

Offender abuse history: Findings from Her Majesty's Prison, Barbados *Corin Bailey and Charlene Coore-Desai*

Introduction

There is general agreement within the international discourse, that abuse, particularly in childhood, is a precursor to future offending. Every year, across the Caribbean, large numbers of children and adults suffer abuse at the hands of parents, teachers and intimate partners. Research has demonstrated a persistent overall increase in child abuse – particularly sexual, across the Caribbean in recent years. Similarly, although inadequate data means that it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the full extent of the problem it is widely recognized that intimate partner violence represents a serious social problem in the region.

Women in the Caribbean are assumed to suffer from a higher level of abuse than men and as such, their involvement in criminality has often been felt to be the result of these painful life experiences. Despite growing interest internationally however, there remains an absence within the region, of empirical data to support these claims. Absent from the Caribbean literature is data on the level of abuse suffered by those incarcerated for various offences, the characteristics of those who suffer this abuse, and the manner in which their path to criminality has been affected by it, if at all. This paper attempts to explore whether or not a sample of offenders in Barbados, could shed light on an unexplored area within the Caribbean, while at the same time identify areas for further research.

From Victim to Offender

Boswell (1995) examined a sample of juvenile offenders to assess the level of victimization in their life histories. He found that 28.5% had experienced emotional abuse, 29%– sexual abuse, 40%– physical abuse and 1.5%– organized abuse. Overall, 72% experienced emotional, sexual, physical or organized abuse with 27% subjected to two or more of them. This research has gone a long way to demonstrating the effect that maltreatment may have in the adoption of delinquent activity. The fact however, that multiple forms of victimization have been identified makes it difficult to isolate the role of specific forms of abuse.

Early research on the link between victimization and involvement in criminal activity focused on the role of ‘intergenerational transmission of violence’. Research has pointed to the critical role of the family environment, and the manner in which violence within the family can affect the learned behaviour of children fostering the belief that it is an acceptable means of achieving goals. Self-restraint is affected as inhibitions for carrying out aggressive acts are weakened and this normalizes the use of violence (Shahinfar,

Kupersmidt, & Matza, 2001). It is felt that these inhibitions are maintained into adulthood (Olweus, 1979). The intergenerational transmission of violence was also examined by Ehrensaft et al. (2003) who found that abuse in childhood was a strong indicator for offending in the future.

Though much attention has focused on the effect of abuse on violent behaviour, childhood victimization has also been linked a variety of other forms of delinquency in a number of studies relating to post traumatic stress and general strain theories (Briere, Woo, McRae, Foltz, & Sitzman, 1997; Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993; Windle & Mason, 2004). Trauma can create situations in which delinquency is used in order to manage intolerable stress (Clark, Lesnick, & Hegedus, 1997; Steward, 1996). Similarly, general strain theory argues that delinquency is a method of coping with negative experiences such as victimization.

Studies examining the effect of childhood abuse on future offending have for the most part based their conclusions on the testimony of prison inmates. A number of recent studies have however have performed longitudinal analyses of maltreated children. The majority have concluded that victims of abuse in childhood are significantly more likely than non-abused children to engage in delinquent behaviour (Kakar, 1996; Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, Lizotte, Krohn, & Smith, 2003; Widom & Maxfield, 2001). Evidence has indicated that not only are victims more likely to offend during childhood, but it is likely that they will become 'persistent offenders', with higher rates of arrest into adulthood (Widom & Maxfield, 2001).

Burgess, Hartman, McCormack and Grant (1988) cited what they referred to as 'trauma learning' as an explanation for the transition from victim to offender. They posit that crime may be used by the victim of abuse, as a means of escaping its traumatizing effects. This is often manifested in the association with disruptive elements, lowered self esteem or rebellion against the perpetrator (Bowers, 1990; Heide, 1992; Scudder, Blount, Heide, & Silverman, 1993).

