

# **The Women at Eddie Warrior Correctional Center: Descriptions From a Data Set**

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## *Abstract*

*This research project involved an analysis of a data set consisting of 2,671 responses from women incarcerated at the Eddie Warrior Correctional Facility collected from 1991 through 1995. The paper presents a profile of the subjects developed from the instrument. The researchers found that most were in prison for the first time and serving a relatively short sentence. The respondents tended to be non-married, Black or White, over 30, with low levels of education and training. Most were mothers, typically having their first child at a young age. Significant use of drugs was reported by the inmates. The respondents illustrated considerable personal, family, and social disorganization.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Eddie Warrior Correctional Center (EWCC), located in Taft, Oklahoma, opened in December, 1988 (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 1994 Annual Report, p. 56). Housing minimum security female inmates, it had a capacity of 500. As of June 28, 1996, its population was 550 (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, "Facts At A Glance"). Its best known program was the Female Offender Regimented Treatment (FORT) program, a boot camp program (Holley & Wright, 1995). A similar program, the Shock Incarceration Program (SIP), operated at the facility for some time, although it was no longer in existence.

This research involved a secondary analysis of a data set consisting of 2,671 responses from women incarcerated at the EWCC collected by institutional staff during 1991 through 1995. The paper presents a profile of the subjects, and was intended to add to and replicate previously-collected information about women incarcerated in Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) prisons.

## **Literature Review**

The research was intended to provide policy makers and managers information about incarcerated women in light of: (1) the secondary status and incidental treatment of incarcerated women; and, (2) the high incarceration rate of women in Oklahoma. Incarcerated women had not only been treated differently but had generally experienced conditions of confinement inferior to those of men (Dobash, Dobash, & Gutteridge, 1986). Limited medical, mental health treatment, educational, and other program offerings had been typical of women's prisons (Pollock-Byrne, 1990).

Oklahoma's incarceration rate for women had been the highest of all the states and was twice the national average (Sandhu, Al-Mosleh, & Chown, 1994). It was anticipated that

incarceration rate would continue to increase, add to overcrowding, and further burden existing programs. At the same time, economic resources were expected to be limited. Additional information about inmates would be essential in order to target resources.

Two previous studies of Oklahoma incarcerated women had been conducted: Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994); and Sandhu, Al-Moslef, and Chown (1994). The former study compared Oklahoma inmates incarcerated at EWCC and Mabel Bassett Correctional Center with national data on selected variables, while the latter examined Oklahoma women admitted to prison between 1988 and 1992 and made some comparisons with national data: *Women in Prison* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991), and *Women in Prison* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994) reported on national surveys of state and federal prisoners. Those studies were carried out during 1986 and 1991, respectively.

## METHODOLOGY

This section reviews the procedures whereby the data were collected, and the process of analysis by the authors.

### The Data Set

Women received at EWCC encountered the facility orientation during their first week at the facility. At that session, presided over by the casemanager supervisor, several forms were given to the newly-arrived inmates to complete. Since 1991, inmates had been given a lengthy personal questionnaire--the source of the data set--and asked to complete it. It was simply returned to staff upon completion. (If an inmate had reading difficulties, another inmate was asked to help.)

Modified by institutional staff from the NIJ survey of women in prison, see *Women in Prison* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991); *Women in Prison* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994), the questionnaire was designed to obtain information regarding the needs of inmates and intended for use in institutional program development and modification. The cover letter stated:

This survey is given to all inmates received at Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center. The purpose of this survey is to gain information that will help us to understand the history and needs of the inmates being incarcerated. This information is closely reviewed and used to modify the programs and resources needed to meet your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and educational needs. Your honesty and openness is critical. This survey will in no way be used against you. Your individual answers will be kept confidential.

Characteristics of the questionnaire included: (1) apparent voluntary participation, (2) confidentiality, (3) a rationale for the survey, (4) an appeal for openness and honesty, and (5) the promise that responses would not be used against the inmate. It should be emphasized that neither Oklahoma Department of Corrections inmate identification numbers nor case identification numbers were connected to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of 80 questions, including items with open-ended and fixed-responses. The items were categorized as follows.

