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# Women's Pathways to Crime

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# Rise of Pathways Research in Criminology

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- ❖ Pathways research emerged in 1990s (Daly, Chesney-Lind, Belknap, Arnold, Richie, others)
- ❖ Core assumptions
  1. Gender and Race Matter
  2. Girls' and Women's Voices Matter
  3. Integrates theories of girls'/women's psychosocial development (e.g., relational theory)

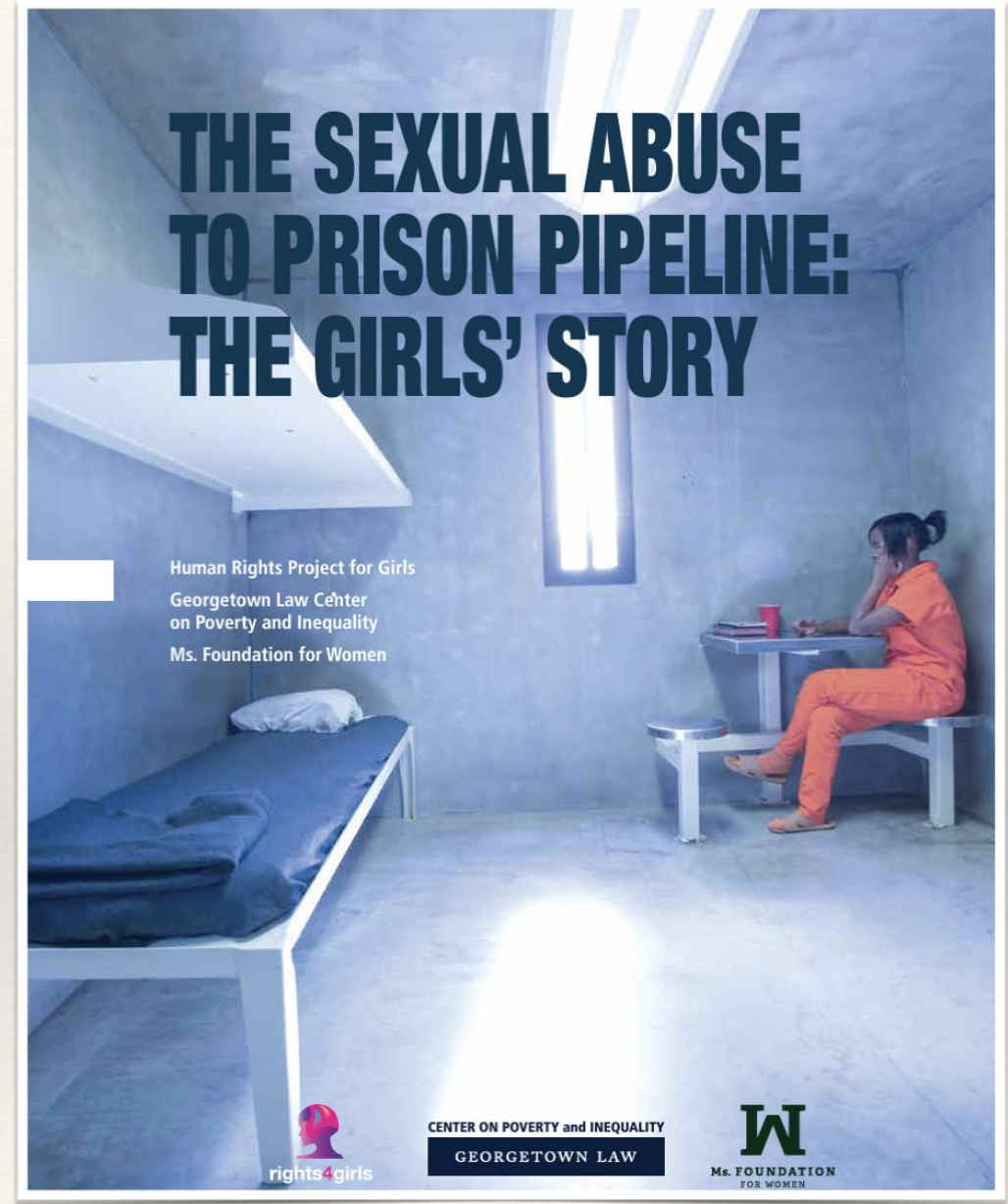
Women's pathways to crime are different than men's pathways

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## Trauma-to-Prison Pipeline

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- 1 out of 16 women in the US report their first sexual experience was a forced one.
- Girls in the juvenile justice system experience sexual abuse at 4.4 times the rate of boys in the system.
- Trauma affects girls and women in fundamentally distinct ways, both socially and biologically.
- Girls are more likely to experience PTSD after trauma and have accelerated cortical aging in a brain region responsible for emotional processing.



