can be solved at the level of prisons or of the correctional department. Rather, it is a matter that must be addressed by the Thai government. Prison overcrowding obstructs rehabilitative and reintegrative efforts by exacerbating the pains of imprisonment. Women's psychological healing and their capacity to acquire important post-release skills are being thwarted. If we want women to stop using, selling and dealing drugs, it is imperative that the problem of prison overcrowding be addressed (see Recommendation 1). In the interim, at least, additional support could be given to support women with re-entry planning and through-care support post-release (see Recommendation 2). As noted above, both re-entry planning and post-release continuity of care were considered vital to re-entry success.

In addition to the dilemmas of prison overcrowding, the following concerns were also found in relation to women's experiences of imprisonment: 1) disconnection from family and other loved ones due to geography, familial poverty and prison policy that limited connectedness on the basis of prisoner classification and sentence length, 2) restricting access to vocational/educational training programmes and work on the basis of sentence classification, sentence length, age and pregnancy, and 3) doubts about the transferability of prison-based vocational skills/work to the outside world.

Prison and correctional policy that obstructs visitation and admittance to programmes based on sentence length, classification and/or other individual level criterion such as age and pregnancy, runs counter to the ideals of rehabilitation and re-integration. Ideally, this should not continue (see Recommendations 3 and 4). Given the importance of familial connection to women in prison and post-release, supplementary efforts should be made to maintain connectedness to family/loved ones for those facing additional barriers (i.e. geography and poverty) to physical visitation (see Recommendation 5). Economic marginalisation and familial economic provisioning are central to women's pathways in and out of prison. Further to lifting admittance restrictions on vocational/educational training programmes and formal work opportunities (see above and Recommendation 3), provisions that connect women to employers outside the prison walls and/or support them in their post-release small business ventures should be further developed and supported. Consideration might also be given to forming/strengthening partnerships between prisons, the Department of Labour and private business enterprises. Undertakings such as these could increase women's prospects of accessing meaningful and adequately paying employment post-release (see Recommendations 6-9).

Victimisation, other life adversity, emotional distress/mental illness, substance abuse and offending are often interconnected. These factors impacted on women's pathways to imprisonment and during re-entry. Prison programmes aimed at addressing histories of abuse, mental health and trauma are therefore essential to meeting women's needs and aiding re-entry. However, there was a relative lack of substance misuse treatment/programmes in one prison and an overall sparsity of directed mental health care, particularly regarding victimisation and trauma. This is troubling given the connection between women's victimisation, trauma, mental health, drug use and offending/re-offending, and must be rectified (see Recommendations 10 and 11).

Finally, as discussed previously, safe and stable housing alongside acceptance by normative society is important for women during re-entry. For women without family or those destined to return to environments ravaged by substance misuse and violence, it is imperative that alternative housing options are made available. Everyone deserves a safe place to call home. Countering stigma within the community is also imperative and should be addressed. This should be part of the post-release support through multi-stakeholder collaboration (see Recommendation 12 and 13). It is important that Thai society understands the pathways that women have travelled into prison and the pains they experience behind prison walls. A public campaign and awareness raising initiatives on this issue would enhance understanding and societal acceptance (see Recommendation 14). Such initiative should aim to inform the public about women's constrained choices and broader social circumstances that influence women's reoffending beyond their immediate control. Community acceptance and support may, therefore, temper the angst of re-entry and help women realise their hopes and goals for a post-prison life. Finally, it may be a too narrow point of view to position re-offending and a return to drug use as the only indicators of post-release success. Despite the odds, and as shown in this research, many women find legitimate work, extricate themselves from unhealthy living situations, reunite with their families, parent their children, support extended kin and temper their offending. As a society, we should celebrate all their successes and continue to empower women through their journey back into society.

# RECOMMENDATION

**Recommendation 1:** *Drug law and sentencing policies should take into account women offenders' circumstances and pathways to offending as well as impact of imprisonment on women and their family. Consideration should be given to developing and implementing gender responsive non-custodial measures which can reduce stigma associated with imprisonment.*

**Recommendation 2:** *In the interim and given the centrality of re-entry planning and through-care support to re-integration, increased government funding and staffing should be provided to CARE and other specialised re-integration units in women's prisons. This would increase the capacity for individualised re-entry planning and provision of through-care support.*

**Recommendation 3:** *Access to vocational/educational training programmes and formal dividend paying work should not be restricted on the basis of sentence classification, sentence length, age and/or pregnancy.*

**Recommendation 4:** *To promote successful rehabilitation and reintegration, open visitation and LINE video calling should not be restricted on the basis of prisoner classification and/or sentence length. Women prisoners should also be allowed to have extra contact with their family as their release date approaches.*

**Recommendation 5:** *Efforts should be made to increase the use of LINE video calling as well as telephone for women who are disconnected from their families and other loved ones due to geographical distance and poverty.*

**Recommendation 6:** *Consideration should be given to developing partnerships between prisons, other government agencies and private business enterprises. These partnerships could be used to both source post-release employment for women and develop vocational training/work-based initiatives within prison that better meet community employability requirements.*

**Recommendation 7:** *Consideration should be given to updating correctional policy and practice pertaining to day release so that more women nearing re-entry can participate in work programme within the community during normal business hours.*

**Recommendation 8:** Work and vocational training programme in prison should be chosen and designed with the priority to provide women prisoners with valuable skills corresponding to the actual market needs and the types of jobs women are likely to be offered, but also with a view to breaking gender stereotypes and economic disparities in the job market.

**Recommendation 9:** The current small business loan schemes operating in some women's prisons should be maintained and potentially extended to all female facilities in order to promote women's self-employment after release.

**Recommendation 10:** Given that most women imprisoned in Thailand are serving time for drug offending, substance misuse treatment programmes such as Therapeutic Communities (TC) and Behaviour Modification Curricula (BMC) should be provided as a matter of course in all women's prisons, and every woman with a history of substance misuse should be permitted to participate.

**Recommendation 11:** All women's prisons should develop programmes aimed at addressing the nexus between victimisation (particularly domestic violence), trauma and mental health. The provision of individualised mental health care (i.e. counselling) should also be expanded.

**Recommendation 12:** Post-release support system is essential to ensure successful reintegration of women prisoners. Consideration should be given to developing programmes that are linked to community initiatives as they can provide continuity of support post-release through a multi-stakeholder collaboration including government agencies, NGOs and civil society organizations.

**Recommendation 13:** The Thailand Department of Corrections, Department of Probation, local government authorities should look at funding and establishing a network of half-way houses throughout Thailand for women released from prison who are unable to secure safe housing.

**Recommendation 14:** A public education campaign should be conducted to educate people about women's pathways to prison, and their experiences of prison, re-entry needs, challenges and successes.

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