

OPM - Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division

Women in Jail Interview Notes

Preview

- This publication is atypical of the reports that are generally published by the Research Unit at OPM's Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division, in that it is a compilation of observations and findings from a series of interviews conducted with female, pre-trial detainees at York CI, CT's sole women's-only prison.
- In October 2018, the Research Unit at CJPPD published *Women in Jail in CT* an analysis on the status and circumstances of women held on pre-trial status at York CI. As that report was being prepared a series of interviews at York CI were arranged in order to test the findings in the initial report and to investigate whether there were other dynamics at play that were being overlooked in the broader report. The interviews uncovered a range of troubling issues experienced by pre-trial women – on a scale that we had not anticipated – relating to childhood trauma, pregnancy, sexual trauma, mental health issues, drug use, economic and family issues and violence.
- This report is intended to capture and present to an interested readership some of the major observations of the project's principal investigator, Kendall Bobula. The Research Unit at CJPPD is generally focused on quantitative work. In the few cases where we have undertaken qualitative research projects, we have struggled with how to present our findings. In this report we have chosen to loosely organize the findings into broad thematic areas. We leave it to the reader to make use of this material and contact the unit for any clarification.

Purpose and Methodology

Between March 3, 2018 and August 23, 2018, the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division at the Office of Policy and Management, performed a series of one-on-one, open-ended interviews with 33 incarcerated women who were awaiting adjudication at York Correctional Institution, the state's only prison for women.

These interviews were intended as part of a broader OPM investigation into the dynamics that appeared to be driving the state's, female pre-trial prison population (*Women in Jail in CT, 2018*). The interviews at York CI provided an often-sobering look at the issues and circumstances confronting a large portion of the state's female pre-trial population. A majority of the women who were interviewed exhibited a complex constellation of issues and concerns that included economic and family instability, chronic substance abuse, mental and physical health issues, and histories of childhood and sexual trauma.

Access to inmates at York CI was granted by former-DOC Commissioner Scott Semple. The women that were interviewed were selected at random by OPM from the DOC's inmate management system. Staff at York CI were informed of the names of the women to be interviewed in advance and correctional officers accompanied each woman to a private interview room where they were informed about the purpose of the interviews. The women were then given the opportunity to opt out and return to their housing units or to sign a consent agreement. In the consent agreement, each interviewee was informed that she was not required to discuss or reveal anything that she did not feel comfortable sharing, and that she could end the interview at any time.

Only one caveat was placed on OPM by York CI staff; interviews were only allowed with women who had been admitted to the facility at least one week prior to the date of the interview. This was done, we were told, to ensure that none of the women were undergoing 'detox' at the time of the interview. The DOC staff's decision to restrict interviews to pre-trial women held for more than one week certainly affected the composition of the interview cohort. In the report *Women in Jail in CT*, we discovered that among women who were able to bond out from jail, 76% were able to do so within the first week. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the women who are able to leave prison within 7 days of admission have greater access to economic assets and social and family support than the women who remain incarcerated past one week. Given this constraint we assume that the interview cohort was slightly more likely to be experiencing more difficult circumstances than the average pre-trial admittee.

The follow pages are an attempt to present the information gleaned from the interviews in a general way in the hope that they might be useful to future researchers interested in incarcerated women.

- Kendall Bobula, Principal Investigator

The York interview cohort

The thirty-three women that were interviewed for this study were selected at random. Since women who were released within a week of admission to York CI could not be interviewed, researchers were concerned about the degree of similarity between the interview cohort and the overall pre-trial population at York CI.

Table 1. Race and ethnicity, York CI vs. cohort

	York CI population	York CI, %	Interview group	Interview group, %
White	166	54%	18	55%
Hispanic	53	17%	5	15%
Black	86	28%	10	30%
Other	1	0%	0	0%
Total	306	100%	33	100%

The racial and ethnic composition of women in the interview cohort was consistent with that of the entire pre-trial population at York CI that remained incarcerated, on pre-trial status, for a least a week between May and August 2018.

Table 2. Age distribution, York CI vs. cohort

	York CI population	York CI, %	Interview group	Interview group, %
Under 30	99	32%	10	30%
30-39	121	40%	18	55%
40 and Over	86	28%	5	15%
Total	306	100%	33	100%

Although women in the interview cohort skewed slightly younger than women in the entire pre-trial population, the difference was within acceptable bounds.

