UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITY

Final Report

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Beth E. Richie, Ph.D.
Departments of Criminal Justice and Gender and Women's Studies
University of Illinois At Chicago

INTRODUCTION

In October of 1999, NIJ funded this study entitled "Understanding the Links between Violence Against Women and Women's Participation in Illegal Activity". It was an exploratory study designed to advance the field of violence research and the scholarship on women's involvement in illegal activities and their subsequent incarceration by looking at the dynamic interaction between experiences and by focusing on an understudied group: women of color from low-income communities. By focusing on this population, the results were able to illuminate the specific experiences of women who are most neglected in the current research on violence against women, and therefore advance the knowledge on topics related to violence against women and crime. This study will begin with a review of the study design, including modifications approved by NIJ. Presentation of the quantitative findings will be followed by the qualitative results. In the discussion section, a conceptual framework that emerged from the analysis will be discussed, and the report will conclude with recommendations for shifts in intervention strategies, policy reform and further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social science research that explores problems of crime and justice calls upon a range of theoretical perspectives, attributing the causation of illegal behavior to various individual, social, environmental and even political factors. A review of the literature on violence against women reveals two predominant theoretical approaches. One body of literature advances arguments of feminist scholars who explains violence against women as the expression of gender inequality in the private sphere that parallels larger patterns

in the public sphere. Another cluster of theoretical approaches draws heavily on the psychologically-based learning theories which attribute violence to observation/exposure during childhood which leads to an intergenerational pattern of interpersonal abuse in certain households. While not completely distinct from one another, these two theoretical approaches frame divergent intervention strategies and policy implications. The analysis of the data collected in this study suggest a third theoretical perspective that is concerned with social disorganiztion and marginaliztion and, as such offers important insights into understanding violence against women in the population of women who are involved in illegal activity.

From most accounts, violence against women has clearly been established as a significant and persistent social problem that has serious consequences for individuals, their families and for society as a whole (Dobash, 1992; National Research Council, 1996). In the case of domestic or intimate violence, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, estimates that 1 million women in the United States experience violence from a male partner (husband, ex-husband, boyfriend or former boyfriend) each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998). In other studies, the rate of violence against women in intimate relationships is estimated to be much higher. According to Wilt, between 7 and 22% of all adult women have experienced a domestic assault and a recent survey by the Commonwealth Fund found that 1 in every 3 women reported having been physically assaulted at some time in her life (Commonwealth Fund, 1998; Wilt, 1996). Fifty-two percent of surveyed women were physically assaulted at some time in their life (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). A full 56% of al Americans report that they know someone close to them who has been involved in an abusive relationship (Straus, 1990).

Morbidity and mortality data indicate the most extreme consequences of violence against women. Fifty percent of women were injured by intimate partners (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Victims of domestic violence represent 37% of all women who sought care in hospital emergency rooms in 1994, and of these cases, 28% required admission and another 13% required major medical treatment (Browne, 1992; US Department of Justice, 1997). Women who are killed are more likely to be killed by a spouse or partner than male victims. In 1998, women comprised almost 72% of all victims of the 1830 murders that resulted from intimate partners (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). According to the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 28.3% of women died at the hands of a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend in contrast to 3.6% of men (FBI, 1995).

While most of the research focuses on physical abuse, there is evidence to suggest that emotional abuse has serious psychological consequences for female victims of domestic violence (Gelles, 1989). Battered women are four to five times more likely to require psychiatric treatment than non-battered women and they are five times more likely to attempt suicide (Stark, 1991).

Previous studies suggested that women of all races and ethnic backgrounds are abused by their intimate partners (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997a). However, while the overall rates may be similar, emerging research suggests that variables such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and age may influence the impact of domestic violence on different groups of women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998; Hampton, 1994; Solomon, 1996). Women who are black, young, divorced, earn low incomes, rent and live in urban areas are more likely to be victimized by intimates (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Factors such as the limited availability of crisis intervention programs,

differential use of weapons during an assault, and lack of trust of law enforcement agencies may heighten some women's vulnerability to intimate violence (Hutchinson, 1994; Richie, 1996a; Sullivan, 1994).

While less well documented, there is also solid evidence to suggest that incidence and types of domestic violence in same-sex relationships are comparable to that in heterosexual relationships (Anti-violence Project/National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1998). Studies indicate that 25-30% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons are abused by their intimate partners and that social discrimination and marginalization may complicate their help-seeking behavior and therefore increase the risk of serious abuse (Renzetti, 1996).

The consequences of domestic violence extends beyond the victim themselves. In a national survey of over 6,000 families conducted by Straus, 50% of the men who frequently battered their wives also frequently assaulted their children (Straus, 1990). Other research has corroborated this finding, pointing to the persistent inter-generational affects of abuse; including that men who witnessed violence towards their mothers were twice as likely to use violence once they were adults themselves (Doumas, 1994).

A review of the literature on sexual assault reveals a problem of similar proportions. According to the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center of the National Victim Center, close to 700,000 women are raped every year in the United States, which has the highest rate of sexual assault in any industrialized nation in the world (National Victims Center, 1992). 876,100 rapes are perpetrated against women each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Younger women seem to be at heightened risk, 32% of rapes occur when the victim is between the ages of 11 and 17 and women

between the ages of 16 and 24 were three times more likely to be raped than women in other cohorts (Koss, 1991). Twenty-nine percent of rapes occur when women are between the ages of 18-24 (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In a definite report of the Violence Against Women Survey conducted by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease control, 17% of all women aged 18 years and older who were surveyed had been raped (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998).

The psychological consequences of sexual assault can be serious as for domestic violence. Thirty-one percent of all rape victims develop rape-related post traumatic stress disorder (National Victims Center, 1992), and as a result of rape, victims are three times as likely than non-victims to experience a major depressive episode in their lives. The rate of suicide attempts by women have experienced rape is 13 times higher than non-victims. Women who have been raped are 10 times more likely to abuse illegal substances or alcohol (National Victims Center, 1992).

As with other forms of violence against women, rape has a high under reporting rate, it remain one of the most under reported violent crimes in America, with approximately only 1 in 6 rapes reported to the police. The National Women's Study found that 84% of the rape victims do not report the rape to the police (National Victims Center, 1992). While even less well documented, sexual harassment, stalking and exploitative involvement in the sex industry are also understood to be a serious, common and threatening experience for women that carry serious physical, emotional and social consequences (Ratner, 1993; Tjaden, 1998). Thirty-six percent of rape victims receive medical care because they were injuried (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

While often studied separately, there is evidence that suggests a strong

relationship between the various forms of violence against women. For example, 78% of rapes involve a person the victim knew (national Victims Center, 1992). Findings reported by Bachman and Saltzman confirmed the relational nature of abuse. According to their research, 82% of women raped or sexually assaulted in 1992-1993 by a lone offender were victimized by a spouse, ex-spouse, partner, friend, acquaintance or relative, and 26% of all rapes and sexual assaults against women were perpetrated by an intimate partner (Bachman, 1995). Several studies have shown that marital rape is often more violent and repetitive than other rape, and it is less commonly reported (Bergen, 1995; Hampton, 1995). Taken together, the aggregate picture of violence against women presents a compelling call to action for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners alike (Graham, 1994).