Some have asserted that the type of future offending can be predicted based on the abuse that is inflicted. Proponents of this view have argued that physical abuse encourages physical violence in the same way that sexual abuse encourages sexual violence. Dutton and Hart (1992) for example indicated that those who have been victims of physical abuse are more likely to commit violent offences than other types of crimes. Similarly, Ryan (1989) argued that as many as 80% of adult sexual offenders were sexually abused as children. Rasmussen et al. (1992) also felt that sexual abuse was the result of some form of sexual traumatization as a child, as young male victims in particular tend to go on to sexually abuse others as a means of coming to terms with their victimization. This view has been criticized however on the grounds that there are a whole host of reactions to abuse – fear, anxiety, depression, anger, hostility etc. Violence or sexual offences are only possible outcomes (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986).

Others have argued that although specific forms of abuse will not necessarily lead to the same form of offending, they nevertheless can act as an indicator of offending behaviour. Mouzakitis (1981), for example, argued that some form of aggressive behaviour is the most likely response to physical abuse. Less attention has been given to the relationship

between violent offences and sexual abuse but life histories suggest that investigation is necessary. Studies reveal that aggressive children are more likely to have been sexually abused than non aggressive children (Cosentino, Meyer-Bahlburg, Albert, & Gaines, 1993; Mannarino, Cohen, Smith, & Moore-Motily, 1991). It is possible therefore, that it is merely the experience of abuse that is important and the type of offending may appear totally disconnected from the abuse that was suffered (Benoit & Kennedy, 1992). Jenkins (1968), for example, found that the most likely response to neglect was not future neglect, but property crimes.

Female abuse and Delinquency

The effect and prevalence of abuse has been said to be greater among female offenders and as such, a great deal of attention has been paid to the female experience (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly, 1994; Richie, 1996). The feeling pervades that an examination of female offending must take into account the victimization that women experience both as children and as adults. Delinquent women tend to have a background of sexual abuse. Baskin and Sommers (1998) found that among 170 violent female felons, 36% were sexually abused by an immediate family member and 26% by a member of their extended family. Studies have shown that between 7% and 22% of all adult women have been the victim of domestic abuse and one in every three women have reported being physically attacked by an intimate partner at some point in her life (Wilt & Olson, 1996). Richie and Johnson (1996) examined incarcerated women in a large United States urban jail and found that 40% of the women had experienced domestic violence and 35% reported sexual abuse.

The manner in which abuse leads to an increased likelihood of offending among women has been the subject of much debate. Richie (1996) in her work on female offenders in the United States used the theory of *gender entrapment* to explain what happens to women who are marginalized in the public sphere because of their race/ethnicity, gender and class and battered by their male partners. Gender entrapment explains the manner in which culturally expected gender roles, intimate partner violence and their social position, force many black women into criminal activity. Richie concluded that the violence experienced at the hands of intimate partners caused 'chaos' in the women's lives in the form of severe injuries, physical and emotional pain and sexual degradation. This was exacerbated by racism, a common bond shared between them and the African American men that were abusing them. These men were vulnerable to a biased criminal-justice system as well as other forms of discrimination. This led to a feeling of loyalty among the women, towards those who were battering them. Richie argued that this solidified the gender entrapment of African American battered women. Added to this, poverty increased feelings of shame and stigma, furthering the impact of social marginalization and limiting responses to violence. All these factors conspire to propel these women into crime.

This was also a theme explored by Wesley (2006) who argued that the backgrounds of female offenders include a range of cumulative victimizations – sexual, emotional and physical. Degradation, social exclusion and economic vulnerability form a consistent

presence in their lives, all located within larger structures of inequality. There is a cycle of cumulative victimization that is maintained through the same violence, marginalization and disadvantage that got them there in the first place. 'Multiple victimization' is suffered by women who are oppressed by their gender, as well as their race, economic position, violent victimization, family and social supports. Crime becomes a strategy of gender resistance where, at the heart of female motivations, is the refusal to accept further abuse. It is the accumulation of victimization that Wesley considered to be of utmost importance. Violence, neglect, social exclusion together with a lack of resources and services are intertwined with patriarchal power relations, pushing women into crime.