Table 3. Distribution by controlling offense

Controlling offense	York CI population	York CI, %	Interview group	Interview group, %
VOP	51	17%	8	24%
FTA 1 st or 2 nd	52	17%	5	15%
Poss. of Narc	19	6%	4	12%
Crim. Viol. of Protect. Order	16	5%	2	6%
Injury / Risk of Injury to Minor	20	7%	2	6%
All other charges	148	48%	12	36%
Total	306	100%	33	100%

Women in the interview cohort were somewhat more likely to be charged with violation of probation or with drug charges than women in the general pre-trial population.

Explanation and discussion

Table 4 consolidates many of the questions that were asked during the York CI interviews. Due to the open-ended nature of the interviews, not every interviewee was asked every question. As the interviews evolved, specific areas of interest that had not been anticipated at the inception of the interview process were incorporated into interviews. Similarly, some lines of questioning were not continued as the interviews proceeded. The percentages included throughout this report refer to the number of responses given divided by the number of women asked, not the entire interview cohort.

Several notable findings emerged from the interviews such as the high rate of physical abuse (75%), sexual abuse (86%), mental health issues (81%), and homelessness (64%) reported among the pre-trial cohort. OPM had some expectations that these issues would emerge but the scale of the reporting around these issues was not anticipated.

Following Table 4 this report relates some of the most significant findings uncovered during the interview process. These findings are organized around a set of themes including – Childhood Trauma, Pregnancy, Sexual Trauma, Mental Health, Drug Use, Family and Economic, Violence, and Health Emergencies. Interspersed among the findings are some direct quotations from individual women relating their own experience.

Following the narrative, we have produced a series of charts – one for each interviewee – providing a summary of the issues that we encountered during the interview process.

As the charts illustrate, the main interviewer (K. Bobula) observed a high degree of intersectionality due to complexity and co-occurrence of trauma associated with women in the interview group.

Table 4. Summary of answers to key topic areas

Question posed	Answering "yes"	Persons asked	Answering "Yes", %
Have you ever been pregnant?	29	30	97%
Have you had an issue(s) with a pregnancy?	11	13	85%
Has anybody close to you died unexpectedly?	24	26	92%
Have your parent(s) had a job(s) (Notice: Answered "Yes")	23	26	88%
Have you ever been sexually abused?	24	28	86%
If sexually abused, were you 16 or younger?	18	24	75%
Did your parent/primary caregiver have mental or physical health issue(s)?	16	19	84%
Have you ever been hospitalized?(non-pregnancy-related)	19	23	83%
Do you have mental health issues?	21	26	81%
Did you move as a child or young adult?	19	24	79%
Did you have enough food to eat as a child?	15	19	79%
Have you ever used marijuana?	18	23	78%
Have you ever been physically abused?	21	28	75%
Use(d) crack or cocaine?	22	30	73%
Was your parent an addict?	14	20	70%
Have you ever attended a drug treatment program?	11	16	69%
Have you ever considered yourself homeless?	16	25	64%
Was there any violence in the house as a child?	15	24	63%
Are you/ have you ever been an alcoholic?	13	21	62%
Have you ever smoked cigarettes?	5	9	56%
Do you abuse pills?	11	20	55%
Have you ever been married?	11	21	52%
Have you ever used methadone?	5	10	50%
Have you ever been evicted from your home?	9	19	47%
Have you had an abortion?	7	15	47%
Have you used heroin in any form?	12	27	44%
Have you ever gotten a DUI?	4	9	44%
Have you ever been jumped/beaten?	9	21	43%
Did you have a juvenile case?	7	17	41%
Did you live with someone besides your parent(s) as a child?	11	28	39%
Have you ever voted?	5	13	38%
Have you ever been shot at?	6	19	32%
Are your kids with the same dad?	6	19	32%
Did you use drugs while pregnant?	4	16	25%
Did NOT finish 12th grade or receive a GED?	7	31	23%
Have you ever been stabbed?	4	20	20%
Is this your first time (physically) in prison?	4	29	14%
Have you ever been shot?	2	20	10%

Themes

The major themes found during the interviews included – childhood trauma, pregnancy, sexual trauma, mental health issues, drug use, adulthood economic and family instability, violence, and health emergencies. I selected interview quotes that I thought best accompanied each of the themes. There are many more interview quotes that were not used. As a caution to the reader there is profanity in the quotes below. Ellipses are used to denote unintelligible words, not that words were excluded.

