

## Community Options Required

“It is important to understand that the context in which many women are increasingly being criminalized is one of poverty, racism, addiction, lack of supports and violence against women.”<sup>1</sup>

- Women are the fastest growing prison population worldwide, especially poor women, Aboriginal women and women with disabling mental health issues. This dramatic growth of women prisoners can largely be attributed to such global phenomena as the retreat of the state and Canada’s social safety net occasioned by the evisceration of affordable health care, child care, social assistance, and other community supports and educational opportunities combined with a simultaneous intrusion of the state in terms of surveillance, monitoring, criminalization, and institutionalization.<sup>2</sup>
- Regardless of their educational attainment, women are still less likely than men to be employed, although gaps are narrowest between women and men with higher education. There still are gaps even though young women today are better educated than their male peers. In 2001, 21% of women aged 20 – 29 were university graduates, compared with 15% of their male counterparts.<sup>3</sup>
- There has been particularly sharp growth in the employment rate of women with children in the past quarter century. In 2006, 73% of all women with children under the age of 16 living at home were part of the paid work force. However, women with children are still less likely to be employed than women without children.<sup>4</sup> Women have accounted for about 70% of all part-time employees since the late 1970s.<sup>5</sup>
- Historically, the majority to employed women continue to work in occupations in which women have been concentrated. In 2003, 70% of all employed women were working in teaching, nursing or related occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, or sales and service occupations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shoshana Pollock, *Locked in Locked Out: Imprisoning Women in the Shrinking and Punitive Welfare State*. (Wilfred Laurier University: 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, Submission of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies to the CSC Review Panel (2007) at 6.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Lindsay and Marcia Almey, *A Quarter Century of Change: Young Women in Canada in the 1970’s and Today* (2004) at 6.

<sup>4</sup> Marcia Almey, *Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. *CRIAW Fact Sheet: Women and Poverty Third Edition* (2005) at 3.

<sup>6</sup> Marcia Almey, *Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).

- Gaining work skills is considered an important factor in successful community reintegration for women prisoners. However, women have little access to meaningful work opportunities and employment programs while they are incarcerated.<sup>7</sup>
- The current classification system used by Correctional Services Canada is based upon risk factors that are associated with men and are therefore, not applicable to women. As a result, women are over-classified as high-security risks. This prevents women from being able to access reintegration tools such as temporary absences passes, work release programs, and other privileges.<sup>8</sup>
- On October 22, 2003, 373 service agencies in Canada reported serving 4,358 clients that day: 77% were female and 23% were male.
- In October 2007, Ashley Smith died while incarcerated in a segregation cell at Grand Valley Institution for Women. Four Correctional Service of Canada employees have been fired and four others have been suspended. All are criminally charged in relation to her death and another stands charged for assault. This tragically underscores the need for correctional accountability and judicial oversight of Canadian prisons.<sup>9</sup>
- Many women classified as maximum security will reach their warrant expiry (end of prison sentence) without having participated in gradual release programs, thereby increasing the likelihood they will find themselves in the same situations that led to their initial criminalization.<sup>10</sup>
- Even for those with university degrees, immigrant women are less likely to have paid employment than immigrant men. A high number of immigrant and refugee women are only able to work as domestic workers; too many also are forced to live in the homes of their employers, which can put them at great risk of financial, physical and sexual abuse.<sup>11</sup>
- While more than 80% of women in the general population have progressed beyond Grade 9, only about 50% of women in prison have the same educational attainment.<sup>12</sup>
- In 1996, there were just over 300,000 child care spaces available to preschool children in Canada. At the same time, there were 900,000 families in Canada with at

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<sup>7</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Protecting Their Rights: A Systemic Review of Human Rights in Correctional Services for Federally Sentenced Women* (2004) at 53.

<sup>8</sup> Shoshana Pollock, *Locked in Locked Out: Imprisoning Women in the Shrinking and Punitive Welfare State*. (Wilfred Laurier University: 2008) at 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* at 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* at 7.

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, *Fact Sheet: Immigrant and Refugee Women* (2003) at 2 online: CRIAW < [http://www.criaw-icref.ca/indexFrame\\_e.htm](http://www.criaw-icref.ca/indexFrame_e.htm)>.

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Protecting Their Rights A Systematic Review of Human Rights in Correctional Services for Federally Sentenced Women* (2004) at 7.

least one preschool aged child living with two working parents or a lone parent who was employed.<sup>13</sup>

- A little known decision of Nelson Mandela when he was elected President of South Africa was that he freed the women in prison who were mothers, rather than allow their continued imprisonment to negatively impact generations to come.
- Because of the lack of child care and women's relatively unequal access to housing, income, et cetera, women are less likely to be given conditional sentences, also known as 'house arrest'.

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<sup>13</sup> Colin Lindsay and Marcia Almey, *A Quarter Century of Change: Young Women in Canada in the 1970's and Today* (2004) at 11.