1. Personal history. The initial items consisted of demographic characteristics, including age, race, marital status, etc. Additional questions related to living arrangement prior to incarceration, number and custody of children, existence of physical or mental handicap, physical abuse history, and sexual abuse history. One item asked if the respondent had ever had a driver's license and other asked if the respondent had ever had a bank account. Other items were identified as "opinions" although some questions related to past behavior and history. Those questions pertained to quality of interpersonal relationships, personal problems, such as suicide, future plans, including job and living arrangements, the respondent's jail experience, and program participation.
2. Drug use history. Questions were asked about the previous use of certain substances, including alcohol, heroin, cocaine, crack, marijuana, speed, and prescription drugs. An item focused on age at first use. Another inquired of previous experience in drug treatment programs.
3. Family history. Those questions related to other family members being incarcerated, parental marital status, and ever run away from home.
4. Educational history. Included there were level of education completed, and specialized education and training, including college and vocational and technical schools. One question asked for reasons if the respondent had not finished high school.
5. Work history. Those items related to job skills, previous job experience, number of previous employers, highest salary earned, and experience with welfare assistance.
6. Arrest and sentence information. Those items emphasized first arrest--including crime and age--as well as number of times arrested and incarcerated. Other items asked for crime, length of sentence, and percentage of time served on this incarceration.

At appropriate intervals and after having received a significant number of completed questionnaires, responses were entered into a computer data set. Those data were then sent to ODOC's research and evaluation unit in Oklahoma City to update the larger data set.

### **The Analysis**

The study represented an analysis of the pre-existing data set from EWCC, described by ODOC researchers as having consisted of responses from 2,671 females collected by institutional staff during 1991 through 1995. While no data were kept on inmate refusal to complete the form, it was the researcher's understanding that nearly all of the inmates responded to the questionnaire.

The researchers collapsed data into categories consistent with previous ODOC data analysis. For some variables, additional recoding of variables was conducted. Variable frequencies were calculated in order to present descriptive profiles.

Since the data were available for secondary analysis, the investigators were confronted with disadvantages as well as advantages (see Maxfield & Babbie, 1995). Although there was no direct way of evaluating the reliability of the responses, the conditions involved in the administration of the questionnaire appeared to provide sufficiently for reliability. Measures also appeared to have both face and content validity, especially since the questionnaire was an adaptation of an established survey. Selected comparisons with the Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) survey of women incarcerated were made. Also, taken into account was the Sandhu, Al-Mosleh, and Chown (1994) study.

Other limitations of the data set included lack of date and year during which the questionnaire had been completed. Thus, it could not be known what the response rate for the population of inmates received at the facility had been (although it appeared that it was extremely high). It would have been helpful to have had an item denoting into which program--general population, FORT, or SIP--the respondents were entering. While the current form of the questionnaire included an item pertaining to arrival date at the facility and a question relating to placement--another ODOC facility, probation/parole, etc.--those data had not been included in the current data set under analysis.

## **RESULTS**

Inmates at EWCC are described in this section. Selected comparisons with ODOC female inmates in general are also made.

### **Crime Background**

Most of the research subjects reported that they had been incarcerated for either a drug-related offense or an economic (or property) crime. About 45% of EWCC women had been incarcerated for drug-related crimes, such as trafficking, possession of a controlled substance (CDS), distribution of CDS, or driving under the influence (DUI). Another 45% identified an economic-type crime as having served as the basis for the current incarceration. Included were shoplifting, burglary, grand larceny, armed robbery (recognizing that offense was typically classified as a violent crime), and bad checks. The remainder--about 10%--reported incarceration resulting from a probation violation, absconding, and violent crimes, such as second degree murder, child stealing, and assault and battery. Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) reported that among incarcerated Oklahoma women, 26% were violent offenders, 36% were drug offenders, and 36% were property offenders. The Sandhu, Al-Mosleh, and Chown study (1994) reported Oklahoma females incarcerated for certain offenses as follows: property offenses--48%; drug offenses--34.6%; violence--9.2%. Given that violent offenders were more likely to have been placed at a higher than minimum security level institution--such as Mabel Bassett Correctional Center--those responses appeared to have been consistent and meaningful.

The reasons reported for committing the crime for the current incarceration could be identified in the following categories: (1) drugs; (2) stress and emotional instability; (3) need for money, unemployed, and homeless, as well as "greed," and "fast money;" (4) influence of others, including husband, boyfriend, to be part of the crowd, and in gangs; (5) stupidity, poor judgment, and irrational thinking; (6) did not do the crime or did not know it was a crime; and (7) "I don't know." Those responses seemed to have been both honest and consistent with what was known about crime motivation (see Moon, Rolison, Akande, & Fletcher, 1994).