Many researchers in the field concur that since the rates and various forms of violence are seriously under-reported, and since most quantitative studies capture only one dimension of the various problems, new basic research addressing violence against women is needed (Hall, 1995). First, few studies explore the aggregate, or intersection of the various forms of abuse even though there is evidence that there may be overlap. Secondly, most quantitative research is bound by pre-determined (researcher driven) categories and is unable to capture the nuanced, pattern of experience or the nature of violence that different groups of women experience (Crenshaw, 1994). Lastly, the empirical need for new basic research on violence against women is particularly acute with regard to women whose experience of violence falls outside the dominant paradigms that have informed the literature reviewed above (Kanuha, 1997; Rasche, 1995; Reid, 1994). For, while there is ample evidence to suggest that violence against women is a

shared problem across different sectors of society, the particular experiences of some women are not at all represented in the prevailing body of research.

One such population that has not been studied are women who are involved in illegal activities; women who may be reluctant to call the police, to use mainstream social services, or to report incidence of abuse to agencies because of their marginalized social position and their precarious legal status. Research on workplace violence, for example, does not include places where illegal drug transactions are taking place. Similarly, women involved in prostitution or otherwise working in the sex industry are less likely to report having been raped or stalked by a pimp. Young women who are truant do not appear in data collected at school, and if a woman is hurt by her crime partner during a robbery or sexually harassed in a place were stolen goods are collected, there is little likelihood that her experience of violence will appear in official reports or research finding.

A recent report issued by the Bureau of Justice Statistics confirmed the need for research on violence against women who are involved in illegal activities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999). The study indicated that almost half of all women in jails and prison reported having been physically or sexually abused before their imprisonment, which is a much higher rate than for the overall population. It further reported significant rates of drugs and alcohol use by abused women in state prisons; close to 70% of the abused women in correctional facilities said they used illegal drugs in the month before their current offense, in contrast to 54% of the women who had not been abused. Fourty percent of women in state prisons were under the influence when they committed the crime they were most recently arrested for (Mumola, 1999). The study concluded with a

call for additional research on this population of women who have experienced violence from an intimate partner.

Prior to this recent study, there had been very little research on violence against women who have been involved in illegal activities. What evidence there is, collected mostly by advocacy groups, suggests that violence is a major factor in the lives of women who are currently serving time in correctional facilities. For example, in a 1996 survey of incarcerated women, Human Rights Watch found that at least half of all female prisoners have experienced some form of sexual abuse prior to incarceration (Human Rights Watch, 1996). 60% of women in state prisons were physically or sexually abused (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). In addition, Amnesty International just released a report about abuse of women while in custody which claims a prior abuse rate of 47% (Amnesty International, 1999). The National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, which is one of the only national organizations that collects data on the relationship between violence against women and women's involvement in illegal activity, reports that more than half of all women in detention have been battered or raped (Osthoff, 1999).

Prior to the release of the recent Bureau of Justice Statistics data and the reports by advocacy groups, the most comprehensive documentation of violence against women involved in illegal activity was found in reports on hearings conducted at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York State in 1986. That study not only established that the experience of prior domestic and sexual violence was a common one for the women incarcerated at that prison, but that the nature of the abuse they experienced was serious (New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1985). In a

comprehensive, follow-up study, Psychologist Angela Browne has unpublished data that indicates that over 80% of the women incarcerated in that same facility ten years later have a much higher rate of past abuse, and that the abuse is much more significant and traumatic (Browne, 1999). However, most of these women do not receive treatment for post traumatic stress disorder in prison and therefore have unresolved issues when they are released. Any treatment that women do receive is usually inadequate (Richie, 2001).

In my own earlier work which serves as a foundation for this proposed project, I found that 40% of women in a large urban jail indicated that they have experienced violence from an intimate partner and 35% reported sexual abuse (Richie, 1996b). Women in prison are even being controlled by their intimates on the outside (Richie, 2001). I followed-up that study with a qualitative research project which revealed findings indicating a very complex relationship between prior intimate victimization, women's involvement in illegal activity, and the particular experiences of violence within this previously under-studied group of women (Richie, 1996a).

The documentation of the higher rates of physical and sexual abuse for incarcerated women is important in and of itself, however this project proposes to go beyond that conclusion. Beyond the well-documented difference in rate, little is known about the nature, impact and relationships between different forms of violence in the lives of women in precarious legal circumstances. It is unknown, for example, how violence in their lives may actually contribute to their involvement in illegal activity and if prior domestic violence or sexual assault victimization is related to abuse while in custody. For, while research has established a relatively higher rate of prior domestic or sexual violence, there is virtually no research that explores a causal relationship or co-variance

between victimization in the private sphere, the criminal arena and women's involvement in illegal activities. This is more that a simple analytic gap in the research; it represents a significant theoretical and conceptual oversight in how we understand and respond to the problem of violence against women. The oversight clearly establishes the need for this project.

Other factors support the need for basic research into the relationship between violence against women and women's involvement in illegal activities. Currently, there are approximately 138,000 women in U.S. jails or prisons. This figure represents a dramatic increase in the numbers of incarcerated women, a tripling of the female inmate population in this country between 1985 and 1997 (Galliard, 1997). While the actual numbers are much smaller than their male counter part, the rate of increase is significantly higher for women than men; 11% and 7.9%, respectively. This precipitous increase is tentatively attributed to both a change in arrest polices as well as actual change in patterns of crime (Bush-Baskette, 1998). Most criminologists take these changes seriously, and are interested in further explorations into the underlying causes of them (Belknap, 1996; Chesney-Lind, 1997).

In addition to the rate increase, the profile of the women involved in the criminal justice system is also raising difficult questions for criminologists. Overwhelmingly, women in jails and prisons are there for non-violent offenses, primarily having violated laws that prohibit sale and possession of specific drugs (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). Women account for only 16% of all felons in state prisons (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). Some scholars have argued that this pattern of illegal behavior is decidedly gendered; that drugs sales and other non-violent crimes that women commit are "survival

crimes" committed to earn money, to feed a drug dependent life, and to escape both terrifying intimate relationships and brutal social conditions (Richie, 1996a; Owen, 1998). Incarcerated women typically have a history of unmet social, educational, health and economic needs in addition to a history of victimization (Freudenberg, 1998).

When these factors are taken together, the population of incarcerated women are of heightened significance to family and sexual violence researchers interested in expanding current knowledge about the problem of violence against women. Incarcerated women are overwhelmingly women of color (particularly African American and Hispanic/Latina women), they are likely to be from low-income communities, and they have a disproportionately high rate of violence against them (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997).

This over-representation of problems creates an opportunity for researchers to explore a heretofore understudied group of women. Until now, the relationship between violence against women of color, women and in low in-come communities and those same women's involvement in illegal activity has only been considered independently from one another, and few have attempted a more focused exploration of the co-variance of these variables. Further, as previously noted, the quantitative instruments typically used to determine rates of violence against women do not include illegal behavior as one of the items to explore (Frisch, 1992). For while violence against women has been established as a serious problem, and even with concern about the rapidly increasing rates of incarceration of the women in this country, there is virtually no scholarly work that attempts to link the two. This proposal has been designed to respond to this gap.

STUDY DESIGN

Goal and Objectives

The overall goal of this project was to explore the relationship between violence against women and women's involvement in illegal activities. Three objectives were established to meet this goal:

1) To measure the scope of the problem of domestic, sexual and other violence among the population of incarcerated women in the Cook County Jail;
2) To measure the nature of violence this population experienced, including the various forms of abuse, variations in the victim-perpetrator relationship and the consequences of abuse,
3) To assess the extent to which domestic, sexual and other violence is related to women's involvement in illegal activities.

