

# Violence Histories among Incarcerated Women in Botswana



Tirelo Modie-Moroka  
University of Botswana  
Social Work Department  
Private Bag 0022  
Gaborone  
BOTSWANA

Email: [Modiet@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:Modiet@mopipi.ub.bw)  
Tel : ( 267 ) 3552383/ 71691331

## Some Twists...

- Males are more represented in the offender population
- Little to no literature on violence, and crime
- Women and girls were left out of studies or were investigated in sexist and stereotypic ways
  - Biological and physiological determinants of criminality – “less evolved”
  - “Non-existent,” to “Embarrassment” to “pathetic, disgraced and dishonoured.”
- Dearth of literature on women and crime in the African continent
- Serious neglect of neglect of the study of the nature and covariates of female criminality

# The Shift

- The number of women offenders has rapidly increased in recent years, calling for a focus on this population
- Women and girls who have experienced
  - Child abuse, neglect and maltreatment, sexual molestation or assault in their lifetimes
    - Are 40 to 60 times more likely to commit crimes
- Women who commit crimes may be exposed to a different set of life experiences from the general population
  - A body of feminist scholarship has blossomed in Africa, Europe, Canada, North America and Australia
- Few studies exist that emphasize the different paths to crime

# Pathways Across Disciplines

- Understanding of women offending has emerged in the form of **“Pathway Perspective”** in recent years
- Bedrock sources of criminality
- Inconclusive on the patterns and pathways
- Oversimplifies women
- Mostly examines single variable differences
- Heterogeneity among women offenders mostly ignored
  
- Many questions that demand more in-depth and qualitative answers
- Conceptual grip on processes and mechanisms

## Qualitative Research Basics

- To develop a theory from observed behaviors or processes
- Providing a nuanced and in-depth picture of a particular phenomenon
- Understanding how perceptions and meanings influence human behavior, and/or
  - Not rely principally on numeric data and quantitative measures.
- How and why humans behave as they do?
- How and why they interpret the world as they do.

# Methodology

- A combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis
- 80 incarcerated women and girls in 6 prisons in Botswana.
- **Quantitative data** – Deductive reasoning (80 women)
  - Provided a general context of the characteristics and profiles of the sample
  - Correlations and other relationships between variables
- **Qualitative Data** – Inductive reasoning (30 women)
  - Describe, decode, translate and come to terms with the meaning
  - Subjectivity- Discovery
    - Exploratory – in retrospect
    - Interview guide with probing questions -to cover a broad spectrum of life in a development sequence to the present
    - Directional conversation to elicit inner views of respondents' lives as they portray their worlds, experiences and observations
    - Specific case histories, Incidents, and Observations
    - Thick descriptions and explanations
    - Explanations

## Interview Guide

- Life experiences
- Family backgrounds
- Criminal histories
- Relationships with significant others
- The reasons/pathways for current offending
- The experiences of poverty; unemployment; illiteracy; financial well-being; work, the neighborhood where the family lives.
- Interpretation of female sex role
- Health and Mental health
- Abuse history: Physical and sexual violence on self and others
- Family life and relationships; satisfaction with family composition
- History of alcohol and drug use
- Relationships with friends, relatives;
- One's health and health of other family members;
- Time for self and for the family

## Demographics

- Age of Respondents
  - 16 to 65 years of age
  - Mean age of 30 (SD= 9.9).
  - Median of 28.
  - The peak ages for criminal involvement were between 30-45 years.
  - A decline in criminality as age advances
  - Under the age of 25 - infanticide, abortion, stealing by servant, petty theft.
  - Women above 50 years - Use of insulting language; possession of dagga and murder.

