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What Do We Know About Women in Jails?

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Achieving More Effective
Outcomes with Women in Jails
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National **R**esource **C**enter 
on **J**ustice **I**nvolved **W**omen

A project of the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the National Institute of Corrections

What do we know?

- Jail populations
- Capacity
- Intervention opportunities
- Risk of return
- Population increased between 2010-2013
- Risk and needs identification is important
- Program policies and procedures based on males





Setting the Stage...

Potential Impacts

- Reduce rates of detention, commitments and returns
- Improve transition to community
- Focused and effective use of resources

Setting the Stage...

What's contributing to the increase in overall numbers (arrest and incarceration)?

- Legislation
- Policies
- Offense types
- Other Issues?

Setting the Stage...

Emerging research and knowledge, revised practices, focus groups, and interviews including the perspectives of justice-involved women continues to confirm:

- Some issues are unique
- Some are the same but occur at increased frequency
- Some issues are the same but have very different impact



NRCJIW/AJA Survey

- Women in Jail Survey: Identifying Challenges and Critical Issues when Working with Women in Jails
 - Gender responsive population management
 - Role of jails and staff in addressing issues specific to women
 - Challenges staff encounters when working with women
 - Interest in learning about effective gender responsive strategies

What jail staff know about women inmates...

- History of abuse and trauma
- Challenges being separated from children and trying to parent from jail
- Physical and mental health issues
- Impact of families and the community at-large
- Jail operational and management challenges



Differences while in custody

- Lower levels of violence while in custody but higher rates of disciplinary write-ups
- Relationships with staff and other inmates
- Responsibilities for children and other family members
- Gender-specific treatment needs while in custody and during transition to community

Staff Perceptions and Roles in Managing Women in Jails

6. Do you believe that male and female inmates should be managed differently in jail settings?



* 243 total responses, 100% of submissions

7. Do you believe jails have a role in specifically addressing issues related to female inmates?



* 243 total responses, 100% of submissions



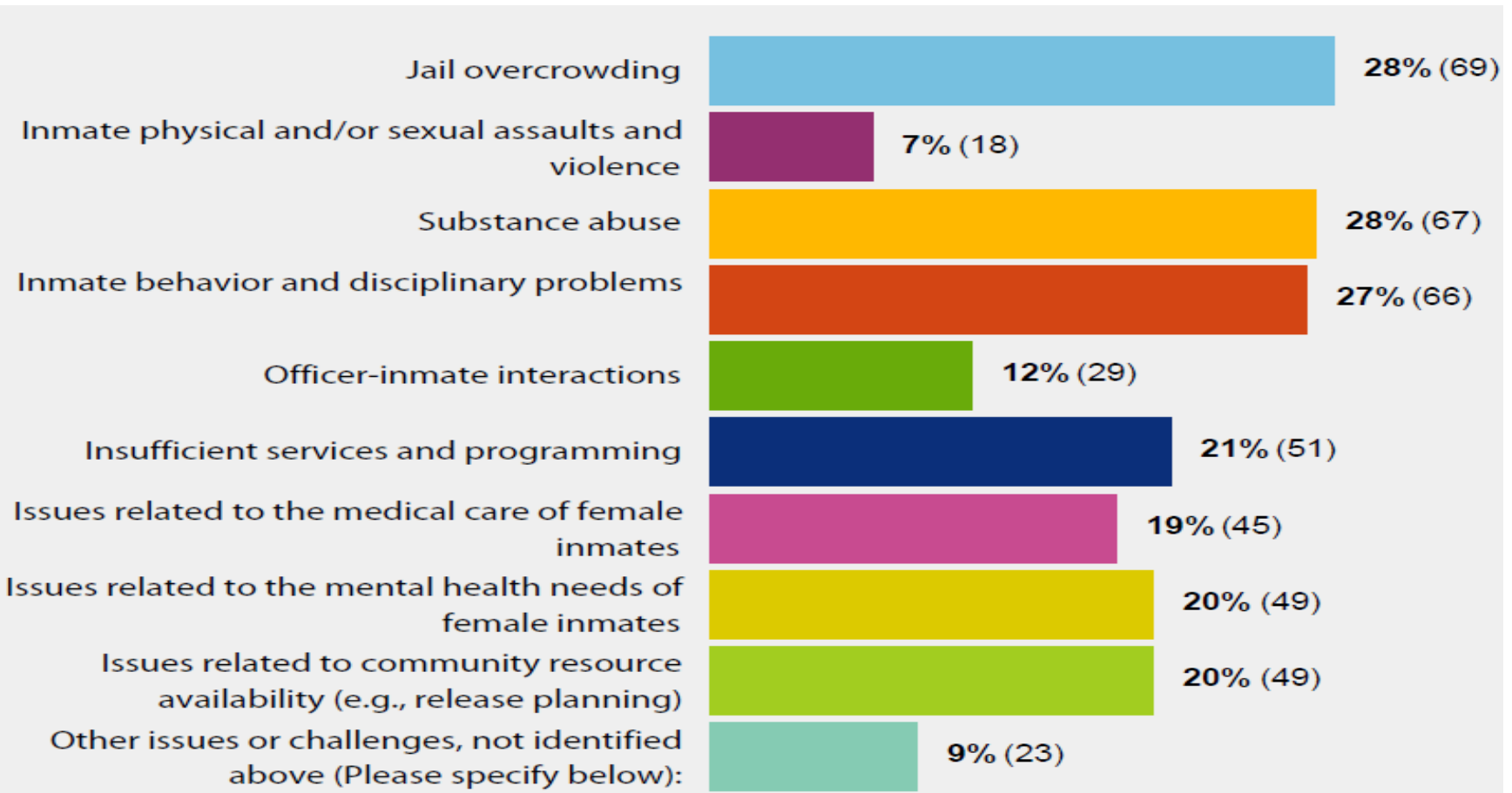
Why not have a role in addressing issues related to women inmates?