Modification to the original study design

Origionally the project was designed to interview women sentanced to Dwight Correctional Facility. Later, the setting was moved to the Cook County Jail to introduce variation in the sample and to focus on a population who were even more vulnerable to the dynamics being explored in this research. There were also a series of administrative changes within the Illinois Department of Corrections that would have limited access to the population of women serving time there. The administration of the Cook County Jail, especially the staff of the Women's Justice Services were enthusiastically supportive of this revised protocol.

Methods of Data Collection

The project described in this report used both a qualitative and quantitative approach to explore the relationship between violence against women and women's

involvement in illegal activity that resulted in their incarceration by the Cook County Department of Corrections. Three sources of data were collected and analyzed.

First, a review of existing data from state agencies about the rate of violence against women and the rate of arrest and detention was conducted to establish the overall prevalence rates of the problems being explored in this study. The data was collected from the Cook County Department of Corrections, The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, The Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network and several published reports.

Qualitative data was collected using a survey instrument that was based on questions found on the Conflict Tactics Scale. This instrument, found in Appendix A, was developed specifically for this research, taking into account the research goals, the setting and the population. It was administered to a sample of women detained at the Cook County Jail in order to establish the extent of the problem of violence against this population and to identify women to participate in the qualitative aspect of the research. The survey asked specific questions about domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse from crime partners and authority figures, as well as the extent to which the respondents felt that a history of abuse was linked to their involvement in crime. Two hundred and ninety-eight surveys were administered during the study period to randomly selected detainees who fit the established criteria and who signed a consent form.

The third and primary data collection method in this study was life history interviews with a sub-sample of women who completed the survey. The women were selected to participate in the qualitative dimension of the study based on their responses to the survey, especially if they responded affirmatively to the questions regarding

experience of violence. Interviews were conducted with 33 women (who completed a second consent form) following an open-ended interview schedule used in previous research with incarcerated women. Found in Appendix B, the qualitative instrument used in this study focused on the life history of the participant: childhood and household dynamics, critical events, key relationships, the immediate and long term consequences of abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator (including non-intimate relationships), availability and utilization of services, the link between abuse and the use of drugs/alcohol, the impact of abuse on children, and the relationship between victimization and women's involvement in illegal activities. The interviews lasted between 60 and 300 minutes.

Research Setting

Most of the data collected for this research was conducted in the Cook County Jail in Chicago, Illinois with women in detention. As previously noted, some surveys were administered at Dwight Correctional Facility prior to the modification of the study design. Within the jail system, there were three research sites: a secured unit of a treatment center for women with substance abuse problems operated by the jail; a large housing unit within the jail; and a furlough program that functions as a day-reporting program where women leave the facility during the evenings and are monitored by electronic devices worn around their ankle.

The research was influenced by institutions' prevailing goal: custody and confinement of the detainees. The data collection process was therefore constrained by correctional policies and a controlled institutional environment. For example, in addition

to the concerns that were discussed previously regarding the change in the research site from Dwight Correctional Facility to the Cook County Jail, the survey had to be shortened considerably in order to be approved by the administration. There were times when the project had to be suspended due to security concerns in the facility, and the correctional staff were occasionally unable to locate the participants who had been scheduled for an interview. Often we were required to wait for admission to the facility, and our interviews were occasionally interrupted by the correctional staff. Even with these difficulties, the women who completed the survey and the women who participated in the interview did so enthusiastically, often asking for repeated opportunities to meet and talk about their experiences. While there were considerable institutional barriers, the women participated willingly in this research.

Sample

The sample of women who participated in the study were recruited from the population of women detained at Cook County Jail with 37 from Dwight Correctional Facility. The participants who completed the survey were selected randomly and reflected the demographic profile of the overall detainee population. They were primarily African American women between the ages of 19-56, with the average age of 28. Most had and were parenting minor children. The women in the study typically lived in low-income Chicago neighborhoods prior to their arrest, and in only a few isolated cases was their first time being incarcerated. The most common reason for their arrest was a drug related charge, including theft or property crimes that were associated with their attempt to purchase illegal drugs. Their addiction was generally associated with other serious personal and social problems, such as chronic health issues,

unemployment and periods of homelessness, family disruption and, of course, previous arrests.

The women who made up the qualitative sample were selected from those who completed the survey based on their response to the question regarding having experienced violence from an intimate partner, crime partner, or an authority figure. This sampling technique, consistent with the approved design, constituted a purposive recruitment strategy. This meant that participants were selected for an interview if, based on their responses to three key questions on the survey, they were deemed to have experiences that were consistent with the objectives of this study. While they do not represent the universe of women detainees, they do reflect the population of incarcerated women who report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Their responses to the interview questions provided rich qualitative data for analysis in this project.

Methods of Data Analysis

The official data regarding rates of violence and arrest rates was gathered as the background data in order to establish the overall context for this project. It is discussed as part of the literature review. The findings from the survey instrument was analyzed using SPSS and is presented in the results section of this report by frequencies and percentages. An ANOVA was performed on two questions to determine: 1) if there was a correlation between intimate violence, crime partners and violence from authority figures; and 2) if respondents who have been physically and sexually assaulted across the life span were more or less likely to believe that their involvement in crime was related to the abuse they experienced. Results from the survey from each research site were combined and are discussed as one set of qualitative data.

The interview data was recorded in fieldnotes and transcribed, and then coded by theme by the PI and two research assistants. The themes were reviewed and collapsed into broad categories for analytic purposes. This inductive method of analysis is consistent with qualitative data analysis typically used in basic research. It required that the research team go back and forth between the raw data and the themes, to be sure that evidence existed in the data to support the tentative hypotheses. The research team then met with representative groups of women detained at the jail to test the validity of the conclusions. In the recommendation section of this report, I will discuss how this process was important not only for scientific purposes, but for dissemination as well.

The multi-method approach to this research, combined with the willingness of the participants to openly share their experiences and ideas, resulted in a very rich data set, which will be discussed in the next section of this report.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Background data on violence against women

In Illinois, the state police recorded 128,000 domestic violence calls in 1997, and in 1996, the Chicago Police Department received an average of 655 calls per day. During the same time period, there were 6,500 reported cases of criminal sexual assaults, of which one in six were perpetrated by a family or household member. More than 40,000 adults and 13,000 children sought shelter and related services from Illinois domestic violence programs in FY 1997, and another 16,500 were turned away from shelters due to lack of space. These startling statistics are suspected to under-estimate the actual extent of violence against women in Illinois. National estimates show that only 10% of women who experience domestic violence seek assistance for services or use the courts

each year.

Background data on women in crime

In its December 1990 report, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that nearly 3.2 million women had been arrested and nearly 1 million were under the supervision of the criminal justice system in 1998. In Cook County, where this study was conducted, there are approximately 15,400 women arrested each year, up from 12,000 in 1996. Most of these women end up in the Cook County Jail, being held in pretrial detention. On average, there are 1000 women detained in the jail on any given day, most of whom were arrested and are awaiting trial for felony offenses. The average female detainee at this institution had 7 prior convictions, and most are there (at least 50%) as a direct result of their addiction to illegal drugs.