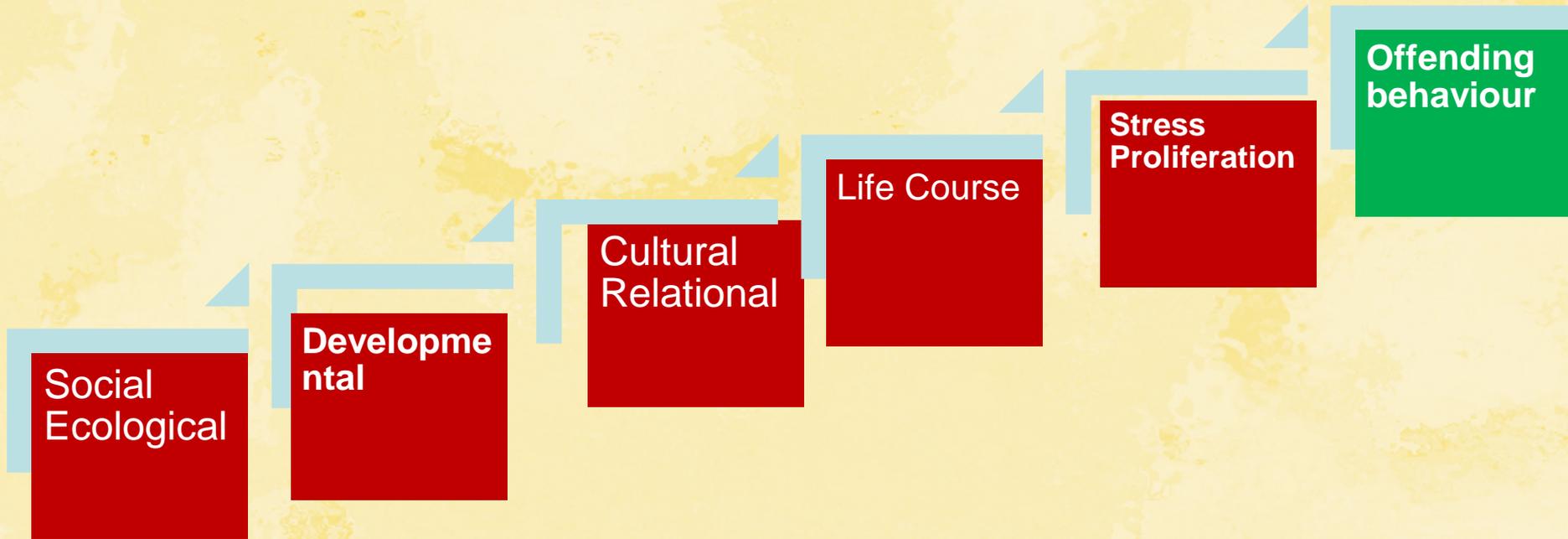
**Table 1: Presentation of Data by Age, Ethnicity, Marital Status, Educational Status and Crime Committed**

Item	Number	Percentage
<b>Crime Committed</b>		
Assault/arson/ Grievous harm/use of insulting language	3	4%
Murder	10	12.5%
Theft Common/Robbery	18	27%
Infanticide/abortion	22	28%
Possession of dagga	18	22.5%
Property Crimes	4	5.0%
Illegal Immigration/Overstaying	6	8%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	56	70%
Married	7	9%
Cohabiting	7	9%
Divorced	5	6%
Widowed	5	6%
<b>Educational Status</b>		
No formal education	7	9%
Primary school	32	40%
Junior Certificate	34	43%
COSC	6	8%
Adult education	1	1.3%
<b>Family Financial Situation</b>		
Registered Destitutes	10	12.5%
Poor but not registered	33	41%
Not so poor	24	30%
Middle class	14	17.5%
<b>Employment History</b>		
Never Had Formal Employment	22	27.5%
“Piece Jobs” (On and Off)	35	44%
Formal Employment	23	29%
Homemaker (mosadi wa lelwapa)	7	8.8%

# Experiences of Violence

Physical Violence as a Child	Frequency	Percentage
Mother	28	35%
Father	21	26%
Brother	9	11%
Other Relatives	27	26%
Father's First Wife	7	9%
Sister	5	6.3%
Step-parents	5	6.3%
Experiences of Sexual Violence		
Whether sexual abuse was experienced		
Yes	34	42.5%
No	46	57.5%
Whether Physical abuse was experienced		
Yes	57	71.3%
No	23	8.7%
Witnessed Violence between Parents		
Never	17	21.3%
Sometimes	35	43.8%
Very often	28	35%
Perpetrators of Sexual Violence		
Husbands	11	13.8%
Boyfriends	49	61.3%
Others	5	6.3%
Strangers	32	40%
Friends	7	8.8%
Male cousin	12	15%
Stepfather	2	2.6%
Other relatives	14	17.5%