Childhood Trauma

The first portion of the interviews primarily focused on childhood, including their families and/ or their foster care homes. When asked about their parents, 23 of 26 (88%) women said at least one of their parents had at least one job at one point in time. 19 of 24 (79%) women said they moved at least once as a child or young adult. 11 of 28 (39%) said they lived with someone besides their parent(s) as a child for an extended period of time. 14 of 20 (70%) women reported their parent was an addict, and 16 of 19 (84%) women said a parent or primary caregiver had a serious mental or physical health issue. Finally 4 of 19 (21%) women said they did not have enough food to eat as a child.

The women recalled childhood instability such as moving as a young adult, changing elementary schools, and not living with their biological parents. Although not asked consistently across all women in the study, 14 of the women, who volunteered information about when they left home, said they had left home or moved out of their parents' house before the age of 18, 5 of them left home before the age of 16. 44% (8 of 18) of women said they were DCF involved as a kid and 8 women out of 17 women asked (47%), had been institutionalized (overnight) as a child. (i.e. mental health hospital, detention center, group home, etc.) Despite this, 77% (24 out of 31) women finished high school or got their GED and 8 of these 31 (26%) reported to at least beginning post-secondary education courses.

“My father ended up getting a dishonorable discharge because he took off to go find my mother. Yeah, so, he ended up finding her or whatever, and she got pregnant with my brother. And then, they got married, and then he left her when she got pregnant with me. My brother is, like, 18 or 14 months older than me... [My dad] left all of us here. My mom was pregnant with me so I was blamed for everything because I looked like my father. My father left when she was pregnant with me, so, of course, I took the brunt of all the bullshit.”

“He would try to strangle [my mom] and stuff like that. Finally got away. I was in a juvenile program 'cause I ran away – I used to run away all the time – 'cause I just, I don't know, I couldn't deal with it. So then I would just like run away, and then, I don't know...”

“I was a runaway. I was in a new home every week. Literally, every single week a new home. I ran away all the time. I hate being told what to do, I hate being made to sit still. I'm not that person.”

“Once I told my mom everything that was going on, because like, he would be like, 'Oh, I'm gonna kill her if you tell her. Your mom doesn't care about you; she says she didn't go to school for four years to be a housewife' things like that. He brainwashed us into thinking our mom doesn't love us and that he is the only one who cared.”

“I was 18 months old when I went into the foster home that eventually adopted me when I was 9, and I went back into foster care when I was 11. And I exalted (sic) all of them by the time I was 16. There's nothing cool, nothing fun, nothing good about my story. There's nothing about it that I even care to talk about. My life was shit. I don't care to talk about it.”

“[My mom] has anger issues. When I was little, for example, she used to, like, if I did anything wrong, she would go nuts, and I would cry and say, 'I'm sorry.' Well, one day, I was getting a little older, and I didn't cry and say, 'I'm sorry.' I think I told her she was crazy or something. And so, I came home from school, and she threw a pill bottle at me that was empty and told me that she took them all and that she was killing herself because I don't give a shit about her. And I was like, 8.”

Pregnancy

When discussing family during the interviews, a major component were the women's children. 32 women were asked if they have children –81% responded yes (26 of 32 women). But when asked if they had ever been pregnant the rate jumped to 97% (29 out of 30 women had been pregnant). 7 of 18 women had had an abortion – 47% of women. 4 of 16 women admitted to using drugs, at least once during pregnancy. 85% of women (11 of 19) reported having an "issue" with a pregnancy. Of the women who provided more information about their pregnancy issues, responses included SIDS, stillborn, and "tubal" pregnancy (also known as an ectopic pregnancy). 9 the women in the study had 3 children, ranging from ages 0 to 6. The most frequently occurring age for first pregnancy was 17, the average age was 18.7. The youngest age for a pregnancy was 14, and there were three women who were first pregnant at age 14. The oldest age of pregnancy was 37 and she was the only woman who gave birth to her first child in her 30's. Seven women gave birth to their first child in their 20's. 71% (24 women asked) of the women said they had a physical health issue and 85% (13 women asked) said they had an issue with a pregnancy. In this case, abortions were not included as an issue with the pregnancy. 7 women out of 15 women had said they had an abortion or multiple abortions.