- Little benefit given the short amount of time in jail
- Limited resources
- Jails are not designed for the purpose of providing gender-specific programs and services

“...the overarching goals are to protect the rights, safety, and security of inmates and officers.”

-Jail Administrator

Challenges and Critical Issues when Working with Women in Jails



Assessing for Risk

Applying Classification Tools to Women

- Gender Neutral: developed on primarily male populations, may be valid, but are not adequately capturing risk.
- Gender Responsive: developed entirely on female populations and more effectively capture levels of risk.
- Why does this matter?



Assessing for Need

- Development of targeted resources
- Addressing systemic challenges with jails
- Importance of community resources/connections

Programming and Services

- Mental and physical well-being
- Social services and family/parenting
- Religious and spiritual care
- Job training
- Reentry and aftercare planning

Transition and Reentry

Transition



Community

- Lack of pre-release/transition programs
- Lack of community resource availability (e.g., release planning and reentry)
- Lack of pre-release and/or post-release trauma-informed services
- Difficulties working with CPS



Physical Health Concerns

- Reproductive health and pregnancy concerns.
- Higher rates of STD's and HIV infection.
- Impact of post traumatic stress disorders.
- Histories of poor health and poor access to medical services.
- Effects of chronic conditions associated with poverty and poor nutrition, such as asthma, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, anemia, seizures and ulcers.


Richard Mauery, GW University, 2007

Substance Abuse

- High rates for both women and men.
- Use of drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism.
- More likely to suffer from co-occurring substance abuse disorders and mental illness.
- Differences in onset and use are critical.
- Higher rates of childhood physical and sexual abuse than men.
- Exposure to drug activity by family members and friends.