The EWCC women reported considerable experience with arrests (Table 1). Almost 55% had been arrested 2-4 times, while approximately 25% had been arrested five or more times. Involvement with crime started relatively late in life, however. While nearly 40% had first been arrested at age 19 or under, about 60% had been arrested at the first time at age 20 and over (Table 2). Nearly 60% of those women reported having been in prison then for the very first time. The Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) data indicated their Oklahoma women had been arrested for the first time at age 23, first incarcerated at age 27, and 54% reported being in prison their first time.

**TABLE 1**

<b>Number of Arrests</b>		
<b>Number of Arrests</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
1	386	17.1
2-4	1236	54.7
5-9	427	18.9
10-19	156	6.9
20-29	21	0.9
30 or more	32	1.4
Total	2258	100.0

**TABLE 2**

<b>Age of First Arrest</b>		
<b>Age of first arrest</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
14 or less	116	4.8

15-19	836	34.4
20-24	624	25.6
25-29	389	16.0
30-34	271	11.1
35 or more	197	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2433</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 reports the length of the current sentence. About half were serving between two and five years. Approximately one-third were serving a sentence of six years or more. The remainder--about 15%--were serving less than two years. This was to be expected, given the brevity of both the FORT and SIP programs. About two-thirds were in the first quarter of their sentence (Table 4).

**TABLE 3**

<b>Length of Current Sentence</b>		
<b>Length of current sentence</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Less than 2 years	377	14.8
2-5 years	1290	50.7
6-10 years	641	25.2
11-25 years	190	7.5
More than 25 years	13	0.5
Life Sentence	4	0.2
Death Sentence	1	0.0
Other	29	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2545</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**TABLE 4**

<b>Amount of Time Served</b> (this sentence)
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<b>Amount of time served</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Less than one-quarter	1574	65.1
More than one-quarter	527	21.8
More than one-half	204	8.4
More than three-quarters	113	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2481</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Several questions related to the experience of first arrest. About 52% reported going to jail. Upon arrest, four out of 10 (41.3%) indicated their strongest emotion was that of "disbelief--this can't be happening to me." Over one-fifth (22.6%) reported "resignation--it was bound to happen," while over one-fourth (26.8%) identified "fear" as their strongest emotion. More than nine out of 10 (93.5%) stated that if a program had been available to help in dealing with the criminal justice system, they would have taken advantage of it.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

Race and ethnicity of the EWCC inmates are portrayed in Table 5. "White, not Hispanic" accounted for 42.8%, "White, Hispanic" accounted for 4.5%, "Black, not Hispanic" was 35%, "Black, Hispanic" was 8.4%, and "Indian" was 7.1%. Those data were comparable to those of Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994). Among incarcerated women in Oklahoma, 43% were Caucasian, 9% were American Indian, 39% were African American, and "other" represented 9%. An examination of age is presented in Table 6. Over four of 10 (43.8) were between the age of 19 and 29. About 55% were 30 and older. The population was not a juvenile one by any means.

**TABLE 5**

<b>Race</b>		
<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
White, not Hispanic	1111	42.8
White, Hispanic	116	4.5
Black, not Hispanic	907	35.0
Black, Hispanic	219	8.4

Indian	183	7.1
Asian	4	.2
Other	54	2.1
Total	2594	100.1

**TABLE 6**

<b>Age</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
18 or younger	47	1.9
19-24	564	22.7
25-29	524	21.1
30-34	647	26.1
35-39	388	15.6
40-44	186	7.5
45-49	80	3.2
50 or greater	47	1.9
Total	2483	100.0

Table 7 reports marital status of the EWCC women. Over one-fourth (28.8%) had never married, while 29.9% indicated they were then married. Also, about one-fourth (25.5%) were either separated or divorced. The Sandhu, Al-Mosleh, and Chown data (1994) indicated that 29.4% identified themselves as having been married.

**TABLE 7**

<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Never Married	745	28.8

Married	774	29.9
Separated	223	8.6
Divorced	489	18.9
Widowed	94	3.6
Other	260	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2585</b>	<b>99.8</b>

Over 40% reported that they were living with a spouse or boyfriend before incarceration. Over 35% reported living alone (or with children) at that time. About 18% lived with friends, parents, or grandparents. Over one-third noted that those arrangements had existed for 12 months or less.