"I got pregnant at the end of 17, so I didn't do anything, well I did weed. I did weed, but I didn't do any cocaine or crack or PCP ... most of the time I was pregnant, but when I found out I was pregnant, I stopped. Anyhow I would regularly smoke weed and I was pregnant and they assigned me a social worker at the hospital at Yale and um she turned her back on me and turned me in... for using weed when I was pregnant. It was illegal, it was illegal back then."

"There was a protective order against me and my ex-husband. I brought my daughter to the doctor's – to a therapist, psychiatrist – and she said my daughter had all the signs of being molested. And I said he called when he didn't, so it was a false please statement so I did 30 days."

"I had a rough life... 10th grade, I got pregnant with my son when I was 14... I took care of him, my aunt helped me take care of him, my grandmother, that's when I was selling drugs, then a lot of money, but then I stopped after I had my second baby, 18. I got 6 different baby fathers, I got 8 kids altogether, but two passed, 6 survived. My daughter 3 months she died of SIDS, then I had a stillborn baby."

Sexual Trauma

Sexual trauma was a common topic in the interviews. 86% (24 of 28) of the women asked had been sexually assaulted in her life, and of those 24 women, 18 of them acknowledged sexual abuse at age 16 or younger. Of the women who gave a specific age of the childhood sexual assault (two women vaguely said the sexual assault happened "as a kid"), the ages ranged from 18 months to 16 years, with the most commonly occurring age as 16 (3 women). Seven women said they were first sexually assaulted under the age of 9. Most of the women knew the perpetrator of the sexual violence; "family friend", "uncle", "cousin", and "step-dad" each appeared twice when asked about who sexually assaulted them at the youngest age they were sexually assaulted. "Gang raped" appeared twice as well. While we did not explicitly ask about prostitution, in 6 interviews the woman identified "prostitution" and one woman said "stripping" when asked "how do you support yourself and/or your family?"

"My mom's name is (redacted), I miss her so much, she was here visiting me when I got arrested. I don't really talk to my dad anymore, he has embarrassed me, I'm like a prostitute and I'm pretty sure I have HIV. I started like tricking in (redacted) city when I was like 15 years old, you know, so like, I've been abused so many times in my life, it's like unbelievable, I just got raped like 13 times in the past year – the past year – in Fair Haven."

"I was assaulted at 13, 18, and 30 years old; I was raped, and two of those times I was heavily drugged...At 13, I was lucid – completely awake for that. And just, a friend's brother and a friend...pinned me down and attacked me. Um, when I was 18, I was heavily drugged and raped by my friend's brother. I tried to commit suicide because...he gave me chlamydia. And then, uh, at 30 years old...someone put over 270 milligrams of Ativan in my drink when I stepped away. And I was left beaten, bloody, and raped on my friend's doorstep."

"When I first relapsed, I lost everything. I lost my job, I lost my scooter, lost my place; I lost everything. So, I did what I did – at that time – to survive. Which is basically sell myself. And then you have people that take advantage of that. You don't know whose car you're getting into at any specific time. It is a very, very dangerous game."

"(Crying) I was gang raped, maybe 3 years ago...I don't really wanna go into that."

Mental Health

Mental health issues appear to be a major component of the lives of the women interviewed, and there is evidence that this exists in the larger female pre-trial population. Most of the women, 81% (21 of 26), acknowledged having a mental health issue or, in many cases, multiple mental health conditions. We compared the women's interview answers to the questions "Do you have a mental health issue?", "Have you ever been institutionalized for a mental health reason?", and "Do you take any medications for your mental health issues?" to the RT 74 – the most recent mental health score given by the DOC. Only 5 women who answered "no" to the question – "Do you have any mental health issues?" However, two of these women had caveats – of one woman stated she has "no diagnosed mental health issues, but I think there's something wrong with me". (This particular woman also took Librium, Benadryl, and a "mystery pill" from the DOC which stabilizes her mood.) And another woman in the "no" answers said she thinks she has PTSD, but she isn't diagnosed with it. Fifty-two percent (14 of 27) of women asked said they have PTSD, 37% (10 of 27) said they are depressed, 33% (9 of 27) said they suffer from anxiety or panic attacks, and 30% (8 of 27) said they are bipolar. Four women said they were schizophrenic or heard voices (or were taking medications for hearing voices), 4 women said they were at one time suicidal, and 5 women had spent time in a mental health institution for some length of time – longer than an outpatient visit. Many women mentioned the medications they take for their mental health – including drugs such as, but not limited to, Gabapentin, Lexapro, and Librium. When asked about mental health issues, the women do not seem to differentiate between mental health disorders (e.g., bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression) and behavioral health disorders (e.g., ADHD, ODD, OCD, gambling, substance abuse) in their own lives and experiences. Therefore, this section does not comment on official terms of the medical or mental health fields, but rather it is predicated in the mindset and perspective of the offenders being interviewed, not necessarily medical fact or literature.