Mental Health

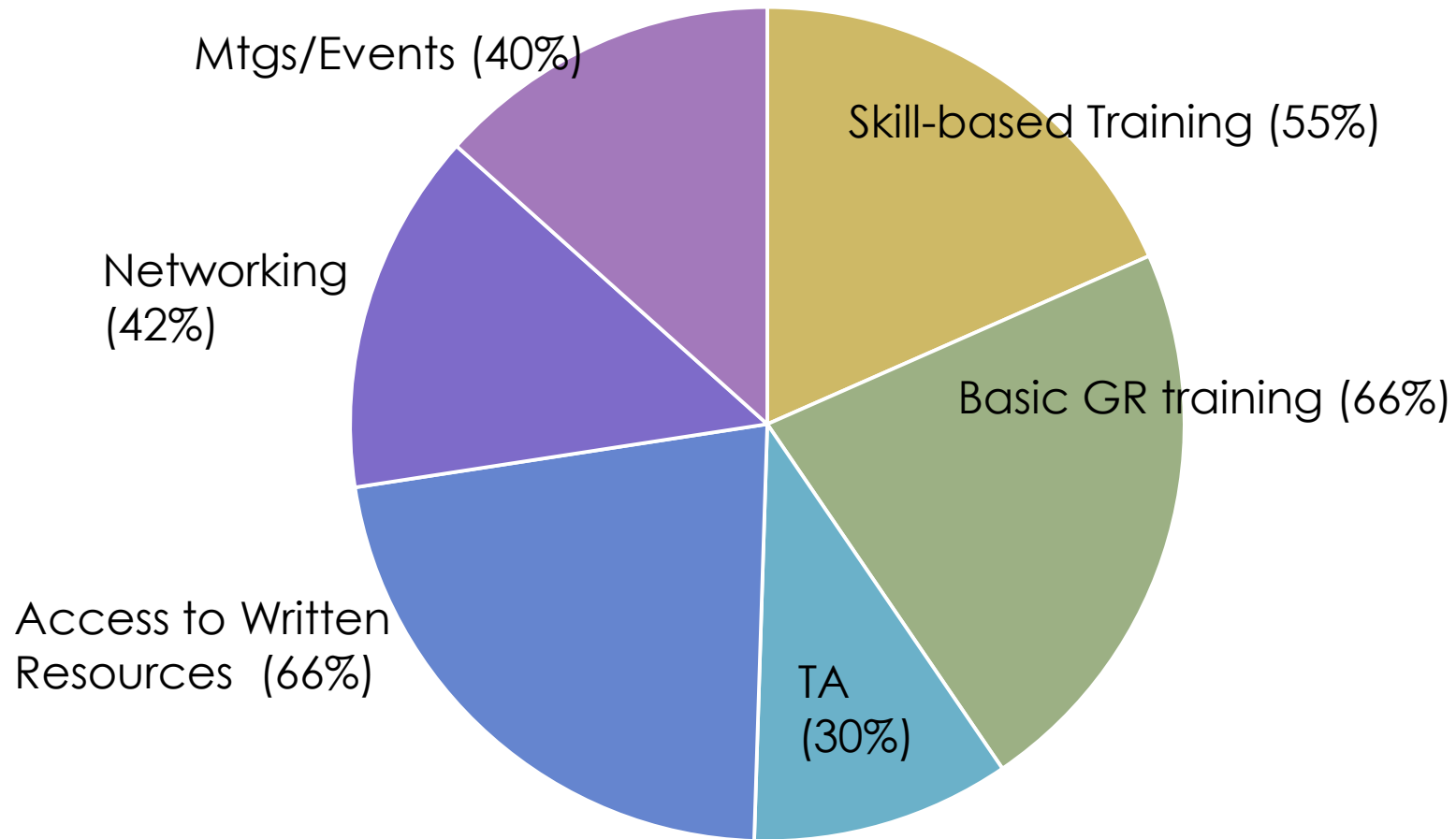
- Significantly higher rates of mental illness.
- Different types of mental illness than men: depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, and eating disorders.
- Twice as likely to take prescription medications for problems.
- Higher infraction rates in prison.



“It is our responsibility to provide care, not merely custody. If women are managed exactly the same as males, we are missing a large piece of the critical responsibility we have.”

--Inmate Program Specialist


Resources Needed to Address Critical Issues





Available NIC Resources

- Gender Responsive Policy & Practice Assessment (GRPPA)
- Women's Risk and Need Assessment (WRNA)
- Jail Design and Planning
- Pregnancy and Child-Related Legal/Policy Issues
- Technical Assistance
- Training programs (on-line and classroom)



“Women have different needs than men. For successful outcomes, we need to recognize and address these needs.”

-Jail Administrator, Wisconsin