Women of color are disproportionately represented in the population of women detained at the Cook County jail; 80% are African American, 13% are White, 6% are Latino and 1% identify as other. The average age is 28, and 10% of the women detained at the jail are under the age of 22. A recent study showed that 80% of the women had a history of psychiatric disorders, including alcohol/drug dependency. While there has not been a study that established the overall rate of prior abuse, in other research conducted at the Cook County Jail, 33% of the women showed severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, indicating a history of victimizaiton. It was expected that this, too, is an under-estimate of the problem given that violence was not the explicit focus of this research.

Survey Results

The qualitative data gathered from 298 surveys is presented in Appendix C of this

report. The results show a much higher percentage of women who experienced physical and/or sexual abuse that found in prior research. In this sample, 77% of the women who completed the survey had physical fights with their partner and in 54% of the times, the respondent was the one who was hurt (although some inconsistency is noted in this question and the question that asked about physical fighting). Fifty-five percent of the women experienced physical injury and the injury required medical attention in 45% of the cases. Thirty three percent of the respondents were involved in situations where knives, guns or other objects were used.

On questions related to emotional abuse, 70% of the women reported frequent arguments, of which 85% included threats of physical assault, cursing or insults. Twenty-six percent of the women surveyed experienced sexual abuse in their adult household and 39% had experienced abuse in their household as children. Thirty percent of the women surveyed in this study experienced abuse from an authority figure, and 57% reported abuse by a crime partner.

The respondents reported that the consequences of the abuse included feeling crazy (7%), worried (5%), fearful (7%), sadness in 11% of the cases, and all of these emotions in 10% of all of the cases. Thirty-seven percent reported other emotional responses that were coded as frustration (12%), betrayal (17%), and manipulation (8%).

Of particular relevance to this study was the survey item where the women were asked if they felt that being abused was a factor in their illegal activity. Thirty-four percent responded yes.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative findings for this study resulted from analysis of 33 in-depth

interviews following the interview schedule found in Appendix B. The qualitative results will be presented by theme, beginning with a discussion of the demographic profile of the sample population who participated in the qualitative aspect of this research.

1. Demographic Profile and Background

The sub-population of women who were interviewed for this study reflected the overall demographic profile of women detained at the Cook County Jail and by the Illinois Department of Corrections. They were primarily African American women between the ages of 19-56 who came from Chicago's most disenfranchised neighborhoods. They had an average of 4 children, limited educational background, and held few legal jobs prior to their arrest, and all had been in relationships with abusive partners.

Most of the women interviewed in this study had been arrested at least four times prior to the current incarceration; more than half had been in jail and/or prison over 10 times in the past five years. In most of the cases, the current charge was drug related; possession, distribution or other crimes (like theft) related to their drug use. Of those women who were interviewed, half reported being addicted to illegal drugs, mostly crack cocaine or heroine. Almost all of the self-reported addicts in this study had been in substance abuse treatment at least once and each of them saw a direct link between their addiction and their arrest. Findings related to how the experience of violence interacted with substance abuse will be presented later in this report. Here it is simply important to establish the overall sense that the women interviewed for this study had serious addiction problems, they were detained in great part because of those problems, and the so called "revolving door" between jails and the communities where they lived was

evident in their account of their life histories.

2. Family and Household Arrangements

The respondents in this study described a range of childhood experiences and household arrangements that were coded as the second theme in this study. Most grew up in family units that included two adults and sometimes a grandparent. Typically, both parents were employed outside of the home in the kind of jobs that required them to work long hours. In a few cases, the family was supported by the efforts of more than two adults who contributed the resources necessary to support the household. While these "other adults" (grandparents, uncles/aunts or older siblings) were a key source of financial stability, there was significant variation in the extent to which their non-monetary influence was positive or negative. The findings indicated that if the adult was a permanent member of the family unit, the influence was more positive than if they were among the changing cadre of adults who moved through the women's households of origin.

The qualitative data further showed that in those cases where there was a changing cadre of adults moving through the household, it was most often this person or an associate of this person who was the perpetrator of sexual abuse of the women when they were girls. That is, in four cases of women who were sexually abused as children, the perpetrator was an uncle who moved in and out of the household because of his changing financial and employment status. In six other cases, the women were victimized as children by their mothers' boyfriend or their stepfather, and in two more the perpetrator was a grandfather. The were other reports of sexual abuse by older siblings or cousins and close family friends who held family-like status and had free movement in

and out of the household.

The accounts of childhood sexual abuse, regardless of the perpetrator, were full of horrific details of betrayal, deception, coercion, and in some cases extreme uses of violence and force. In very few cases was the abuse an isolated incident; rather it lasted for years for most of the women who participated in the interview and sometimes involved multiple and simultaneous perpetrators. This finding is supported by the literature that suggests that women who are incarcerated are more likely to have experienced child sexual abuse than women in the non-detained population. However, the interviews conducted for this study show different results from the literature in that the nature and extent of the abuse (over years, multiple perpetrators, simultaneous abuse, violent rape) is beyond what the literature typically describes.

An important dimension of this finding was the extent to which the presence of other adults in the household, while potentially threatening to the female girls, had positive aspects to it as well. If, for example, the adults had jobs, they often contributed to the family income. If they did not, they stayed home and were cared for other (typically male) children. The dynamic created by this paradoxical presence of "other adults" turned out to be very complicated for the young women who were being abused. Given the prevalence of this pattern in the sample of women interviewed for this study, it emerged as one of the prominent conceptual issues in the analysis of the qualitative data.

Another pattern of household arrangements emerged during the interviews. Approximately half of the women reported that they were sent to other households to live for brief periods of time during which they were cared for by women other than their mothers. They described being "taken in" by aunts, grandmothers, neighbors or others

who provided temporary shelter and support when conditions in their households were difficult and resources were stretched. It is noteworthy that the women whose experience fit this pattern recalled being sent away for one of two reasons. Some women were sent away because their was a rapid decline in economic resources that resulted from job loss or illness. In other cases, one of the adults in their biological household had a dormant substance abuse problem that got out of control.

The women whose experience fit this pattern described these as very positive experiences. In contrast to some of their own family situations, the households they were sent to were very stable, even rigidly organized. While the arrangements were socially isolating for the young women at the time (the women reported having to stay inside, for example, and tend to household tasks) they felt a strong sense of gratitude both towards these "other mothers" in their lives and towards their biological parents for being able to access this very important resources of additional adult support during difficult times. It is very important to note, however, that this childrearing strategy was not employed in response to the sexual abuse even when the abuse came to the attention of their mothers.

3. Neighborhood Dynamics

As the women were being interviewed for the qualitative aspect of this study, they pointed to conditions in their neighborhoods or community that influenced their life history in important ways. These findings were significant in the ways that they suggested that the women's identity was shaped by more than events and circumstances in the private sphere; indeed at a very young age, the women interviewed for this study indicated a strong sense of being part of a neighborhood and community beyond their family and household.

Most of the women who are incarcerated in this country come from low-income communities that are plagued with problems that have resulted from persistent poverty, chronic employment, divestment of human service programs, and a lack of social capital. The findings showed that the women interviewed for this study lived in communities that saw considerable change during in the past 30 years. They grew up in neighborhoods that were once thriving; where families owned their own homes and cultural institutions were solid. They heard about how the communities had been seriously impacted by shifts in occupational and other social conditions. For example, major industries closed or relocated to outlying areas of the city and thousands of people were laid off. Local agencies lost funding during the 1980's and human service programs that their families once depended upon were closed. Residential patterns and representation by elected leadership were altered by redistricting and changes in zoning, and public transportation routes that provided essential access to other parts of the city were eliminated.