# Thinking...of ordering the steps?



# The Social Ecological-Developmental Pathway

## The Social - Ecological as Antecedent

- Early introduction to economic deprivation and material hardships
- Both episodic and transient
- A convergence of life events and chronic strains
- Overarching continuity of strains
- Counter-extensive over a life course
  
- Vigilant anticipation –stop the next occurrence
- Psychic pain in fear of future occurrence
  
- A desire for alternative forms of survival

# The Ecological-Developmental Pathway as Antecedents Deprivations and Vulnerabilities

- Single-parent families – (60% ); 13% child-headed; *Step-parent related Experiences*
  - “*Rraagwe ngwanake/ the father of my children*”
  - “His or her person.”
- Polygamy -“the other mothers”
- Infidelity/MCPs, etc
- Multiple dependent children
- Parental Divorce and fragmentation of the family
- Loss and Grief - unresolved
- Dropped out of school
  - Pregnancy (8%); Lack of school fees (9%); Lack of school uniform or feeding fee (38.8%); Poverty at home and a desire to leave school in order to help the family (35%); Underachievers and “no need to continuing with schooling (5%)
- Parental Family Criminal Involvement
- High crime area – Old Naledi, Ginger, Maruapula
- Housing Problems (unstable residence, chased from homes, etc),
- Low Family Support

# The Ecological-Developmental Pathway as Antecedents Deprivations and Vulnerabilities

- Status location and devaluations within systems of inequality (ethnicity, SES, Marital status, etc)
  - Acquired at birth
  - Discriminatory practices in the home, school, jobs, justice systems, medical care, and community
  - Lack of child support especially for low-income single women with dependent children
  - Distorted economic priorities
  - Dependency on destitute rations
  - Narrowing economic and social capital
- Unfriendly school environment home, school, jobs, justice systems, medical care, and community environments

## Social –Ecological and the Cultural-Relational

- Mutual Empathy
- Relational Authenticity
- Connective/Affiliation - rituals of obligation
- Relationship differentiation (boundaries, self-validation, integrity)
- Affirmation of the needs of the other
- Adapting of one's needs to those of others
- Using one's relational strength to enhance other people's well-being.

- Unquestioned loyalty
- To meet the expectations or risk losing them
- The ebb and flow of development is seasoned by relationships in women's lives,
- Lifetime of self-sacrifice and compromise
- Censor people's needs, thoughts, and emotions to cultivate harmony and satisfaction in their relationships
- Autonomy and distance problematic
- De-selfing to retain these relationships
- Involvement in either their parent's, boyfriend's or husband's life-fulfilment and identity

## **Infanticide:**

***Age unknown by respondent; cohabitee; with four children no formal education; does not know age of first child.***

- My child fell from my back onto a rock and died when I was coming from a shebeen. I drink alcohol a lot and can not stay without drinking. I am a tank. Actually the child did not die immediately, I took her home and later during the night, I felt that he was a cold. I tried to breastfeed him. Unfortunately, I realised that he was no longer breathing.
- I was then arrested. I did not plan to kill my baby. I was drunk and it was dark.
- My mother, brother and sisters all have serious problems with alcohol. We all drink and fight each other. When I was growing up there would be fights after drinking and everybody would start beating each other. My father and mother used to fight a lot too. I was introduced to it at an early age.
- ...I was once sexually molested by a stranger but I do not know the dates. I have never been to school....I have never worked.
- ...I wash clothes for people and they pay whatever amount they feel is appropriate.