"So my kid's father, he's like abusive and he kept calling the police on me until they arrested me basically, he said that I was like hallucinating and bipolar and schizophrenic. And um he was gaslighting me and really confusing me... I was working 2 jobs, going to school, and I have 3 kids. So, I got really tired, and I have chronic pain the winter, so my whole body, like my joints hurt and stuff and I couldn't sleep, so I got really sleep deprived and I started like having a mental breakdown. I was inpatient in a behavioral health clinic for a week and he basically kicked me out of the house."

"It started with Percocet – it actually started with Xanax, I was like prescribed that since I was young – since I was like 12 years old, I've been on Klonopin, I've been on Geodon, I've been on Wellbutrin, I've been on Zoloft, I've been on Prozac, I've been on everything you can name... because I was like... I have PTSD and I have like a bunch of major depressive disorder, I actually made like a suicide attempt with the pills when I was younger. I have been in the Pond House a couple of times. I've been institutionalized a couple of times. In Connecticut. I've been to the Pond House like 3 or 4 times."*

* A behavioral health unit at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London, CT

Drug Use

Drug use is nearly ubiquitous among inmates, only two women from the entire interviewed cohort did not acknowledge ever using a drug (including marijuana). The most commonly used drugs were marijuana at 78% (18 of 23 women), crack and/ or cocaine at 73% (22 of 30 women), and heroin 44% (12 of 27 women). Of the 22 women who used crack and/or cocaine, 12 were white, 6 were black, and 4 were Hispanic. Black women who used cocaine and/or crack were on average 36, white women were 34 and Hispanic women were 31. And of the women who used marijuana 8 were black, 7 were white, and 3 were Hispanic. Of the women who used heroin – 10 were white and the remaining 2 were Hispanic and the average age was 32. 62% of the women

asked said they were an alcoholic (13 of 21 women) 44% said they had gotten a DUI, (4 of 9 women). 69% (11 of 16 women) said they had tried a drug treatment program and 50% (5 of 10 women) said they had tried methadone. And lastly, 15% (4 of 16 women) said they did use drugs at some point while they were pregnant.

"I was doing crack and heroin... well I was on heroin for a while, and then I got onto the methadone, because the first time DCF was involved and I got all that, then I was clean for two years and then I started smoking crack, I tried it with one of my friends and I fell in love, and then because I kept coming up dirty with the clinic with cocaine, I got rapid detox off of it, they detoxed me 100 ml in 5 days, so I was really sick, and I had to get up and get the kids ready for school, like it was getting impossible, so I just started using the heroin again, this was not even about a year ago now."

"I think it was just the fact that drugs were everywhere and I was already used to them, curious about them, making money from them, tired of working, tired of not seeing my son. And I think that made it easier for me to buy a pack and sell it so I could be with my son. I was missing my son growing, missing my son developing new characteristics, missing milestones. I missed it. I got him back to pay for him, I didn't get him back to be with him. So, I felt like that would be a way for us to spend time together, if I stayed home and sold drugs, then I could still be with my son. And in the meantime, I guess I had so much time on my hands that I became curious again and started using."