The women interviewed for this study described the extent to which these difficult conditions influenced how they felt about themselves and their family; at once "under-served" and "undeserving." On the one hand, the respondents witnessed their families struggling to accrue sufficient resources to take care of themselves, scrambling after limited public resources (such as public housing), and they felt first hand the impact of dependency on inadequately funded social and health programs. At the same time, they internalized the effects of having this position in their community which in some cases lead a suspicion of agencies and their development of an oppositional stance towards authority.

Simultaneously, there was a rise in a series of health and social problems that

disproportionately impacted on low income communities like those where the women interviewed from this study lived. Most notably are the epidemics of crack cocaine and violence. The combination of these processes meant that there was a decline in the community's ability to manage the increasing number of problems that they were facing. Subsequently, the women interviewed for this study described their families' growing dependency on large social institutions rather than more localized, community-based services. For example, when their neighborhood health clinic closed, they began to use the public hospital for health care that was not in their neighborhood. While they received a large "dose" of social services from institutions, the interventions were not designed to solving individual and neighborhood problems in a comprehensive way.

The resulting climate in the community was one of indifference or hostility towards the social institutions. The women who participated in this research described their frequent interactions with departments of social services, unemployment offices, health institutions, law enforcement, schools and other institutions as unhelpful, at best. This sentiment extended to victim service programs and correctional systems, which had particular relevance for this study because those women who did turn to these agencies for support felt that the disregard for their needs from institutions mirrored and therefore reinforced their family and communities minimization of it. Some of the respondents described this as a key element in their reaction to abuse from authority figures and their involvement in illegal activity.

4. Key traumatic events

A clear pattern emerged in the data that supported the fourth theme; the presence of key events that the respondents identified as having a significant impact on their lives.

While coding the interview data, these key events stood out for two reasons. First, they were identified by the respondents as "changing the course of their lives" or, in the second case, the events were outstanding because of how extremely traumatic they were. The first category, pivotal life changing events, included those things like moving to a new neighborhood (typically in the direction of more privilege) or achieving educational or occupational success. The women interviewed for this study identified a number of such events. It was noteworthy that in this category of key events, even a seemingly positive event (such as a move) was reported by the women interviewed for this study to have a disruptive effect, one that set in motion a series of destabilizing emotions and circumstances. That is, moving to a new neighborhood meant the loss of community and exposure to values and attitudes that were unfamiliar. This was especially true in the case where women of color moved to integrated or predominantly white neighborhoods. During the interviews, they described feeling "out of place" or discriminated against by their new neighbors.

A similar sentiment was described by those women who, for example, found employment in a corporate setting rather than a job in the service sector that paid below minimum wage. They recounted experiences of overt racial and gender discrimination, as well as more subtle forms of prejudice. This finding suggests that which might typically be evidence of social progress had a complicated impact on some of the women interviewed for this study.

The second category of events that emerged as a significant finding in this research was the extent to which the women experienced extreme trauma and loss in their personal and social network. Three of the women interviewed for this study saw their

mothers killed by their husbands or boyfriends. Six had lost children in their families under 16 to violent deaths. Each of the women interviewed for this study who had children had some interaction with child protective services, and all except two has lost custody of them. There were also reports of events such as life-threatening car accidents, fires that resulted in serious injury and destruction, repeated theft of their personal property, and high rates of incarceration of family members.

For many of the women interviewed for this study, the traumatic events were not isolated; they experienced them regularly. Some described how, at different points in their lives, the extent of unexpected crises was, in fact, a frequent (almost monthly) experience. The subsequent lack of predictability, the strain on emotional and material resources and the stress associated with having to put one's life back together without adequate time to grieve or fully recover was a very significant finding in this study.

5. Adult emotional and social profile

The prominence of these key traumatic events is linked to the fifth theme that emerged as significant in this study, the ways that women's emotional and social identity was shaped by family arrangements, neighborhood dynamics and those frequently changing circumstances previously described. It should be noted that the presentation of the data in support of this theme is not intended as a psychological or personality profile. Rather the discussion of this theme is intended to reflect a pattern that showed how women who participated in this study responded to experiences in their lives that may have influenced their victimization and arrest.

As the women reported the traumatic events described in the previous section of this report, they did so with flat affect, often dismissing the magnitude of the traumas.

They recounted even extreme events as almost routine, and they rationalized their misfortune as unimportant and "part of life". The respondents themselves noted the discrepancy between what they were describing and the manner in which they spoke, and explained this as their way of coping with repeated loss and change. It should be noted that while women described being almost paralyzed at times with fear and grief, their recovery from these events was typically swift and considered. They were able to gather themselves and repeatedly respond to the very difficult circumstances that they faced. Their acceptance and calm appeared almost as a form of resistance to what might otherwise be cause for collapse.

A closer look at some the emotional reactions the women described revealed a deep sense of spirituality. Even in those cases where women had been fairly alienated from the religious traditions that they had been raised in or exposed to (especially by their "other mothers") they described how in the most destitute times in their lives they relied on a strong faith both for explanatory and restorative purposes. That is, they felt like "things happened as they should" and that they would be taken care of, if not by people or institutions then by God. In almost all of the interviews, the women's spirituality seemed to be a major source of strength, and it emerged most clearly in the findings about the challenging circumstances that the key traumatic events brought.

Another response to the key events was a pattern that showed the women avoiding risks and seeking stability in almost all of the dimensions of their lives. The unsettled nature of their lives as a result of losses and changes was reminiscent of the shifting composition and environment of their childhood households. The respondents described the desire to "settle down" by finishing school, getting a job, saving money for

a home, and raising a family. On the surface, these responses seem like very conventional dreams and aspirations. However, the women interviewed for this study considered their aspirations to be almost transgressive. That is, their descriptions implied that the establishment of "traditional life styles" was ironically counter to what was expected and available to them, that they were actually unconventional in their desires. So, too, were the strategies they employed to achieve these markers of social success. Again, having experienced social institutions as not helpful, they described repeated attempts to "beat the system" in order to have access to stability and predictability in their lives. This was one of the most important findings of the study.

There were other elements of the emotional and social profile of the women interviewed for this study that followed a discernable pattern. Most described themselves as women who genuinely cared about the needs of others and who were, therefore, taken advantage of. They had a highly developed sense of obligation, and were keen observers of theirs intimate and social environment. They could identify manipulation when they saw it, for example, but they might not object to it when they experienced it.

On a related theme, the women who participated in the interviews had very high expectations of themselves and while they described themselves as having strong opinions and values about things, they compromised easily. They sought structure and routine, yet they adapted to change easily. It is important to note that the nature of this aspect of their emotional profile and their social interactions was not one of being passive or weak. Rather, the women saw themselves as "strong enough to bend" and as "race women" willing to advance the needs of family and community over themselves. There was decidedly racialized dimension to this finding and it showed a deep sense of ethnic

pride for the African American women in particular.

The ways that the women's life experiences influenced their intimate relationships and their parenting also emerged as important in the interview data. On the issue of adult relationships, the women described forming meaningful partnerships easily, and that romance was important to their sense of identity. They also described relationships as fragile; they described them ending abruptly and sometimes without apparent cause or explanation. From the women's point of view, their relationships were not casual or without meaning; rather they felt that the circumstances in their social world were not conducive to long-term, monogamous relationships. It was interesting to note that in this sample, four of the women described their primary partner for a significant period of time as another woman.