Empirical studies looking at histories of abuse have paid particular attention to the differences between offenders and non-offenders. When compared with girls that have not suffered childhood abuse and neglect, abused and neglected girls are nearly twice as likely to be arrested as juveniles, twice as likely to be arrested as adults and 2.4 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes. Physically and sexually abused girls as well as those who have suffered from neglect, have an increased risk of arrest for violence among women (Widom & Hislop, 2002). Mouzakatis (1981) found that roughly half of female delinquents have suffered from sexual abuse and that women in prison are two or three times more likely than women in the general public to have been sexually victimised. Similarly Seigel and Williams (2003) examined a sample of women sexually abused in the 1970s to see if sexually abused victims were at risk of arrest when compared to other girls. They found that child sexual abuse was a statistically significant predictor of arrests (when compared to non-abused girls) even when controlling for childhood history of family problems.

Less attention has been paid to the differences in abuse which exist between male and female offenders. Studies on childhood abuse have concluded that boys and girls experience similar levels of physical victimization (Kotch, Muller, & Blakely, 1999; McClellan, Farabee, & Crouch, 1997; Whitcomb, 1999). Differences have however emerged where sexual abuse is concerned with evidence suggesting that girls tend to experience more sexual abuse than boys (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986; Kotch et al., 1999; Romano & De Luca, 2000). Indeed feminists argue that sexual abuse is particularly common among females and directly related to criminal involvement later in life (Browne, Miller, & Maguin, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 1997)

There is no general consensus however that there exists a natural progression from victim to offender. Many researchers have concluded that the majority of maltreated children do not become delinquent (Koski, 1987; Scudder et al., 1993; Widom, 1991). Widom (1989) argued that there is no direct relationship between abuse and delinquency and that an abusive history is not enough to predict a progression into criminal activity. Some victims do not exhibit the negative effects of abuse. These include those who have not been abused by both parents/guardians, those who have experienced less severe and shorter periods of abuse, those who have an emotionally supportive relationship with a family member during childhood, or good social supports or a supportive spouse during adulthood (Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Sroufe, 1988; Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl, & Toedter, 1983; Hunter & Kilstrom, 1979).

Despite the lack of universal agreement as to the role of abuse in criminal behaviour, it is generally accepted that an offender's journey towards crime is often littered with multiple episodes of abuse. It is asserted that women suffer from a disproportionate level of abuse, when compared to their male counterparts. Arguing that crime is a symptom of the painful life experiences of women, some have justified the favourable treatment of women when they come before the courts (Katz, 2000; Radosh, 2002). Indeed there is a growing school of thought that differential sentencing is the correct response to the forces that have led women to run afoul of the law in the first place. Katz (2000) and Widom (2000) argued that both the adult and childhood victimization experiences of women play a major role in their offending and an understanding of these mechanisms is the first step in preventing this high-risk group from ending up in prison. It is the view of many researches that enough of a link has been demonstrated between the victimization of women and their criminal behaviour for the justice system to take this 'special condition' into account (Richie, 2000). Empirical evidence however is sparse and in the case of the Caribbean – non-existent. Specifically, the paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any gender differences in the rates of self-reported physical abuse in childhood?
2. Are there any differences in the rates of self-reported molestation in childhood?
3. Are there any gender differences in the rates of self reported rape in childhood?
4. Which demographic factors influence childhood abuse?
5. Are there any gender differences in the rates of self-reported intimate partner violence in adulthood?
6. Are there any gender differences in specific forms of intimate partner violence?
7. Are there and gender differences in the rates of self-reported sexual abuse in adulthood?
8. Is childhood abuse correlated with abuse in adulthood?