# Stress Proliferation across the Developmental Life Course

- Early adversity is an important domain to watch
  - Childhood to adulthood victimization, abuse and trauma
- Embedded in the family of origin
  - Pre-existing circumstances in early life tended to interfere with status attainment
  - Unbroken economic strains in the home
  - Parental alcohol abuse
  - The presence of a parent's partner (such as a new lover)
  - Parental stress over single-parenthood
  - Hostile environment in the home
  - Negative affect in the family
- Continuous, overlapping and Sequential presence
  - Contemporaneous clusters or an intertwine with a series of stressors that tend to emerge seriatim

# 18 Year Old: Infanticide

- My mother and father were both spent most of their money on alcohol. So there was nothing to eat at home most of the time.
- My father was married to two wives and looked after the first wife more than my mother who was second. My mother resorted to alcohol use. Most of the money she got from my father she used all the money on alcohol.
- I decided that when I grow up I do not want to be like her.
- She would arrive late from drinking and would ask us to go and look for food -- even if she had left us with none. She was always and bitter. When she died, I became the sole provider of the household. My father ignored us.

*I was involved in a relationship with a man who belonged to ZCC. He was okay most of the time...he would beat me when he found me talking to another man...he told me that his church prohibited the use of contraception and if we used any, we would be sinning. He said that for us to have sex before marriage is not even a sin because in God's eyes we are "almost" married. He also told me that he had performed some ritual "taela" to make sure he does not impregnate any women within a certain period. I believed him.*

*... I wanted to get rid of the baby so that I could look after my younger siblings because my father's habits make this impossible. I was not ready for the pregnancy at all. I could see that my life was going to end up like my mother's. Therefore, I was trying to avoid that. Ke eng a ne a nkaketsa are ga nkake ka ithwala?/ why did he lie to me that I would not get pregnant?*

*My mother never beat me that much, but it was my brother who was more likely to beat us for all sorts of things. My mother preferred talking to us. My male cousin sexually abused me at the age of 10. I don't know what he was doing. He stopped doing it when he went to South Africa to work in the mines. When I think back, I really hate him.*

#### *45 year old: Grievous harm*

*Then when I was 15 years old a man once came to our home and he found me alone. He asked where everybody else was, I told him that my mother was at lands and the other children were still at school. Therefore, he came closer to me and told me that he wanted to tell me something. Suddenly, he was touching my breast and his other hand tried to remove my panties. When I realised what he was up to, I pushed him away and ran outside the house. I suspect that the man knew my brothers, though I did not know him. One day I met him and he got excited and told his friends that he wanted to marry me. I was angry because I knew that he was trying to cover up for what he had done to me once. I walked away from him.*

*When I was around 11 years, our playmates (boys aged 15 - 16) used to force us to have sex with them, and they also touched our breasts against our will. I used to tell my mother that the boys are forcing us to do things we do not want to do and my mother would get very angry with them. They continued till I went to secondary.*

## **20 year old : Theft Common**

It was painful not to have a mother when I was growing up. If I had a mother, she would have taken care of my child so that I could continue with my schooling. My aunt's daughter had a baby and she went back to school because my aunt stayed home with the baby. I felt bad. I had been forced to leave school because there was nobody to take care of my child. My sister and I went to school bare-footed to school. She said that there was no point investing in us, because when we grow up, we would desert her.

#### **27 year Old: stealing by Servant**

*I grew up living with my father and my stepmother. My stepmother used to beat me often. I had to do all the housework while my step-siblings were just sitting and not doing anything. Though my father was aware of what was going on, he never did anything to protect me.*

*My father had told me that my mother had died. It was only after I had my first child that my grandmother told me that my mother was alive.*

*I ended up moving out to stay with my grandmother. When my grandmother died, I had to go back to my father and stepmother. Later I traced my mother and went back to stay with the family. I also faced problems there since my mother was alcohol abusing*

