



Women After Prison

Associate Professor Chris Trotter Monash University Department of
Social Work

A Professor Rosemary Sheehan Monash University Department of
Social Work

Professor Gill McIvor University of Stirling Social Work Research
Centre

Catholic Social Services Management Committee
Australian Research Council

Research Officers: Cathi Flynn, Catherine Smith, Louise Oliaro, Jan
Oliaro

Report available from Monash Social Work – chris.trotter@med.monash.edu.au

the women

- **83 women interviewed 1-3 months after release from DPFC and Tarrengower prisons in Victoria**
- **69 interviewed 1 year after release**
- **139 women interviewed in prison**
- **37 workers interviewed, including 18 parole officers or workers seeing client as part of parole (e.g. drug treatment)**

aim to consider access to and effectiveness of services

- **Identify services accessed by women after prison and their return to the community**
- **Potential of these services to reduce women's risk of re-offending**
- **Services accessible at times when women need them?**
- **Aims of services and roles of workers delivering services clear to the women?**
- **Services work with client definitions of problems?**
- **Address problems or issues directly related to the person's offending (e.g. drugs, employment, anger)?**
- **Focus on skill development (including social skills) or practical issues rather than feelings or insight?**
- **An holistic approach to client issues rather than a focus on specific problems or symptoms, focussing on the individual's potential for rehabilitation?**

the women

- average age of the women was 31.
- 84% were born in Australia
- 4% in Vietnam
- 3% in New Zealand.

the women

- most common offences for which they were imprisoned were trafficking drugs, burglary and theft.
- 63 % had been in prison before.
- 59% had children living most often with their father or maternal grandparents.

the prisons

- women at either:
 - Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, on the outskirts of Melbourne, or
 - Tarrengower Women's Prison, situated in a rural area about 136 kilometres from Melbourne.
 - were offered a number of welfare programs including psychiatric and psychological services, housing, chaplaincy, anger management, parenting and educational.

recidivism outcome measures

- Fifty-nine of the 138 women (43%) gave permission to the research officer to access their police records after one year.
- Seventy women were interviewed approximately 12 months after they had been released from prison and they were asked if they had been 'involved in further offending since their release'. Sixty of the seventy women answered this question.

recidivism outcome measures

- When the research officers attempted to find the women for the third interview (one year after each of the women had been released) 22 of the 70 women who were located were in prison in Victoria.
- The study therefore provided data based on police records, self-report, and prison records. At least one of these recidivism measures was available for 94 of the 137 women. A fourth recidivism measure was therefore used, which identified any further offence committed since release from prison, identified through a combination of the three sources referred to above.

No. of women who used different types of services whilst in prison

Service Type	Number of women utilizing service
Accommodation	57
Substance abuse	55
Education	53
Employment	53
Psychologist	36
Personal Development	44
Parenting	27
Religious	26
Psychiatric	24
Stress management	12
Anger management	8
Other	55

Frequency of Contact with Services

Service Type	Mean number of contacts with services
Education	45
Religious	35
Substance misuse	21
Psychologist	11
Personal development	7
Psychiatric	7
Anger management	6
Stress management	7
Parenting	5
Employment	3
Accommodation	3

Level of helpfulness of the service – 5 point scale

Service Type	Level of helpfulness
Religious	4.57
Psychologist	4.22
Personal development	4.20
Employment	4.05
Substance misuse	3.90
Education	3.80
Stress management	3.77
Accommodation	3.64
Parenting	3.46
Psychiatric	3.44
Anger management	3.44

Intention to use services after release from prison

- Most of the women felt that they would not continue with the service after their release either because they did not wish to or it would not be available.
- The exception to this was employment and accommodation services with 81% and 72% respectively saying they would use the service after release.
- 32% of those using the religious programs also indicated they would be use the program after release.
- 24% made this comment in relation to substance abuse programs.
- Only one of 53 using educational programs said they would continue to use these programs after release.

The relationship between use of programs in prison and recidivism

- Women who used services in prison had lower recidivism rates on each of the four recidivism measures used in this study.
- Furthermore, the more often they used the services, the lower the recidivism on each of the measures.
- However, none of the results quite reach the 0.05 level of statistical significance.

