

# Women in prison: An issue of blaming the individual for social problems

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Los Angeles, CA (October 11, 2011) Researchers have long claimed that physical abuse and marginalization lead to criminal activity; however, women in prison are taught to overlook socioeconomic issues and blame only themselves for their behavior, according to the new study "Experiences of Interpersonal Violence and Criminal Legal Control: A Mixed Method Analysis," published in *SAGE Open*.

Authors Traci Schlesinger and Jodie Michelle state that there is a real connection between the type of abuse experienced by women, marginalization, and whether or not they will turn to drugs and criminal activity to cope with their experiences. Still, the authors contend current psychiatric and popular discourse portrays female incarceration as the result of poor choices and [bad behavior](#) "rather than identifying structural conditions that lead to imprisonment—including changes in laws, racist and sexist legislation, poverty, lack of resources and jobs, and social vulnerability over the course of one's life."

The authors analyzed surveys from 170 incarcerated women as well as personal history interviews conducted with 11 formerly imprisoned women and found that women who experience non-sexual [physical abuse](#) as well as any type of abuse as adults are more likely to begin using drugs, while women who are victims of sexual abuse as children claim that their imprisonment is a direct, nearly inevitable result of their abuse. They also found that marginalized women (such as women whose parents were also incarcerated and women who were unemployed at the time of their arrest) are more likely to turn to drugs to deal with

[interpersonal violence](#) than women with the resources to find other ways to cope with their experiences of violence.

"Having few or no options because of their marginalized socioeconomic positions, entrenched racial inequality, and repeated episodes of violence, respondents indicated that criminalized activities became survival mechanisms, which led to incarceration," write the authors.

The authors point to institutional change and support systems for victims of abuse as a way to prevent female criminal activity.

The authors wrote, "Radical education, community support, decriminalization, job creation, and automatic expungement could work together to push back against the web of interpersonal and state violence experienced by so many marginalized [women](#)."

**More information:** The article "Experiences of Interpersonal Violence and Criminal Legal Control: A Mixed Method Analysis" published in SAGE Open, is available free at: [sgo.sagepub.com/content/early/.../419523.full.pdf+html](https://sgo.sagepub.com/content/early/.../419523.full.pdf+html).

A podcast interview with authors Traci Schlesinger and Jodie Michelle is also available at: [sgo.sagepub.com/content/1/2/21 .../4011419523/suppl/DC1](https://sgo.sagepub.com/content/1/2/21.../4011419523/suppl/DC1)

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