This finding had an important subtext related to violence from intimate partners and crime partners, which will be discussed in a later section of this report. Here, it is important to note the contradictory meaning of relationships; women wanted them, they worked hard at them, they did not have very high expectations of them, and they understood them to be negatively influenced by social conditions. From this vantage point, abusive male partners and violent co-defendants were sources of betrayal but also tolerated, disappointments and also consistent with women's expectations of relationships in their lives.

Most of the women interviewed for this study were parents of minor children at the time, and if they weren't, they had raised children that were not their biological offspring. In almost half of the cases, the women had children when they were very young, and then again when they were older (in their 30s). The relationships between the

women and their older children were more sibling like; were boundaries typically associated with generational difference were not evident. With the younger children, the women had more conventional parental styles, although many had experienced the interruption of their child rearing by violence, substance abuse and incarceration. Being a parent and raising their children was very important to the women interviewed in this study, and it was one of the areas that had been most compromised by the factors being studied in this research project.

6. Experience with the criminal legal system

As this study was conducted with women who were incarcerated at the time of the interview, the issues associated with arrest, confinement and separation from the community emerged as very important during the interviews. For a variety of reasons, including those discussed above, the women were living on the margins of society at the time when they were engaged in illegal activity. As previously noted, many had substance abuse problems, many were struggling to manage multiple demands with insufficient resources, most were responding to a history of trauma and destabilizing events, and they had children who needed them.

The findings from the interviews showed a clear pattern of the women facing a life every day that was characterized by emotional, social, and economic crises and very limited material support. They described how "out of control" they felt, how much their trust of social institutions had deteriorated and how limited their network of family and friends were; a classic portrayal of socially disorganized communities where poverty has eroded individuals opportunity and neighborhood structure. The findings showed how approximately half of the women interviewed for this study engaged in illegal activity as

a response to these situations, as ways to secure resources, to avoid further deterioration, and to maintain their families. Some were pulled into illegal activities by their association with others who were dangerous to them in order to avoid abuse. In most cases, using illegal activity to accomplish these goals was not successful in that it resulted in arrest and removal from the community in which they were so desperately trying to survive.

In other cases (close to half), the women participated in illegal activity explicitly to support their addiction to alcohol or drugs. This finding emerged with absolute clarity. The women sold drugs to buy drugs, they stole property to pay off drug debts, they violated probation because of drug possession or they failed to appear in court because they were "drug sick". The extent to which the women felt illegal behavior was almost inevitable - given the power of their addiction and the lack of treatment programs - was a very impressive finding from this research.

The inevitability of the pattern was furthered by the extent to which being arrested for a drug related offense only complicated the situation the women interviewed for this study found themselves in. The chemical and social dimensions of addiction are very strong, and it is well established as one of the most difficult health issues to overcome. Very few of the women interviewed for this study had received treatment for substance abuse problems while they were incarcerated, and many spent their time in detention craving drugs and alcohol. Incarceration also meant that the women owed drug dealers even more money when they were released, and a felony seriously limited their ability to earn a living in a legal occupation. So, craving drugs, owing money, being unemployable and stigmatized, they returned to deteriorating neighborhoods where the

cycle was repeated. While some of the women interviewed for this study described very moving accounts of stabilizing themselves, most experienced the very strong pull back to substance abuse and illegal activity in the neighborhoods to which they were released. This finding clearly points to the needs for community development as described in the recommendation section of this report.

7. Violence

The final theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the women's experience of violence. The term "violence" was operationalized in this study to include physical assault, sexual abuse, and coercion or threats made towards the respondents that resulted in them being afraid and/or modifying their behavior to avoid an assault. In addition to asking about the various forms of violence, the interview schedule asked about three categories of perpetrators: intimate partners (including family members); crime partners (including drug-using associates); and authority figures (law enforcement officers, counselors, etc.). As per the study design, all of the women interviewed for this study had at least one form of abuse by at least one category of perpetrator.

The results of the analysis of the interviews revealed that most women interviewed for this study experienced violence within each of the relational contexts under exploration in this study. With very few exceptions, the women were battered or had a history of abuse in intimate relationships, they were physically and sometimes sexually abused by their crime partners, and, less frequently, they were assaulted or threatened by authorities in the system. The results will be presented by category of perpetrator, followed by a discussion of the common dynamics that appeared in the data.

On the issue of intimate violence, the women described ongoing physical,

emotional, sexual and economic abuse that is consistent with the literature. The findings depart from what has been established by other research in the extent of the abuse and the multiple perpetrators. That is, the women interviewed for this study were severely assaulted on a regular basis in most of their adult relationships, and they had an average of three assaults. They sustained serious injury due to the use of weapons and felt like their life was endangered on numerous occasions. The qualitative data on this theme was full of horrific accounts of brutality that included a women who was sexually abused with a hot comb, another being locked in a trash dumpster after being beaten, and another who was shot over 40 times. These and other accounts point to how serious the violence was and how life for the women interviewed for this study had been shaped in very consequential ways by abuse.

The design called for an exploration into the extent to which women were victimized by people with whom they engaged in illegal activities. The results of this exploration revealed that, indeed, women are abused to a significant extent by their "crime partners" and that abuse parallels the intimate abuse described above. That is, the women were physically assaulted, sexually abused, and emotional engendered, and economically exploited by those that surrounded their illegal activity. A series of probing questions revealed that, in most instances, the women committed crime with male accomplices, but seldom were they engaged in romantic intimate relationships with their crime partners.

This finding suggests that this abuse was therefore not an extension of domestic violence as originally conceptualized, but rather it is a different site of similar violence. That is, the women interviewed for this study were being assaulted in similar ways by

different partners, creating a multiple effect that was very troubling. The interviews revealed many accounts of women getting robbed and beaten after they get money or goods illegally, how they are raped when buying drugs, and how they were exploited and threatened by their co-defendants. Similar to the previous theme, the nature and extent of their victimization by "crime partners" was significant, and it was repeated at home by their intimate partner.

The extent to which women experienced abuse by authorities in the systems that they were involved in was also a question in this research project. While some of the women refused to respond to this question stating that it was "too sensitive" to answer, in half of the interviews there was evidence of physical or sexual assault, and many more reports of manipulation, exploitation and other forms of emotional abuse by men who had authority over their lives. The pattern that emerged showed how vulnerable the women were to their abuse of power and how hurt or threatened the women interviewed in this study felt. For example, there were four accounts of probation officers who forced women to have sex with them, six accounts of physical assault by police officers and four accounts of correctional officers beating women who were interviewed for this study. Moreover, almost each woman described being touch inappropriately during institutionally sanctioned searches, five reported being forced to watch men masturbate and five felt coerced into not reporting an assault in order to be released from detention or not arrested. Findings like these were very common in the data collected for this study.

It is important to note here that in institutions of total control where people have "legitimate" authority over "inmates", "arrestees", "probationers", or "clients", some

degree of disrespect and arbitrainess might be expected. The findings reported in this study do not fall into this category of experience. When coding the data on this item, we limited inclusion to those responses that were evidence of blatant abuse, not those instances where a respondent felt "treated unfairly". This distinction is important to establish in order to make the point that while very few incarcerated women may report feeling respected by authorities in the system, the findings reported here go far beyond that more common (and conceivably expected) result.