"Klonopin, then it went to Ativan, than it was on Xanax, and I think it was just, then it was just like the coping mechanism, to take it and go to bed, take a nap, it was making me tired and it just shut my brain down, instead of kinda dealing with it, and I wasn't really doing much like counseling – talking – I was more just taking medicine, and I think that's what really started it – looking back – because a year later I was - you know - snorting, I'm not an intravenous user. I've never done that before, but I mean I'm no better than anybody else, but it started out with that then percocets, then 2 -3 years ago it was the heroin"

Adulthood Economic and Family Instability

The theme of instability often followed these women from childhood into adulthood in the form of evictions, homelessness, and previous incarcerations. 47% of the women (9 out of 19) had experienced being evicted as an adult. 64% (16 of 25 women) reported experiencing homelessness at some point in adulthood, including living in a homeless shelter, on peoples porches, on the street, or in tents. 86%, (25 of 29 women), had spent at least one night in prison prior to this current pre-trial stay. All of these variables of instability, were often compounded with other stressors, as previously mentioned, such as domestic violence, sexual trauma, mental and physical health issues, and having to care for children and/or other adults. Despite this, most women reported having, or having had, jobs in the past. As mentioned previously, 6 women reported working as prostitutes at some point, for money and/ or drugs; one additional woman said she was a stripper. Two of these women also held other jobs in addition to prostitution. Only two women in the cohort answered that they never held a job. 36% (12 of 33 women) had a food related job, including working at fast food, waitressing, or a grocery store. 7 women had medical field related jobs such as eye doctor receptionist, Assess-A-Ride, CNA, and home care. Other miscellaneous jobs included construction, cable installation, Walmart, housekeeping, window washing, veterinarian technician, secretary and others. Most women moved frequently between different low-skill, low-wage jobs. Only one respondent reported having a stable well-paying career in the traditional sense– as a unionized construction worker.

"I ended up in a church when it got so cold 'cause I was staying under the bridge, and they let me sleep there for a few hours. And then I got up and I called (name redacted) and said, "Look, I don't know what we're doing here; I can't stay here," and they finally put me in a shelter. But we still couldn't see each other. I don't have a vehicle, I know nobody. I have no support system."

"I didn't stab anyone, I didn't mug anyone, I didn't rob a store, I didn't you know – I mean it's like, I'm a mom from [redacted], I was a tee ball mom, I ran the concession stands."

"Normally, it was like sports bars, type – family restaurants/ sports bars ... so I would work like double shifts, and I would come home and in between shifts do laundry, walk the dog, you know make dinner, do – I mean like – I was like, you know like, I just want my life back, but it's like nobody will give me a chance. The judge even said... like the prosecutor said, she goes, she's just going to be a felon walking the streets of (city redact). It's like – you don't even know me. It's like – you read what's on a piece of paper from what other people wrote on a piece of paper."

Violence

When asked about themselves 75% (21 of 28) said they had been physically abused and 83% (19 of 23) said they had been hospitalized at some point. Most women recounted episodes, if not ongoing, of violence in the house as a child – 63% (15 of 24). This often carried from household to household as they were shifted from multiple households as children. 43% (9 of 21) said yes they had been jumped or beaten, 20% (4 of 20) had been stabbed, 32% (6 of 19) said they had been shot at, and finally two women said they had been shot. We didn't specifically ask the question "Have you ever carried a weapon?" however 5 women said they had used or were in possession of a weapon at some point.

"[Living with my drug-dealing uncles] was scary, it was exciting, it was depressing. Some happy times. There was a lot of money, things that were available to you that other kids didn't get. And sometimes it was life-threatening... a lot of raids, shootings, dog attacks, stabbings...by other drug dealers, police, people who wanted to rob us; they'd kick in the doors... My uncles got shot. Some of them passed away, some of them lived. Right outside the door, in the parking lots. People would just wait for them, 'cause there was a lot of money coming out of our house. I've been held [hostage] for my uncles to show up with money. One time I was 13, uh, one time I was 15. Um, I think another time I was 15, maybe 16."

"[My ex-boyfriend] would take the phone from me. He would, like, drive me to remote areas and beat the shit out of me. It was wonderful. (Sarcastically). Like my whole pregnancy [and] before I was pregnant."

"When I was in my twenties I went through a lot of deaths, I went through a lot of um, relationships with my kids' fathers, um, I was in one bad-ass relationship where he was abusing me, which is my one youngest daughter's father, I had my jaw broken from him, he broke my jaw, he shattered my jaw, I had to have my jaw wired... this was about 8 – 9 years ago."

"[My ex-boyfriend] was doing all sorts of stuff: beating me, and the police had to come, all types of stuff...I can show you – if I take my clothes off – my whole body is bruised...They said that they have to – even though I'm the victim – they have to [arrest me] in the state of Connecticut [speaking on dual-arrest]...I'm the victim, I'm dragged, I'm beaten, but I'm the one in jail."

