

Sentencing policies



Present day sentencing policies are surrounded by a set of myths. Low levels of incarceration, opportunities for community reintegration, and the impact of incarceration on recidivism – all these are associated with controversial statistics and do not reveal the true picture of sentencing in the U. S. The recent ABA report sheds the light onto the most problematic sentencing spots. Reintegration remains one of the most controversial aspects of sentencing policies in the country.

In this context, it is more than important to review the premises on which current reintegration policies are based, as well as the ways in which reintegration policies impact socialization opportunities for female ex-prisoners. Objectively, one of the goals for The Commission was not only to understand the current sentencing issues, but to describe them in more detail and to mobilize the existing resources in a way that would facilitate integration of correctional institutions with other social structures. Those who are released from prison should be given a chance to become full community members.

One cannot deny the fact that “ the public expects convicted felons to learn their lesson and become law-abiding citizens, while the legal system burdens them with continuing collateral disabilities that make it very difficult, if not practically impossible, for them to successfully reintegrate into the free community” (ABA, 2004). One of the major incarceration and sentencing myths is in that society develops and implements effective reintegration policies, and that the current legal system actively works to provide ex-felons with full reintegration opportunities.

It appears, however, that the reality is quite different, and where ex-felons seek the means to establish themselves in society they meet a whole set of obstacles and challenges. The situation is particularly problematic with women, and recent statistics confirms the relevance of sentencing concerns expressed in the ABA report. True, the majority of women incarcerated in the U. S. are sentenced for drug-related crimes; moreover, female ex-prisoners experience serious drug abuse problems (Figueira-McDonough & Sarri, 2007).

Unfortunately, in their current state, reintegration strategies lack emphasis on drug abuse programs and do not work effectively to resolve emotional problems, which women face on their way to successful reintegration. “ Women in prison are disproportionately poor women of color with a number of strikes against them when they entered prison. When they leave prison, they are still poor women of color, carrying the same burdens as when they entered, with the additional label of ‘ ex-con’ ” (Figueira-McDonough & Sarri, 2007).

With 23. 6 percent of women suffering from mental illnesses and with 40 percent of women being the victims of drug abuse, their transition to the free world becomes even more problematic, and the present day sentencing policies cannot secure them from the major socialization failures (Figueira-McDonough & Sarri, 2007). The fact is that the challenges women face upon being released from prisons are much more complicated than those on the basic list of services.

Numerous needs and stressors are left beyond the scope of the prison authorities' concern, making women too susceptible to the risks of recidivism (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2003). Not only do ex-prisoners face condemnation and rejection on the side of their community, but they have limited access to social resources and face the lack of appreciation. To restore the custody on their children, to find a decent employment, or to reintegrate with their families – all these competing demands place significant pressures on women and do not leave them a single chance for successful reintegration.

It is too early to say that sentencing policies are designed to reduce incarceration rates and emphasize the role of socialization. Unfortunately, in the current state of sentencing policies, successful reintegration of female ex-felons with community remains nothing but a myth. Conclusion The ABA report confirms the relevance of reintegration policies across different population groups. In many instances, the success of reintegration efforts also impacts the rates of incarceration and recidivism.

The situation is particularly difficult for women, and where female ex-felons require restoring their basic civil rights, they also face a whole set of challenges and competing demands. Although reintegration is widely recognized as one of the social and sentencing priorities, the success of reintegration remains nothing but a myth. That is why special attention needs to be paid to how women can resolve the major issues on their way to reintegrating with their communities and families, and to becoming full society members.