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of male and female inmates at Her Majesty's Prison in Barbados. This is the main facility for the incarceration of offenders on the island. A list of inmates revealed a total prison population of 1,024. Table 1 shows the number of male and female inmates incarcerated for major offenses up to July 2008. The largest single number of inmates was incarcerated for drug crimes with almost the entire female prison population falling into this category. As a result, in order to make fair comparisons between the sexes, this form of criminal activity became the focus of the study with only

males and females incarcerated for this offence being included. Due to the relatively small number of female inmates, all women incarcerated for drug crimes were included in the survey while a 50 percent random sample of male prisoners was employed.

Table 1. *Incarcerations for major offences up to July, 2008*

Offence	Male	Female	Total
Aggravated Burglary	18	0	18
Assault	27	0	27
Attempted Murder	1	0	1
Burglary	107	1	108
Drugs	183	22	205
Manslaughter	78	1	79
Murder	97	2	99
Rape	41	0	41
Robbery	54	0	54
Shooting with Intent	2	0	2
Theft	128	3	131
Wounding	22	0	22

Instrument

A questionnaire was designed specifically for this study. There were six main sections in the questionnaire: demographics, childhood physical abuse, childhood sexual abuse, intimate partner violence in adulthood, sexual abuse in adulthood and incarceration history. The demographic section asked questions related to age, gender, education, childhood socio-economic status (SES) and annual income prior to incarceration. Childhood, in this study, referred to experiences that took place before the age of 17. All sections related to abuse (physical and sexual) in both childhood and adulthood asked the participants to respond to questions about the nature, frequency, severity and perpetrators of the abuse. The final section of the questionnaire explored the length and reasons for present and past imprisonment.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the Superintendent of Prisons through the Ministry of National Security. Confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation in the survey were stressed, and all the selected respondents agreed to take part. Face-to-face interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks. Each cell block consisted of a 'sitting area' surrounded by cells. During the interview periods all inmates were placed in their cells and selected respondents summoned to the sitting area for the duration of the interview. In this way, prison guards could observe from their block tower, while at the

same time remaining far enough to ensure the confidentiality of the process. Each questionnaire took an average of 20 minutes for completion. Two trained interviewers (one male and one female) collected and entered the data on the entire sample.

Results & Discussion

Sample

There were 85 participants in the study (26% female). The participants were between 15 and 60 years of age. The majority of participants fell into the 21-30 age group (41.2%). The lowest number of participants fell into the youngest and oldest age groups. Twenty-five percent and 24% of the sample were in the 31-40 and the 41-50 age groups respectively (See table 2).

Table 2. *Age Groups*

Age Groups	Number of Male participants (%)	Number of Female participants (%)	Number of participants Total (%)
15-20	1 (1.2)	3 (3.5)	4 (4.7)
21-30	25 (29.4)	10 (11.8)	35 (41.2)
31-40	18 (21.2)	3 (3.5)	21 (24.7)
41-50	15 (17.6)	5 (5.9)	20 (23.5)
51-60	4 (4.7)	1 (1.2)	5 (5.9)

Table 3 shows the nationalities of the participants. A minority of the sample comprised Barbadian nationals while a significant number came from Jamaica and Guyana. These are the two Caribbean countries which have been experiencing persistent economic problems over the last three decades (Bennet, 2006). Drug trafficking has been seen as a means of overcoming the difficulties at home (Jones, 2003; Molano, 2004). This avenue has been particularly important to men and women with little education and skills.

Table 3. *Nationalities of Participants*

Nationality	Frequency (%)
Jamaican	30 (35.3)
Barbados	10 (11.8)
Trinidad and Tobago	3 (3.5)
Guyana	19 (22.4)
Antigua	1(1.2)
St Lucia	3 (3.5)
Europe	5 (5.9)
United States	1 (1.2)
St Vincent	9 (10.6)
Cuba	1 (1.2)
Suriname	2 (2.4)
South America	1(1.2)

The largest group (46%) comprised those who had been raised in single parent homes, mostly maternal family settings and an additional 9% grew up in the absence of biological parents. Most individuals in the sample had children (72.9%) and had completed primary school (48.2%). Thirty four point one percent and 7.1% had completed secondary school and some form of tertiary education respectively. Nine participants reported having no primary education.