Those women tended to have had low levels of education (Table 8). Over four of 10 (42.7%) had no more than three years of high school, and no GED. Slightly over one-third had either a GED or had finished high school. Twenty percent had completed some college. About 90% of the women who reported college attendance for four years had not received a degree. Those data showed lower levels of educational attainment than the Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) study.

**TABLE 8**

<b>Level of Education</b>		
<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Elementary School	298	12.3
1-3 years high school, no GED	734	30.4
1-3 years high school, GED	435	18.0
4 years high school	463	19.2
1-3 years college	420	17.4
4 or more years college	63	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2413</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 9 presents reasons for having dropped out or "quitting" high school. About 55% had not finished high school. Over one-third cited pregnancy as the reason.

**TABLE 9**

<b>Reason for Leaving High School Early</b>		
<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
I did not belong	96	6.5
I was pregnant	557	37.7
I was tired and bored	211	14.3
Other	612	41.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1476</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Slightly under half (48.1%) of the subjects reported having attended a vocational or technical school. That was dramatically less than the 62% reported by Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994).

### **Children**

Over 75% of the EWCC women reported having had at least one child, compared to 81% in the Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) study. Essentially half of the women with children (N=2,124) reported having had one or two children (Table 10). The other half were parents of three or more children. The Sandhu, Al-Mosleh, and Chown data (1994) indicated 7% of Oklahoma female inmates identified themselves as childless.

Those women became mothers for the first time at a significantly early age. Sixty percent were 18 or younger when they gave birth to their first child. Interestingly, about 15% became mothers for the first time at 15 or younger. As noted above, being pregnant substantially figured into having dropped out of high school.

Over 75% maintained legal custody of their children. Physical custody or care of the minor children was provided by mother or father (42.3%), spouse or boyfriend (17%), or others. The relationship between the respondent and her children was overwhelmingly "good" (85.7%).

**TABLE 10**

<b>Number of Children</b>		
<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
1	444	20.9

2	616	29.0
3	557	26.2
4	266	12.5
5	128	6.0
More than 5	113	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2124</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Economics

When employed, the EWCC inmates reported having held jobs which largely provided low status and low pay. Those included: assembly-line worker, bartender, clerical, cook, day care worker, nurses' aid, secretary, and waitress. Table 11 presents the highest salary earned by these women. Only one out of 10 (11.4%) had even had an hourly salary of \$10 or more. About two-thirds had a high salary of \$6.50.

**TABLE 11**

<b>Highest Hourly Salary Earned</b> (in dollars)		
<b>Salary</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
3.35 or less	241	10.2
3.36 - 6.50	1311	55.6
6.51 - 10.00	540	22.9
10.00 or more	268	11.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2360</b>	<b>100.0</b>

One-fifth of the women were unemployed during the previous three years. Slightly over 50% had two or more jobs during that period of time.

Almost 70% of the respondents reported even having had received welfare assistance. Almost 40% reported never having had a checking account. And, a significant number of women--23.4%--reported never having had a driver's license.

The types of skills that the respondents had appeared to parallel the low income/low status jobs they had held in the past, perhaps with the exception of data entry and

computers. Most skills had been acquired on-the-job (33.3%), in high school (20.1%), or in vocational or technical school (25.9%).

## Drugs

Several items focused on drug and alcohol use. First use of drugs happened prior to age 20. Over 70% first used drugs at age 19 or younger (Table 12). Very few began use at older ages.

**TABLE 12**

<b>Age of First Drug Use</b>		
<b>Age of first drug use</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Less than 5	3	00.1
5-9	48	2.4
10-14	513	25.3
15-19	917	45.2
20-24	258	12.7
25-29	150	7.4
30-35	83	4.1
35 or greater	59	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2031</b>	<b>100.1</b>

Most subjects (90%) had never used heroin, speed (70.8%), prescriptions (77.2%), and crack (72.1%). Interestingly, about 45% indicated cocaine use. Of those, about 25% reported at least weekly use.

Table 13 depicts alcohol use. Nearly 75% were users, with over 10% using daily. (Those data did not reflect illegal or necessarily problem use.) About 55% were marijuana users, of which 15% were daily users. Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) reported 46% of the Oklahoma incarcerated women were marijuana users.

