


# Women in the Criminal Justice System


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# Who are the Women?

- Disproportionately women of color
- In their early to mid-thirties
- Most likely to have been convicted of drug or drug-related offense
- Fragmented family histories with other family members in the CJ system
- Survivors of physical and/or sexual abuse

- Significant substance abuse problems
  - Multiple physical & mental health problems
  - Unmarried mothers of minor children
  - High school degree/GED
  - Limited vocational training
  - Sporadic work histories
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# Male/Female Differences

- Employment histories
- Substance abuse problems
- Criminal involvement
- Psychological functioning
- Physical/sexual abuse history

(Messina, Burdon and Prendergast 2001)

# What Does Gender Responsive Mean?

Gender responsive means creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women and girls and that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges.

(Covington & Bloom)

The bottom right corner of the slide features several decorative elements consisting of concentric circles in various shades of blue, resembling ripples in water. These circles are arranged in a pattern that suggests movement and depth, adding a visual texture to the dark blue background.

# Three Critical and Interrelated Issues

- Substance abuse
- Health problems (physical and mental)
- Trauma



# ACE Study

## (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

- Recurrent and severe emotional abuse
- Recurrent and severe physical abuse
- Contact sexual abuse

Growing up in a household with:

- An alcoholic or drug-user
- A member being imprisoned
- A mentally ill, chronically depressed, or institutionalized member
- The mother being treated violently
- Both biological parents *not* being present

(N=17,000)

# ACE Study

## (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

### Results

ACEs still have a profound effect 50 years later, although now transformed from psychosocial experience into organic disease, social malfunction, and mental illness.

- Smoking
- Alcoholism
- Injection of illegal drugs
- Obesity

(Felitti, V.J.: Origins of Addictive Behavior: Evidence from the ACE Study. 2003 Oct;52(8): 547-59. German. PMID: 14619682 (PubMed-indexed for MEDLINE).

# Childhood Traumatic Events

## Largest Effect-Mental Health

- 980% increase in odds if exposure to 7 CTE's

(Messina & Grella, 2005)



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“...women whose lives represent all women’s issues-*magnified.*”