Forty-eight participants were sentenced to between two and four years in prison. This represented the majority of the sample. Twenty percent were sentenced for 12-18 months. Six individuals were serving 4-10 years for their crimes and another 13 individuals were serving more than 10 years for their crimes. Information for one participant was not available. Only 9.4% of the sample had been incarcerated in the past.

Abuse in Childhood and Adulthood

Childhood Physical Abuse

Forty-seven percent of the sample (40 participants) reported being hurt physically by a member of their household before age 17. Of those who were hurt as children, 67.5% were males. These incidents occurred a few times a year for the majority of the group (30%). Only 10% said that this happened everyday (See Table 4).

Table 4. *Occurrence of Childhood Physical Abuse*

Occurrence of Physical Abuse	Frequency Males (%)	Frequency Females (%)	Total Frequency (%)
Everyday	2 (5.0)	2 (5.0)	4 (10)
Once or twice a week	6 (15.0)	0 (0)	6 (15)
A few times a month	5 (12.5)	4 (10)	9 (22.5)
A few times a year	8 (20)	4 (10)	12 (30)
Once or twice	5 (12.5)	3 (7.5)	8 (20)
No response	1 (2.5)	0 (0)	1 (2.5)

Severity was measured in two ways. First, participants were asked to indicate on a scale of 1-10 the level of severity of the incidents of physical abuse. This scale was then recoded into three categories: mild (1-3), moderate (4-6) and acute (7-10). Sixty-five percent believed that these incidents were mild while 27.5% and 7.5% reported the severity of the incidents as moderate and acute respectively. Secondly, they were asked to indicate whether any of the incidents ever resulted in a visit to a doctor. Fifteen percent (six individuals) reported seeing a doctor as a result of one of these incidents. An equal number of males and females fell into this category.

A Pearson's chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and physical abuse in childhood. No relationship was found ($\chi^2(1) = 1.72, p = 0.22$). This is in keeping with work done on childhood physical abuse (Kotch et al., 1990; McClellan et al. 1997; Whitcomb, 1999) and is not surprising when taking into consideration the historical and contemporary culture of child socialization in the Caribbean (Barrow, 2003). Despite international condemnation of the physical punishment of children, there remains a normalcy and acceptance of this form of discipline in the region as both boys and girls are subjected to 'beatings' for a variety of 'offences' – lying, stealing, impoliteness, neglecting chores (Evans, 1989). Alternative methods of discipline are rarely practiced as parents believe that it is their right to treat their children as they see fit. There are few gender differences although girls have been found to be generally less severely punished than boys (Barrow, 2003).

Child Sexual Abuse – Molestation

There were eight (9.4%) participants who reported sexual molestation during childhood. Molestation included being kissed or touched in a sexual way or being asked to touch someone's sexual parts against their will. Of these eight participants five (65.5%) were females. For five participants (four females and one male) the perpetrators were family members and for the remaining three participants (two males and one female) the incident(s) took place with a friend. In addition, five participants (four female and one male) reported that physical force was used in one or more of the incidents. For the majority of this group (65.5%) these incidents happened once or twice before age 17.

However, two participants (both female) reported that these incidents took place once or twice a month. Early adolescence (ages 11-14) was the most common time for the onset of these incidents (50%). For two participants these incidents began before age 10 and for another two participants they began after age 14.

A Pearson's chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and sexual molestation in childhood. However, the chi-square statistic could not be reported because one cell (males reporting sexual molestation in childhood) had an expected count of less than five. Consequently, the Fisher's Exact Test (2-sided) was used instead. Female participants were more likely to report sexual molestation in childhood than male participants (65.2% versus 37.5% respectively, $p = 0.02$, Fisher's exact test).