**TABLE 13**

<b>Report of Alcohol Use</b>
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<b>Report of Use</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Never	682	26.6
One or two times a month	954	37.2
One or two times a week	651	25.4
Daily	277	10.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2564</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **Abuse History**

The subjects' backgrounds included considerable experience with abuse. The data indicated that nearly half (48.7%) of the women reported physical abuse ("being beaten, kicked, or tied up"). Two-thirds of the women studied in the Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) research reported physical abuse. Perpetrators of the EWCC women's abuse were identified as boyfriends or husbands, as well as ex-husband, ex-boyfriends, etc. In about two-thirds of the cases (64.3%) others had been told or it had been reported. As a result of reporting, about two-thirds report things either had not changed or got worse.

Over one-third (37.3%) reported sexual abuse, either as a child or adult. Those results were essentially identical to the Fletcher, Rolison, and Moon (1994) data. About four of 10 (40.7%) of the EWCC women indicated it happened one or two times. About 70% reported the first sexual abuse experience at age 14 or earlier. Over half--57.6%--told or reported the abuse. As a result of reporting, about 45% said that things did not change or got worse. Abusers were identified as fathers and step-fathers, although both kin and non-kin were mentioned. A number of victims indicated they were abused by strangers.

### **Family Background**

Several variables highlighted the family of origin. The respondent's parents were either married (37.8%) or divorced (31.1%). Over seven of 10--71.1%--reported the relationship with their parents to have been good.

Over half (52.5%) of the inmates said they had another family member incarcerated. Over 40% had brothers incarcerated. Several had multiple family members incarcerated.

### **Physical and Mental Health**

This section reports on measures related to physical and mental health. About 23% of the inmates reported a physical or mental handicap. The most common was impaired vision--41.9%. It was noteworthy that 5.5% indicated they had a hearing impairment and 19.2% indicated they were physically disabled.

Over one-fifth (22.3%) of the respondents indicated they had attempted suicide in the past. Of those having attempted suicide, slightly over 50% reported they had attempted at least two times. Over 10% had attempted five or more times.

Over one-third (37.7%) mentioned that they had run away from home. Nearly four of 10 (37.4%) had run away three or more times.

Three-fourths stated that they felt "love and acceptance" when growing up "all" or "most" of the time. At the same time, over 60% stated they had been either "somewhat" or "very much" influenced by peers and friends.

### **Treatment Programs**

The survey examined past treatment programs participated in. "Drug treatment" and "alcohol" total about two-thirds of the subjects (Table 14). Correspondingly, 75% of the EW women said that those two programs had been the most helpful to them.

**TABLE 14**

<b>Treatment Programs Participated In</b>		
<b>Treatment program</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Alcohol	462	29.4
DWI School	94	6.0
Mental health	174	11.1
Drug Treatment	553	35.2
Detox. Treatment	19	1.2
Methadone Maintenance	15	1.0
Foster/Group Home	35	2.2
Job Corp	27	1.7
Total	218	13.9
Total	1571	100.0

### **The Future**

Inmates perceived needs for the future. Six out of ten said they needed more education, while about 25% said they needed more experience. They had also made plans and had access to resources. Almost all (96.8%) said they had a place to live after release. Those included one-third planning to live with a spouse or boyfriend, while another third planned to live with friends or parents/grandparents.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The research found that most of the women had been serving time for a drug crime or an economic crime. Most were in prison for the first time and serving a relatively short sentence, with most of it yet to be served. The majority had been arrested for the first time at age 20 or older.

The respondents tended to have been non-married, White or Black, over 30, with low levels of education and training. Most were mothers, typically having had their first child at a young age. Most reported having held low-income jobs and most had received welfare assistance in the past.

There was significant drug use reported by the subjects--including alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine, along with considerable experience with physical and sexual abuse. Fewer inmates identified themselves as having been physically or mentally handicapped, experienced with suicide attempts, and having run away from home.

The respondents indicated that they had experience in drug and alcohol treatment programs, and that those had been most helpful.

The respondents illustrated considerable personal, family, and social disorganization. That there had been multiple sources of and indicators of problem areas added to the complexity of developing intervention and/or treatment strategies.

Yet, the data provided useful information for correctional administrators and planners. Those data suggested three areas of special need: family and parenting; drug and alcohol use, and education and vocational training.

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