In each category of abuse, a consistent pattern of response emerged. Seldom did the women reach out for assistance from mainstream institutions; these institutions had failed them in the past, the women felt that if they disclosed their abuse they risked incriminating themselves and they blamed the system, in part for their abuse. The data did not reveal a single case where the women who escaped an abusive relationship did so by using conventional approaches or mainstream services.

In these cases where the abuse ended, it did so in one of three ways. For some, being involved in illegal activities was a way out of an abusive intimate relationship. This was especially true for those women who were in relationships with men who were addicted to drugs or alcohol. By supplying drugs for their addicted partners, for example, they were afforded a temporary respite from the abuse while their partner was using. Abuse from crime partners was interrupted by his or her arrest, or the women turning herself in, for example, as a parole violator. Abuse from authority figures was typically only interrupted by a change in circumstances; if the women was released from custody, if she stopped going to treatment of if the authority figure was rotated to another institutional assignment.

Women in conflict with the law are unlikely to turn to law enforcement for protection. If she has been rejected or not responded to by her family, that is not a likely source of support either. This was a very significant finding and has important implications for intervention programs.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The previous section of this report described the specific findings of the research. It discussed how the survey results and the themes from the in-depth interviews showed the pervasive nature of violence in women's lives and the relationship between those experiences and their involvement in illegal activity. Patterns emerged that were significant, and where variation was found, it was noted as evidence of the complexity and breadth of experiences that incarcerated women who have been victimized find themselves in. In this section of the report, I will discuss the findings from a more analytic perspective. In keeping with the goal of this study that was designed as a basic research project, a new conceptual framework that emerged from an analysis of the data will be discussed here in order to further the understanding of this understudied group of women and their experiences.

1. Traumatic Discrepancy

The women who were interviewed for this study grew up in households that could be characterized as having a series of discrepant conditions within them. On the one hand, there were many accounts that described nurturing aspects of their environments. These accounts included descriptions of positive interaction with adults and meaningful rituals which the women treasured and that brought the household together. The conditions in the women's environment helped to establish of a set of values that

included loyalty, obedience and a sense of family pride.

However, these conditions co-existed with a divergent set of experiences that were highly stressful, disorienting and brought the women shame within and about families. First, most of the women who participated in this study witnessed or experienced violence in their intimate sphere from a very young age. The extent of the physical abuse and the sense that their troubles were unimportant lead to feelings of pain, fear and confusion. These feeling were furthered by social and economic marginalization; resources were inadequate, adults were not able to care for their families and the women felt disgraced by institutional mistreatment. The data showed evidence of both the nurturing dimension of their early lives and the more dangerous ones. As a result, the young women grew up in unsettled environments with a traumatic discrepancy between these two aspects of their lives.

2. Desensitization

The traumatic discrepancy was, for most of the women, very difficult. The lack of predictability, the instability and the confusion they felt was matched by the extent to which their family had to change in responce to events in the public sphere, such as the closing of a public housing complex. The women coped with that discrepancy and those changes by becoming less sensitive to them. This desensitization is conceptualized in this analysis as more than what the literature describes as disassociation. More than a psychological response to stress or trauma, the pattern that emerged from the data collected for this study revealed a social as well as a psychological phenomenon: one that was deeply influenced by the community dynamics, women's socioeconomic position, their membership in ethnically marginalized communities and their experience of abuse.

The nature of the desensitization was such that women described how easy it became to adapt to new surroundings and how quickly relationships could be formed with new people without establishing much trust first. The women managed their shifting reality by denying their needs, maintaining symbolic ties with things and people who were no longer in their daily lives, and by having very low expectations of relationships.

On the surface, this adaptive facility was impressive and seemed to point to a self-confidence and resiliency. Indeed, the women interviewed for this study described themselves as "easy going" even though some also perceive themselves as shy, quiet or not very good in social situations. Just below the surface, however, was a more troubled set of feelings. The women interviewed for this study felt mistrustful, unfulfilled, anxious about being hurt and invisible. Behaviorally, they described responding to situations impulsively and that at times they had trouble meeting social responsibilities. They structured interactions based on their belief that they were not going to be noticed and, if they were, they were not going to be treated fairly.

As previously mentioned, each woman described a shifting social environment that included the loss of resources and the tragic loss of loved ones and associates. The combined effect of loss, grief, fear, and social instability that resulted from the traumatic discrepancy leads to a lack of trust of intimates and institutions. It also resulted in the women's denial of the impact of what otherwise would be considered hugely traumatic events. The women in this study adapted by moving between being like the proud, loyal women who could adapt and change with ease and feeling scared, mistrustful and undeserving of concern from people or institutions. They describe living with a sense of numbness, with a very acute sense of tension just below their external identity.

3. Community and Neighborhood Conditions

The conditions in the women's community and neighborhood created, in essence, the perfect setting to further traumatic discrepancy and the process of desensitization. The women who were interviewed for this study grew up in under-privileged urban neighborhoods that were characterized by a series of structural shifts that have resulted in deteriorating economic conditions, neighborhood instability, and other manifestations of social disorganization. As young adults, they witnessed the effect of high unemployment where people once had decent jobs, they saw social institutions that were once prominent sources of assistance and pride lose their potency, and they were exposed to the negative effects on a community when middle class people feel compelled to leave their once mixed income community for better jobs and schools. Added to this, the women lived in communities where illegal drugs, particularly crack cocaine, seriously altered the nature of family and neighborhood life, and where the "war on drugs" created tense relationships with social institutions, including law enforcement.

To understand the full impact of these sets of community dynamics on the women interviewed for this study, further elaboration is required. Persistent poverty, chronic unemployment, deteriorating housing, crack cocaine and tension with law enforcement created a very dangerous situation for the women who were already experiencing the dynamics of traumatic discrepancy and desensitization. The violence associated with crack cocaine (including increased use of weapons and the presence of gangs) has a particular effect on women and girls who are already vulnerable to gender violence. This effect included being at higher risk of exploitation when they were involved in illegal drug activity and being vulnerable to arrest as a result of their addiction and their abuse.

4. Violence as a Factor in Illegal Activity

The traumatic discrepancy that resulted from childhood experiences, desensitization to very significant and life altering events and deteriorating conditions in the women's community culminated for the women interviewed for this study in victimization and their involvement in illegal activity. The data showed some variations on the perpetrators of violence; however, the analysis of the interviews supported the general pathway described below.

The women interviewed in this study were loyal members of households where they faced considerable difficulties. They managed these difficulties (both in the emotional and social sense) by working hard to create and maintain idealized family images and by staying connected to relationships, even with people who had failed them, including their abusive partners. Some of the women denied the risk in dangerous relationships and stayed with abusive partners. Others explained their attempts to overcome the insurmountable obstacles created by the violence using strategies that were illegal. The women were unrealistic about their ability to protect themselves. In the end, they described how their repeated victimization by their intimate partners as part of relationships was reinforced by abuse as part of the illegal activity and how both were consistent with what they expected from authority figures.

This conceptualization does not mean that the women weren't terribly hurt, fearful and angry. Rather, it suggests that their reactions to being abused were shaped by their experiences which included conditions in their family and as marginalized social actors. These experiences did not predispose them to call the police, to seek refuge in a battered women's shelter far from their homes, or to attend a support group for crime

victims when they were abused.