Sexual Abuse – Intercourse

Three participants reported having non-consensual oral, anal or vaginal sex or penetration with a finger or object before age 17. All three were female participants. In addition, the perpetrators in all three cases were family members. In two of the three cases the participants reported the use of physical force. For one participant this occurred once or twice a month whereas for the other two participants this occurred once or twice before age 17. In terms of the age of onset, one participant each, fell into the three age categories (under age 10; 10-14 years; over age 14).

The prevalence of child sexual abuse among the female respondents is in keeping with research conducted in the Caribbean where victims are almost exclusively female. In the period 1994-96 for example, Barrow (2003) found that 94% of all victims studied were female, the majority of which were between 12 and 16 years.

We were interested in determining what demographic factors were associated with childhood abuse. A childhood abuse score was derived from summing the responses to the variables of child physical abuse, sexual molestation and rape. Scores on the childhood abuse scale ranged from 3 – 6 (Mean = 3.6; SD = 0.72). Higher scores indicated more reported abuse in childhood.

A multiple regression was performed to see which demographic variables had the strongest impact of childhood abuse, using gender, childhood family status and childhood family economic situation. Childhood family status was determined by asking participants to list all the members of the household in which they spent the majority of time growing up. Dummy variables were created from the categories that emerged in the sample. The nuclear family situation served as the reference category. Childhood family economic situation was determined by the participants' reports of the socio-economic status of their households growing up. Dummy variables were also created from the categories used in the questionnaire (e.g. working class, middle class etc.). The category of "Poor" served as the reference category. Using the enter method, a significant model emerged ($F_{8,76} = 2.21$, $p < 0.05$). Adjusted $R^2 = .104$. Only gender emerged as a significant variable (See Table 6).

Table 6. *Summary of regression analysis for variables predicting childhood abuse (n = 85)*

Predictor variables	B	SE B	β
Gender	.372	.183	.225*
Nuclear Family vs. Single Parent – Father	-.076	.261	-.032
Nuclear Family vs. Single Parent -Mother	.042	.176	.028
Nuclear Family vs. Neither Parent	.072	.270	.029
Poor vs. Working class	.307	.186	.200
Poor vs. Middle class	-.368	.222	-.183
Poor vs. Upper middle class	.263	.420	.067
Poor vs. Upper class	.571	.702	.085

$R^2 = .18$
 $p < 0.05$

Intimate Partner Violence in Adulthood

The questionnaire also explored intimate partner violence in adulthood. Participants were asked to indicate how often (from never to very often) they had been the victim of seven forms of violence with their partners as the perpetrators. The frequency of endorsements for these seven forms of violence is presented in Table 5. Verbal abuse had the highest level of endorsement, followed by slapping and hitting. A composite score for intimate partner violence was computed by summing the responses on each item for every participant. Scores for overall intimate partner violence ranged from 7 to 32 (mean = 11.05, SD = 5.40). Higher scores indicated higher levels of intimate partner violence.

Table 5. *Frequency of intimate partner violence*

Violent Act	Never			Rarely			Sometimes			Often			Very Often		
	M*	F*	T*	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Name calling/criticism	33	11	44	3	3	6	10	3	13	6	0	6	11	5	16
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	42	10	52	7	4	11	7	5	12	2	1	3	5	2	7
Slap/hit/punched	40	9	49	10	7	17	8	2	10	1	1	2	4	3	7
Kicked	58	17	75	2	1	3	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	3
Threw around	58	18	76	2	1	3	0	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Choked/strangled	61	16	77	1	3	4	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	1
Used a weapon against	52	15	67	8	5	13	3	1	4	-	-	-	0	1	1

* M = Male; F = Female; T = Total

An independent sample t-test was performed to examine gender differences in self-reported intimate partner violence. The results indicated that there was no significant

difference between males and females in terms of their reports of these incidents ($t = -1.39$, $df = 28.57$, $p = 0.17$).