# Violence and the Stress Process

Poorer self-esteem in adulthood

Disruption in attachment/Insecurity in relationships

Disruption in self-control

Disruption in moral and social judgments

A sense of lack of trust

Overcrowding leading to sexual re-victimization

Feelings of humiliation and shame

Increasing networks with

negative social support from deviant peers

**Helpless, worthless and powerless**

Drug and alcohol use

Internalizing self-destructive behaviours

Externalizing aggressive or anti-social behaviors

Academic problems

# Mediators/Moderators: Childhood/adolescent/adulthood

- Perceived social support from significant others such as family, friends, and intimate partners could help
- Perceived social support could promote psychological well-being
- Social support can be an important mediator of the effect of early victimization on depression, nonspecific psychological distress, and post-traumatic stress disorder in adulthood (Runtz & Schallow, 1997; Shaw & Krause, 2002).
- Using violence to respond directly to the experience of violence or abuse
- Psychology of entrapment"

# Psycho-cognitive Mediators/Moderators: Childhood/adolescent/adulthood

- Social support
- Self concept and self-esteem
- Described themselves as “the support system” for other people - “looking at me”
  - Aging parents
  - Unemployed relatives
  - Drug abusing boyfriends and children
- Role entanglement leading to debilitating stress in their lives
- Poor or inadequate support system for themselves
- Limited opportunity to benefit from positive feedback or functional appraisal patterns
- Few viable legal options
- Disconnected systems of containment

# Psycho-Cognitive (Mediators)

## Childhood/adolescent/adulthood

- Lead to psychological and behavioural effects
  - Mental health problems
  - Internalizing
    - Depression - Occurs more likely when there is an interaction of adverse life circumstances and intrinsic cognitive characteristics that increase the risk
    - Self-silencing
    - Pessimism/low self efficacy
    - Anger/Bitterness
    - Hostility
    - Vengeance and retaliation seeking
    - Anxiety – “worrying too much”... “talking with my heart”
  - PTSD- hyper vigilance
  - Compulsive and Externalizing Behaviours

# Psycho-cognitive - (Moderators)

- Cognitive schemas guide subsequent appraisals (Dutton, 1992; Segal, 1988).
- When one appraises events negatively, they may become vulnerable to adverse psychological outcomes
- The existence of protective factors could reduce co-occurrence and reduce the likelihood of abusive behaviours being repeated across generations
- Psychological predispositions and social supports could lessen the effects
  - Resilience
  - Sense of Mastery
  - Taming attributions
  - **Hardiness**
  - Learned Helplessness Vs Hopefulness Versus Tolerance
  - Self-esteem- could buffer the psychological effects of chronic stress by:
    - Helping develop positive psychological dispositions
    - Sense of power and control
    - More active stress appraisals
    - Supporting problem-focused coping
    - Confident disposition
    - Self-confidence tend to improve and enhance confidence and sense of control over life events, hence indirectly challenging worthlessness, helplessness, and powerlessness.
    - Social support
- By encouraging positive psychological dispositions
  - By promoting constructive coping strategies and behaviours
- To weaken or even counter the lasting impact of experiences, interpersonal problems, and feelings of powerlessness

## **Human Agency and Turning Points – “Final straw”**

- **Nxaaa!**
- **Pshmmm!**
- **I thought he was strong...**
- **Who am I? Who is he? /she?**
- **How did I come to be like this? I was not like this. I don't like the person I have become**
- **I am not “mad” /Insane (mental health problems)**
- **Who has power? Are you are the only person with power?**
- **Where did they get power? Where did I lose mine?**
- **Can I be a victim of another person all the time?**
- **How can she take my boyfriend while I am sitting?**
- **Why did he deceive me? Kana I had come a laughing stock in the village**
- **What does respect mean? How can I respect a useless man who can't even feed that family?**

## Contention...

- It is important to understand factors that contribute to the development of each criminal behaviour **independently**

....and then

- the possible **synergistic, additive, or dynamic interaction** of behaviours.

## Going forward

- Use the Social ecological developmental model to design interventions
  - A let-down of the social service, the health care and criminal justice systems.
  - Particular attention regarding the focus of policies, programs, advocacy, and reachable, appropriate, and effective services.
  - Prison design, service coordination, and intervention development.
  - Prisons has a role in providing services for women prisoners
  - Quantitative study to move to comprehensive understanding of the **processes and factors**
  - Assess the nature of the specific interconnections and pathways of influence among the parts, intricate ways in which they foster and reinforce each other and