

**GEDETINEERDE VROUWEN IN NEDERLAND**  
**OVER IMPORT- EN DEPRIVATIEFACTOREN BIJ DETENTIESCHADE**

ANNE-MARIE SLOTBOOM

CATRIEN BIJLEVELD

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

SAMORA DAY

California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation

ANNE VAN GIEZEN

Universiteit Leiden

## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to gain information about the well-being of imprisoned women in the Netherlands and the prison conditions they have to deal with. The study was done in four different penal institutions in the Netherlands, Ter Peel, Nieuwersluis, Zwolle and Breda. A total of 251 women participated in this study (response rate 60%). Special care units were excluded, mostly because participation in the study was regarded by the prison staff as too stressful for these women. The study was based on questionnaire data, which focused on prison conditions and psychological and physical well-being. Information was also gained about imprisoned mothers and (the relation with) their children.

### **Women in prison: the numbers**

In the last ten years the number of imprisoned women in the Netherlands has increased tremendously (from more than 400 to more than 800). The group women with short sentences increased the most. Over the years, the total population became older while their sentence length became shorter. Most of the women were convicted of drug related crimes, followed by property and violent crimes.

### **Characteristics of imprisoned women**

The women in this study are mostly between 25 and 45 years old. Half of them are born in the Netherlands, and around 75 percent has the Dutch nationality. A lot of women are single, almost two third have children, around 50 percent is low educated and one third of them were imprisoned before. Most women are incarcerated for drug and property crimes. More than 40 percent has been (sexually/psychologically/physically) abused before detention. The sample is more or less comparable to the total prison population at that time.

### **Well-being of imprisoned women.**

Most women hardly think of harming themselves. However more than half of them have depressive symptoms and a third of the women have post traumatic stress complaints. Mothers are somewhat more depressed, irritated and angry than women without children. Mothers are also more irritated and angry when they have problems in the relation with their children.

### **Perceived prison conditions**

Most women feel relatively safe in prison. However, they show some environmental stress, which is mainly caused by noise, light, temperature and lack of privacy when they share a cell with another prisoner. Many women are negative about the medical care: they are not satisfied with the medical treatment and think that medical care is not provided very fast. Most of the women report good relationships with staff and other prisoners.

They see the possibilities to have contact with the outside world as too restricted and too short, in particular with regard to their children. Women hardly follow any educational program, and see their work as boring. More than half of the women don't know any organization that supports prisoners during or after their release. Just a small part of the women participates in activities preparing them for their release. Those women are mostly positive about their supervision.

### **Relation between personal characteristics, prison conditions and well-being**

The psychological well-being of the women seems to be predicted mainly by the prison environment. Especially problems in contact with family and having young children seem to increase the chance of developing psychological problems while in prison. Nevertheless not only prison factors but also personal factors are important in adjustment to the prison. Women who had psychological problems before detention also had more psychological problems during detention. Therefore both deprivation (prison) and imported

(personal) factors are important in predicting the psychological well-being of imprisoned women.

### **A healthy prison?**

In this study we compared our results with the 'healthy prison' concept, which consists of four different components: a safe environment, treating people with respect, a full constructive and purposeful regime, and resettlement training to prevent re-offending. According to the women, the Dutch prison is not an unsafe place to be and they generally feel treated with respect. Problems are mainly related to contacts with the outside, healthcare, meaningful activities (all related to a constructive regime) and resettlement. Therefore the women prison in the Netherlands is not completely unhealthy but neither totally healthy.