Although it is commonly asserted, that intimate partner violence is primarily perpetrated by males, responses from the prison sample suggested that among this group, both sexes suffered from similar levels of abuse. Though this remains a highly controversial topic, there is support for this in the literature as within the last few decades, a number of studies have indicated that men and women commit violence at similar rates (Steinmetz, 1977). The Family Research Laboratory conducted a national study confirming not only that the use of violence between the sexes was similar, but that women used violence with greater frequency than their male counterparts (Straus, 1993). Others contend that to say that males and females suffer from similar levels of abuse is to grossly oversimplify the issue. It is argued that when the injuries sustained as a result of physical violence are taken into consideration, roughly 90 percent of those considered to be 'battered' are female (Gelles, 1993).

Adult Sexual Abuse

Four participants (4.7%) reported having sexual intercourse with someone because they threatened the use of physical force. In addition, four participants (4.7%) reported having sexual intercourse because someone actually used physical force. Six participants (7.1%) considered themselves to have been raped after the age of 17. An adulthood sexual abuse score was derived from summing the responses to the variables of sexual intercourse by threat, sexual abuse by force and rape. Scores on the scale ranged from 3-6 (Mean = 3.1; SD = 0.65). Higher scores indicated more reported sexual abuse in adulthood.

An independent sample t-test was performed to examine gender differences in self-reported sexual abuse in adulthood. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of their reports of sexual abuse in adulthood ($t = -2.53$, $df = 28.57$, $p = 0.019$). Females had experienced more sexual abuse in adulthood than males.

Finally we wanted to determine whether or not childhood abuse was correlated with abuse in adulthood. There was a significant positive correlation between overall childhood abuse and overall adulthood abuse ($r = .377$, $n = 85$, $p < 0.01$). Fourteen point two percent of the variability in adulthood abuse can be accounted for by abusive experiences in childhood in this sample.

Conclusion

The study is based on inmates sentenced to prison in the island of Barbados and can in no way be interpreted to be representative of all criminals on the island or indeed the Caribbean. This is a special population and together with the small number of women incarcerated on the island, may have had an effect on the outcome of the statistical tests employed. Another limitation of the study is the fact that the overall lack of female

inmates imprisoned for other offences meant that there was an exclusive focus on those incarcerated for drug offences. It would have interesting to see whether or not specific types of abuse correlated with specific offences. The analyses however allowed us to shed light on an under-researched area within the West Indian context. We found that inmates incarcerated for drug crimes in Barbados were more likely to have been between 21 and 30 years of age. They were more likely to have completed only primary school and have spent most of their lives in a single parent setting.

The differences in levels of abuse experienced by inmates varied depending on the type of abuse considered. Women incarcerated for drug crimes in Barbados were more likely to have been sexually molested as a child than their male counterparts. The same was true of childhood sexual abuse. Sexual abuse in adulthood was also significantly skewed towards the female inmates as they demonstrated a greater likelihood to have more extensive self-reported histories of this form of abuse. The greater likelihood for the experience of sexual abuse among the females was not surprising. That there were no significant differences in physical abuse experienced either in childhood or adulthood, was however unexpected.

The research shows therefore that despite abused females forming only a small percentage of total female inmates in Barbados, they are in fact more likely to have histories of sexual abuse within their life histories than males incarcerated for the same crime (drug offences). The next step is to determine the nature of these incidents, and the manner in which these forces impact upon decision making, and the path that the Caribbean female takes to criminality as opposed to males. Historical and cultural norms within the Caribbean mean that both boys and girls are physically abused in the home. At the same time, similar levels of intimate partner violence are experienced by both sexes in the sample. The question arises therefore as to what is the role of both the childhood and adult physical abuse of men in future offending. Only when these questions are answered, can we begin to address the use of abuse against women, as justification for any perceived differential treatment received by women who come before the court.

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