Reoffending by women who used religious programs more than 12 times

	Committed further offence
Used religious programs more than 12 times	2/10 (20%)
Did not use religious programs more than 12 times	50/84 (53%)

Mean no of contacts with religious programs in prison by re-offenders

	Mean number of contacts
Committed further offence	9.6
Did not commit further offence	52.3

Factors – women's view of chance of reoffending

- Worker focused on all the issues that were concerning me
- I made maximum use of service
- Worker understands my problems
- Worker and I worked together to decide how we would address my problems
- Worker did what s/he said they would do
- Worker did practical things for me
- Worker was concerned about my feelings and my understanding of my own behaviour
- Worker believed I can I change
- Worker is a friend
- I like the worker
- Worker believes that I will not re-offend
- Worker knew what I wanted from the service
- Worker focused on the problems as I described them
- Worker is friendly
- Worker has a sense of humour
- Worker was punctual
- Authority worker had and how it might be used was clear
- Worker encouraged me when I said non criminal and positive things
- I did practical things to address the problems
- Worker comments on the things I do well

Factors not related to reoffending

Worker challenged me when I made excuses for offending or other anti-social behaviour

Problems we discussed were the ones relating to my offending

We talked a lot about my offences

How information I gave worker might be used was clear

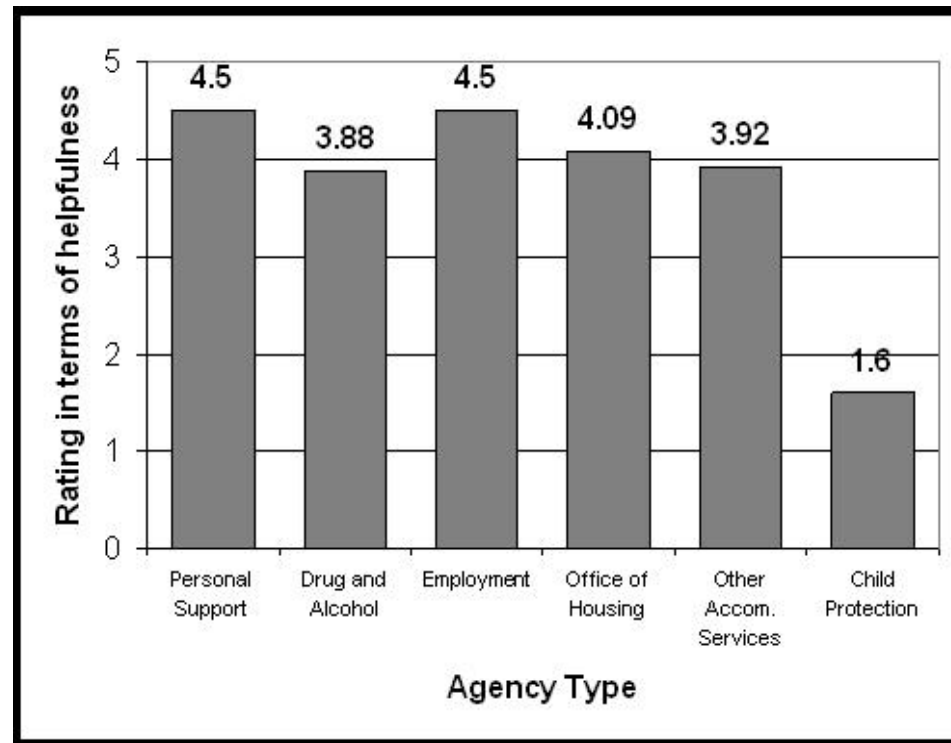
Worker comments on the things I do badly

I always saw the same worker

Twelve month follow up

- Interviews conducted approximately 3 months after women left prison
- Following their release from prison, attempts were made to contact each of the women. Unfortunately, despite persistent efforts of the part of the research officers, many of the women had changed addresses and were not able to be contacted. Nevertheless, the research officers were able to contact 83 of the 139 women (60%).
- Women were asked if they had had contact with welfare agencies since their release and 95 percent (79/83) indicated that they had.
- 46 of the women had seen three or more agencies.