Health Emergencies

Stories of significant hospitalizations due to head trauma, accidents, and violence were common in the interviews. Although not asked directly about car accidents, 15 women mentioned – without prompting – during their interviews they had been in a serious car accident, and 2 more said they had been in a minor car accidents (We didn't ask women specifically if they had been in a car accident). 13 women recalled having a traumatic brain injury, brain surgery, or a serious concussion. The stories included traumas such as being struck by a moped at age 9, a mirror falling on her as a child resulting in brain surgery to remove the shards of glass, seizures causing concussions since age 7, being head-butted by a drug dealer resulting in a surgery, pistol whipped in the head during a fight, and multiple stories of car accidents resulting in varying levels of head injuries. Death, violence and physical illnesses were common themes in most of the interviews. Almost all of the women – 92% (24 of 26 women) said they had experienced the death of someone close to them (usually a close family member or significant other) – the causes ranged from shootings, accidents, and suicide to AIDS and various cancers. Only two women said "no" they hadn't experienced the death of a loved one.

"I think anything below \$25,000 shouldn't be held I think it should just be promise to appear and case is handled... OK, I missed my appointments, god fucking forbid, ok, I'm ADHD, bad as hell, I'm 34 years old, I have 4 kids, I lose my train of thought, OK, I don't think of the appointments, I don't think that, it's not like I think I'm better than them- I don't have to go, it's just I don't think about it. You know, I do in the moment, like at first, like the first couple days – whatever. I'm like yeah I got this, I call. But it's like I can't – I can't do too much at once, I have, I have had brain traumas like nobody's business. I was head-butted by my Columbian drug lord ex-boyfriend. And I had to have brain surgery... caused a subdural hematoma."

"I was on medication with my first one, because I have grand mal epileptic seizures. They were worried about birth defects with both of my boys because I needed to be on the medication, so they did ultra sounds all the time to make sure the kids were ok, like no holes in their hearts or cleft lips, or anything"

but they – beautiful children – healthy, everything. I’ve probably had probably like had 70, since I was like 7, and I was on medication, I was on Trileptal for a while, but then my husband’s insurance didn’t cover it, cause it didn’t come in generic form, so I weaned off of it, so I haven’t been on medication since.”

“So we were living in [a ’99 Ford Escort in a Walmart parking lot in (redacted)] and then I get sick because I have: colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, and I have a twisted intestine that is infected. So, I have all these plus other problems – I’m old – high blood pressure, thyroid, arthritis, a disability in my shoulder, I just broke my ankle that’s still repairing ‘cause I ripped the tendon from the bone, so they say it’ll take 8 months to a year before it really heals.”

Constellation of Issues Graphics

It is hard to explain in a traditional chart or graph the extent of dysfunction present in these women’s lives. To best illustrate this point of a multitude of issues in one woman’s life, we have taken each woman and given them a “constellation of issues” graphic. These are grouped by thematic color and include interviewee-specific information near that bubble. These graphics make it easier to see how a person could become overwhelmed by their situation or their life’s trajectory. For example, a small excerpt of an interview with a woman, demonstrates the fragmented lives of these women.

“They shot at me too, the same dudes who raped me, they chased me and couldn’t catch me so they started shooting at me... of course I have seen people get shot, killed, stabbed in Hartford and in Florida. I went to North Dakota. I saw someone get killed there...” This woman is in prison for a VOP, she mentions her twin sister is also at York for Assault. “...me and my twin sister were in DCF, but just went to my dad’s, my mom was not being a good parent...my dad was on drugs at one time, we lived with his mom and sister.” She goes on to explain, “I don’t have kids and I don’t want none, I had an abortion and a miscarriage and my twin same – an abortion and tube pregnancy...”

This excerpt is not unique in painting a picture of a web of dysfunction in these women’s lives. These graphics give a general look at each woman we interviewed and their co-occurrences of trauma and stressors. Names were replaced by pseudonyms out of respect to the interviewees and to provide anonymity.

Note: The data provided here is directly from the woman’s interviews, no further attempt at explanation or validation of their accounts have been made, other than from the RT system and the gathering of data about pre-trial women as a whole. Pseudonyms were given to provide some anonymity in addition to their actual age at the time of the interview and their charge (Controlling Offense) from the RT system.

































