Prison Life: The Difference in the two Genders

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Okay everyone, you know the drill. Line up and let’s get ready for breakfast. Keep all hands to yourself. Whose baby is that crying?

This is not a typical saying you would expect to hear in a prison environment…or is it? Life in prison is becoming a little more family oriented. Is this right for everyone or is it showing favoritism to the female prisoners. I will first talk about the daily life of women and men in prison. I will then show how women have a little extra touch of home in different prisons and violence.

**Daily Life**

Day to day living in prison should be the same for both men and women, so you would think. A day normally consists of a wake-up call or roll call, personal hygiene time and cleaning of living areas. Then off to leisure time or any work that the inmate may be involved in. Some are allowed to make phone calls if they are not on restriction. This is repeated throughout the day for morning, noon and night. Can you say Groundhog Day? How long does it take for this routine to wear on a person? Are men better at sustaining life in prison than women are?

Women typically do not present an immediate, violent physical danger to staff members and fellow inmates. Violence is usually concentrated only in male prisons. (Female Prison Life). For women, being confined causes a lot of anxiety and anger due to being separated from families and loved ones. A form of adaptation to prison life used my many women is the make-believe family. According to Siegel & Worrall, a make believe family is a substitute family groups with a faux father, mother and siblings. People both in and out of prison have needs for security, companionship, affection, attention, status, prestige and acceptance that can be filled only by having primary group relationships (Siegel & Worrall).

 I can almost relate to this as a woman. When I deployed to Afghanistan is was one of the toughest things ever to leave my husband and child. Granted it was not prison, everyday seemed to be on a schedule. There always seemed to be a “mother-hen” in each unit that was there. The woman was there to listen, comfort and provide support when needed. It gave a lot of us a sense of belonging while we were away from home.

**Children in Prison**

Even though there was a mother hen in the units, there is nothing like having your own family with you. But, in some places women are allowed to give birth in prison and keep the child with them for a period of time. That is a little touch of home, who would not want it? I would. Why are women afforded this right? Prison nursery programs allow a mother to parent her infant for a finite period of time within a special housing unit at the prison. Community-based residential parenting programs allow mother to keep their infants with them while they fulfill their sentences in residential programs in the community (WPA). The women that are accepted into these two programs are fairly identical. They have committed low-level non-violent offenses, face relatively short sentences and will continue as the child’s primary caregiver upon release.

I do not agree with children in prison. Prison is a form of punishment and having the ability to have your children in prison with you is seen to me as a reward. What more could you ask for? You have food, shelter, clothes and day care. I think that is an extra expense for us tax-payers. If a woman has a child and she is incarcerated that child should go to a family member or to the state. The way I say it makes me sounds as if I do not care about the kids. That is the problem, I do care about the kids and I think they deserve better than to spend time in prison. When I think prison I cannot help but to think about the violence that occurs there.

**Violence**

Male prisons are more violent than female prisons. Life in prison is normally governed by mandates set forth by gang leaders. This includes: no snitching, no cooperating with authorities, and attacking disloyal members. In female prisons, gang activity is much reduced (Female Life Prison). Women in prison cope with their problems differently. Relatively few engage in violent behavior, and incidents of inmate-initiated sexual aggression, so common in male institutions, are rare in women’s prisons (Siegel & Worrall). Women are more likely to cause harm to themselves or attempt suicide. After doing research, I found that a common practice among female inmates is self-mutilation or “carving”.

**Conclusion**

Being in prison could be torture for some or a walk in the park with the kids for others. A typical day in prison could seem like Groundhog Day. The same mundane thing happening over and over again would be enough to run a person mad. But on the other hand, you could have you child there with you while you serve your time. If you fit the profile to allow your kids under the age of 18 months stay with you during your sentence, you could literally enjoy a walk in the park while in prison. That is a waste of tax-payers money to me. Violence in prisons are becoming a big concern. Men and women deal with problems differently but the fact is violence is still rampant. Although a drastic difference in prison life exists between men and women, the pain and frustration still remain the same. Women deal with the situation differently than men.

Female Prison Life <http://voices.yahoo.com/female-prison-life-1966960.html>

Siegel, Larry J.& Worrall, John L. (2012). "Introduction to Criminal Justice" (13th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

WPA, Women’s Prison Association [www.wpaonline.org](http://www.wpaonline.org)