Helpfulness



Women's views – service & reoffending

The purpose of service and what worker was aiming to achieve was clear

Worker understands my problems

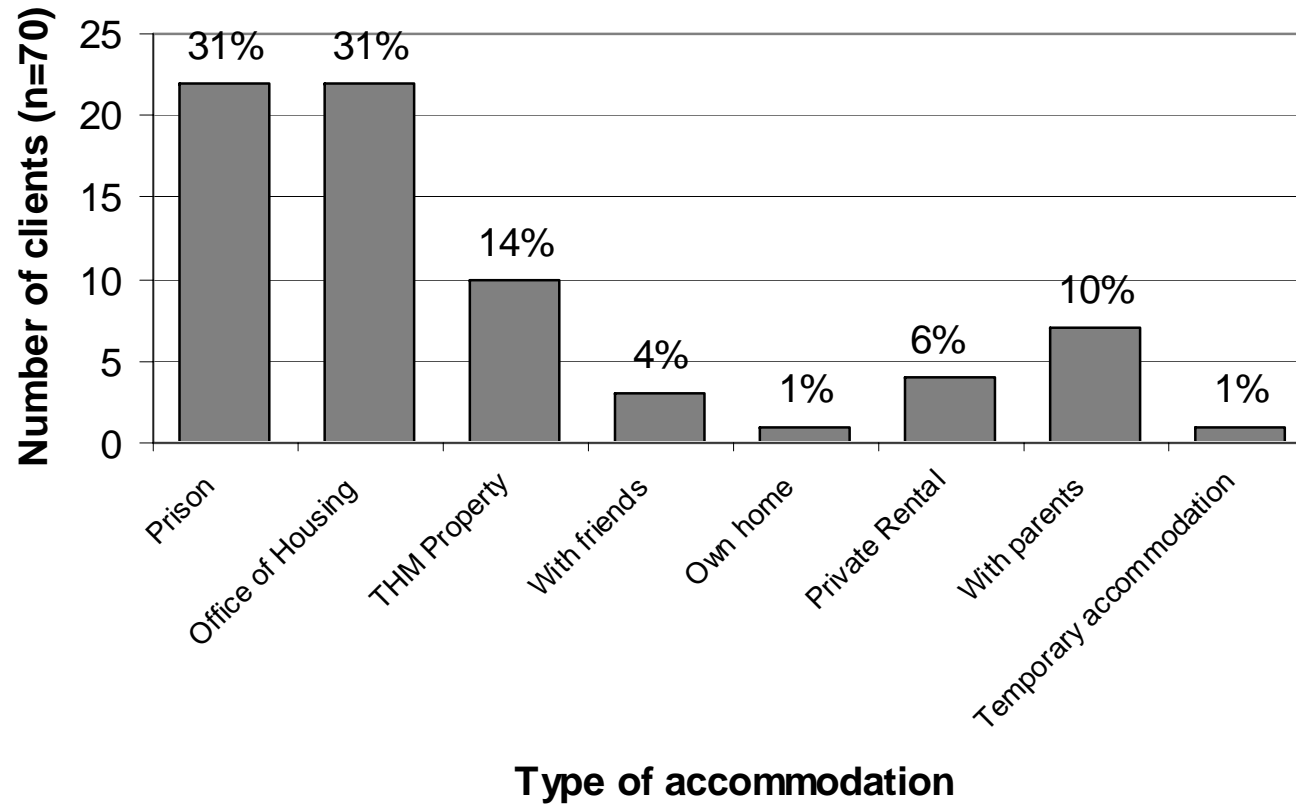
Worker knew what I wanted from the service

I made maximum use of this service

Worker focused on all the issues that were concerning me

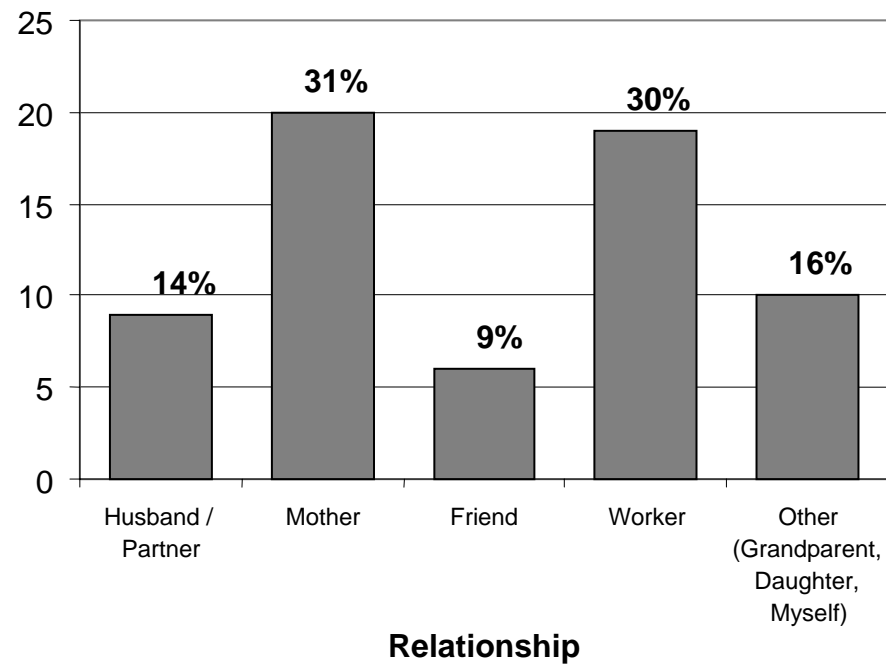
Worker focused on the problems as I described them