The women in this study endured the abuse and they participated in illegal activity in response to it. Being abused by a crime partner and authority figures in the system deepened the impact of intimate violence and further removed women from the possiblity of assistance from intervention programs. Their experiences have not been understood very well in either theoretical or practical terms.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The conceptual analysis that emerged from the data collected in this study attempts to explain what happens to women who constitute a very vulnerable sub-group of the population when they experience violence. Being socially marginalized and in conflict with the law because of one's illegal activity leave women in potentially deadly situations. The conceptualization developed here is an attempt to explain how the violence that the women in this sub-sample experience is unique because of a) the context that is occurs within; b) the range of perpetrators: and c) how the abuse for them is linked with illegal activity and arrest. It is, therefore, both an explanation of vulnerability to and consequence of abuse, as well as an explanation of a particular pathway to crime.

The following discussion of recommendations emerges from this conceptualization. It has been organized by category to facilitate dissemination of the findings and to encourage their serious consideration by various audiences and stakeholders in the field of violence against women.

Direct Service Implications

The findings from this research illustrate important gaps in services for women

who experience violence and who are also involved in illegal activity. The most obvious one, of course, is that intervention programs that work with battered women, sexual assault survivors, victims of stalking and adults who have experienced childhood abuse need to re-design their direct services to include the ways that illegal activity is linked to these experiences. At the most superficial level, prohibitions on providing services to women who have a felony record must be lifted. In addition, programs must engage in purposive outreach to this "hard to reach population" and they must shift their approach to services so that they can better meet the needs of women in conflict with the law when they present for services. One example of this would be to foster self-help approaches as women reported relying heavily on their social network for support.

Similarly, agencies that work with incarcerated women or women otherwise in conflict with the law must include attention to the various forms of violence the women in this study reported. Re-entry and pre-release services, crime prevention and harm reduction programs, and probationary counseling must pay serious attention to the ways that violence influences women's choices and decisions. To ignore violence against women who are arrested, detained, sentenced and ultimately released back to their neighborhoods seriously limits programs effectiveness and may contribute to the revolving door between correctional facilities and some communities in this country. It should be noted that to accomplish this goal might require that some programs shift the intervention philosophy and treatment approaches.

A third recommendation for direct service programs is to develop interventions that are not only culturally specific, but to offer approaches that look specifically at the community context within which women live. In the case of the women who participated

in this research, it was important to understand the ways that neighborhood changes and community dynamics influence who they are, how they respond to challenges, what role institutions and services play, how the presence of illegal drugs influences their daily life, and the strategies they use to survive that are particular to their community norms and structures. One concrete example of this is the importance of early intervention, for as the results of this research show, this sub-group of battered women experienced or witnessed extreme amounts of violence very early on in their lives.

Policy Recommendations

The role that public policies play in structuring the vulnerability that the women in this study faced was a very significant finding from this research. Even though it was not one of the major research objectives originally, as the women responded to the questions and discussed their life stories, it became clear that shifts in economic policy, the unequal distribution of resources, and the erosion of human services delivery systems in their communities was important. The most obvious of these was the impact of the policies associated with the "war on drugs", which created a series of mechanisms that led to their arrest and incarceration. This, coupled with the policies that have limited health and social services at the community level and reductions in services for ex-offenders in particular, has had a tremendous impact on these battered women and sexual assault survivors.

In the general sense, the findings from this research call for an infusion of resources to strengthen the community infrastructure and foster the redevelopment of neighborhood life in urban areas that have been blighted by poverty, homelessness, joblessness and other consequences of social disorganization. More specifically, policy

that will promote the health and well being of women and families in these communities (especially young women, women who have experienced violence and women in conflict with the law) are particularly important.

On the issue of violence against women specifically, the results of this research point to the very serious need to explore alternatives to the criminal legal system as the primary response to domestic and sexual violence. There was considerable evidence from the study that suggested that women did not rely on law enforcement, the courts or the correctional system to protect themselves and when they did, it resulted in more, rather than fewer, complications. While it is clear that in some instances calling for the police to arrest a perpetrator is the best and maybe the only appropriate response to victimization, the policies of mandatory arrest, heightened criminal legal sanctions and other strategies that rely solely on criminal justice institutions may not be helpful to women and children in disadvantaged, low-income neighborhoods. At the very least, there needs to be other alternatives.

Community Organizing Responses

An analysis of the data collected in this study suggests that there are characteristics of the women's community that exacerbate the negative impact of violence towards them. In part these community characteristics' are the result of competing community priorities and the general minimization of women's needs when compared to the communities responsiveness to the situations that men find themselves in. This pattern is particularly evident on issues related to violence and crime; the climate of opinion in many low-income urban communities considers men more vulnerable to these problems than women. The interviews confirmed this.

This finding from this study indicates the need for community organizing strategies aimed at shifting community consciousness and building coalitions with groups likely to accept the kind of gender analysis put forth by the findings from this research. That is, by educating the community on the extent and nature of violence against women and by putting the consequences of domestic violence and sexual assault within the context of other community problems, the community as a whole may respond in a way that limits rather than ignores the problem of violence against women. There is evidence from other research that confirms this supposition. Community education and the subsequent shifts in consciousness include the establishment of neighborhood coalitions and local collaborations that would formally link violence against women with other issues that communities care about -- issues like housing, education and public safety.

Limitations of this study

The findings from this report must be understood from within the context of several limitations, each of which point to the need for further research which will be discussed below. First, the research design did not call for a comparison group which may have limited the full analytic ability to assess the relationship between the factors under study in this project. In future work, it would be interesting to compare women with similar life experiences but who were not involved in illegal activity or women with criminal backgrounds but who were not involved in abusive relationships. Such comparisons would amplify the differences.

A second limitation was created by the setting. As is typically true of research in correctional facilities, serious constraints are placed on the data collection process by institutional polices and practices. The survey instrument and the interview guide were

shorter and less detailed that was desired. In particular, for obvious reasons, the setting and the sensitive nature of the questions did not allow for as much information on the direct pathway to crime or the criminal background of the respondents. On balance, however, there were many instances where the interviewer was able to probe beyond the original instrument, yielding rich accounts of women's lives.

Further Research

The final area of recommendations is directed at the research community research community and the agencies that support explorations into the issues of violence against women and women's participation in crime. While there have been important initiatives in the area, serious gaps remain in the scientific literature about these two populations and the sub-sample of women who experience both violence and arrest. In addition to needing more basic research, there are four specific areas of inquiry that the results of this study point to.

First, this study suggested that there is a relationship between specific public policies and violence against women. A closer, more controlled study of these links is called for. Second, this research suggested that there were particular characteristics of the communities that the women interviewed for this study came, and it demonstrated the value of localized case study approaches to understanding the contextualized factors that influence women's experience of violence. It follows that we need to explore the extent to which patterns found different communities are generalizable. That is, to what extent does the interactive effects of household arrangements, victimization, outstanding events and community conditions that were revealed by this study impact different communities in similar ways?

Lastly, this study focused on risk factors and used conventional definitions of violence and abuse, and the results showed a very poignant picture of vulnerability and struggle. The data also revealed evidence of resistance and challenged the accepted epistemological notions of the problem of violence against women. It was obvious that the definitions of violence need to be broadened to include a wider range of experiences of victimization beyond what is typically measured as domestic or sexual violence. It may be that the distinction between intimate and other forms of violence is not analytically useful, as this study suggested. In addition, the field would benefit from including questions regarding women's resilience, their strength and the successful strategies they use to avoid violence in very vulnerable setting and among populations at heightened risk.