Location of women after one year

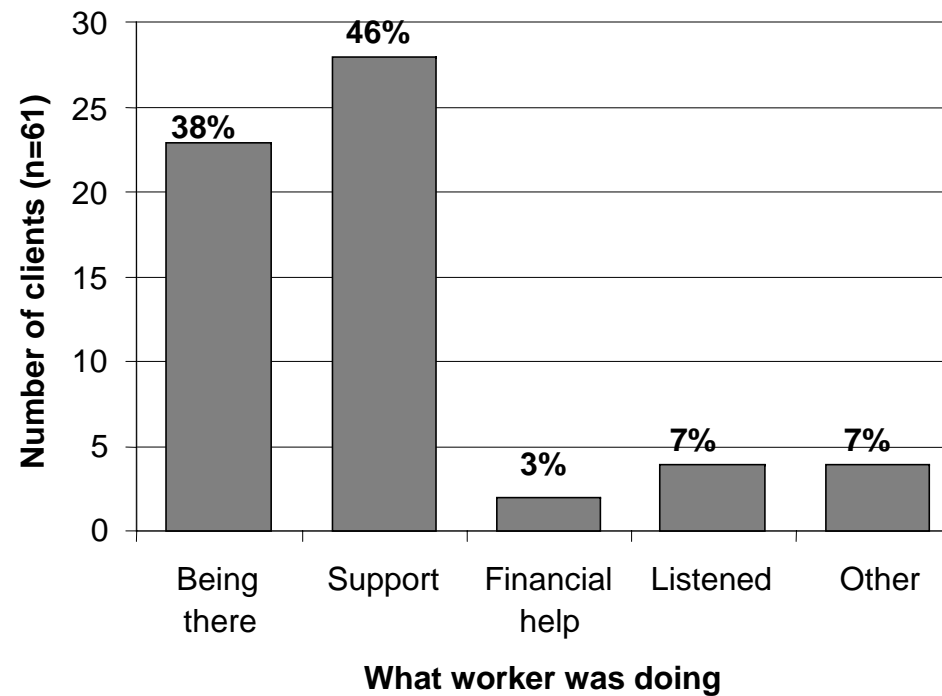


Most helpful to you

N=64



Worker helped - How?



Factors that helped according to the women

Service was accessible

Worker and I worked together to decide how we would address my problems

Worker did what they said they would do

I made maximum use of service

Worker focused on all the issues that were concerning me

Worker did practical things for me

I like the worker

Worker was punctual

Worker was concerned about my feelings and my understanding of my own behaviour

Worker understands my problems

Worker focused on the problems as I described them

Worker encouraged me when I said non criminal and positive things

Purpose of service and what worker aimed to achieve was clear

Worker believes that I will not re-offend

Worker is a friend

Worker knew what I wanted from the service

Worker is friendly

Authority worker had and how it might be used was clear

Worker has a sense of humour

Worker believed I can I change

Worker comments on the things I do well

parole

- Of the women in the sample, 64 were released on parole and 74 were released without parole. When released on parole, the women were expected to report to the parole officer within 48 hours of their release from prison.
- In all cases, those women who were given parole undertook intensive parole for the first three months of the parole period. This involves visiting the parole officer twice per week and undertaking one day per week unpaid community work (unless the women had children or full time work). The parole officer may also arrange an early visit to Centrelink.

parole

- Many of the women had special conditions and were legally required to be involved in programs such as drug treatment, psychiatric treatment or cognitive behavioural programs.
- While access to parole is at the discretion of the Parole Board, no women in the sample were denied parole. One woman had her parole deferred, but was subsequently released on parole. The average period of parole for women released in 2003 was 416 days (Corrections Victoria, 2006).

Sentence/paroled

Table 12: Received A Sentence and Whether Paroled

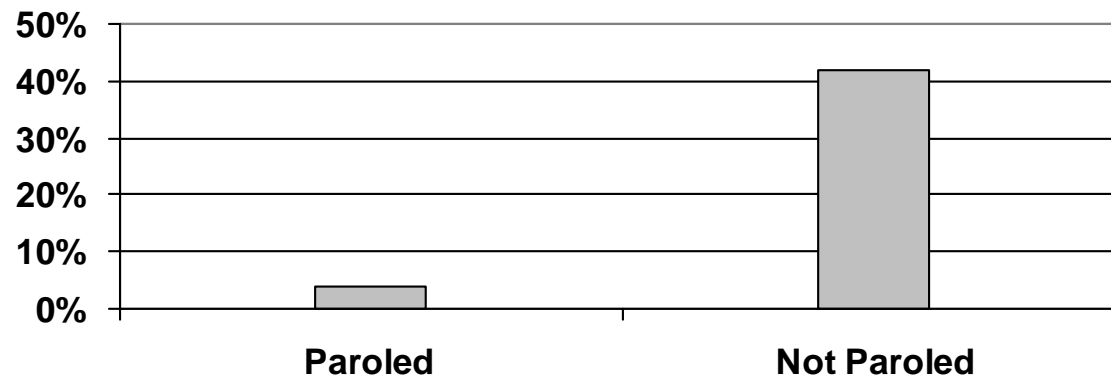


Table 12

- Table 12 shows that only one (4 percent) of the women on parole, who allowed research officers access to the police records, was sentenced to a period of imprisonment within an average of 20 months following her release from prison.
- On the other hand, 42 percent of the women who were released without parole, who allowed access to their records, were sentenced to a period of imprisonment in the period following their release.

Table 13: Any Further Offence After Release & Whether Paroled

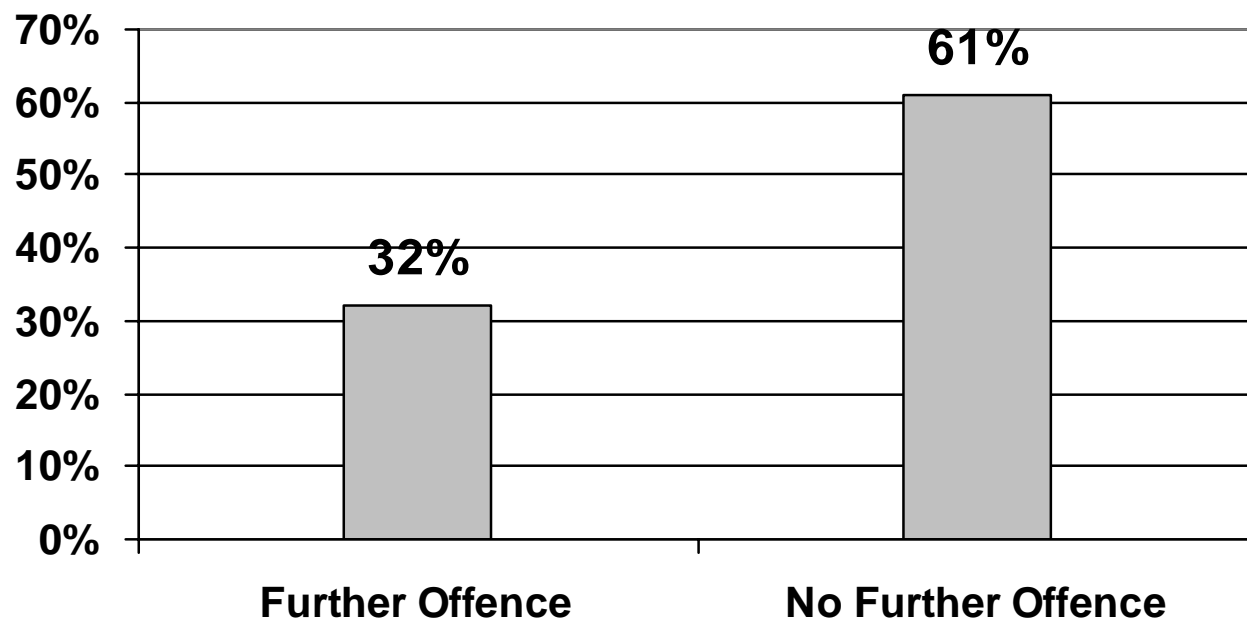


Table 13

- The study also used a number of other measures, which confirm that the women who received parole had lower recidivism.
- Table 13 presents the results in relation to any further offences. Again, this favours the parolees at statistically significant levels, with almost twice as many women who were released to the community without parole committing further offences.

Women on parole

- Used more services in prison
- Saw a professional worker within 2 days of release
- Used more services after release
- Indicated that they had as many problems in prison as women who were not paroled - but fewer problems reported after release