Sources: Hawks et al. (2019); Klabunde et al. (2016); Saada Saar et al. (2015)

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# Qualitative and Quantitative Studies Align

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- ❖ Quantitative studies support the narratives women have been sharing for decades.
- ❖ Salisbury & Van Voorhis (2009)  
Tested 3 pathways with 313 women on probation in Missouri:
  - Childhood victimization
  - Unhealthy intimate relationships
  - Lack of social and human capital

## **GENDERED PATHWAYS**

### **A Quantitative Investigation of Women Probationers' Paths to Incarceration**

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*University of Cincinnati*

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Although qualitative research in the area of gender-responsive offending pathways has grown extensively, little quantitative work has been conducted. This study utilizes interview and survey data to assess various gender-responsive needs with an intake cohort of 313 women probationers. Using a path analytic approach, the study statistically supported three gendered pathways to women offenders' incarceration: (a) a pathway beginning with childhood victimization that contributed to historical and current forms of mental illness and substance abuse; (b) a relational pathway in which women's dysfunctional intimate relationships facilitated adult victimization, reductions in self-efficacy, and current mental illness and substance abuse; and (c) a social and human capital pathway in which women's challenges in the areas of education, family support, and self-efficacy, as well as relationship dysfunction, contributed to employment/financial difficulties and subsequent imprisonment. Support for such gendered pathways has implications for both criminological explanations of female offending and correctional interventions for women.

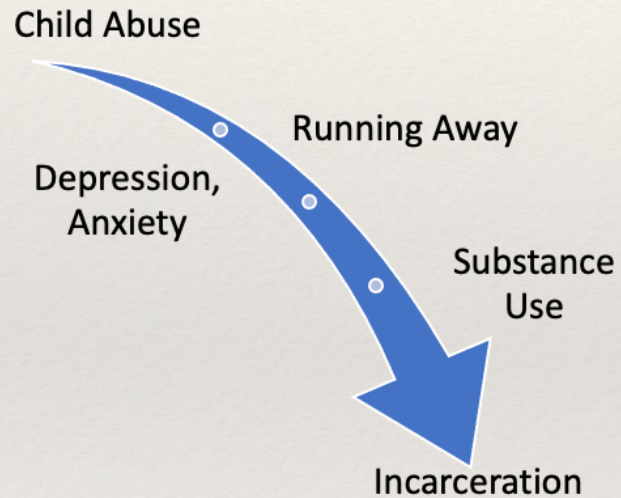
**Keywords:** gendered criminal pathways; women offenders

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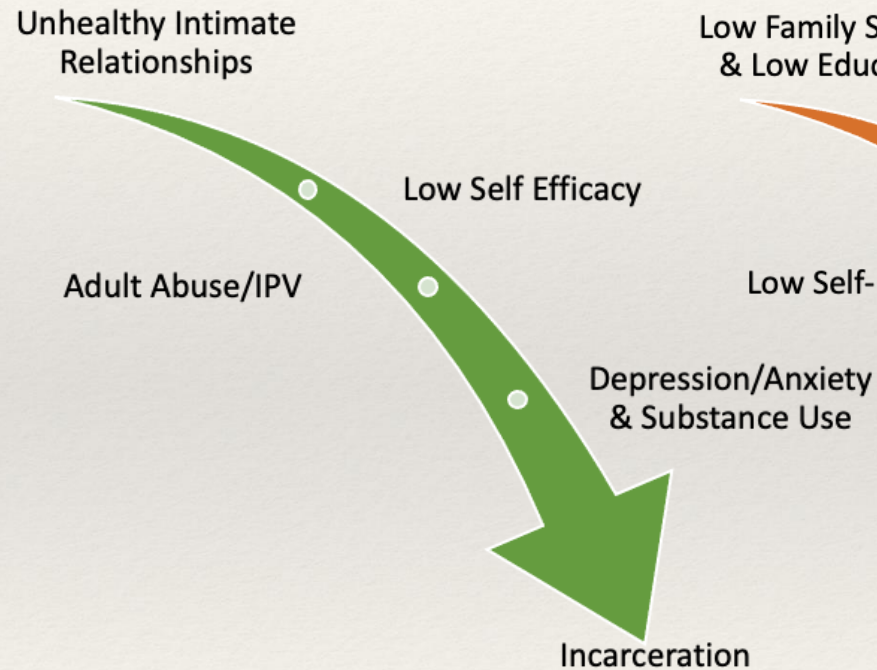
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# Multiple Routes to Incarceration

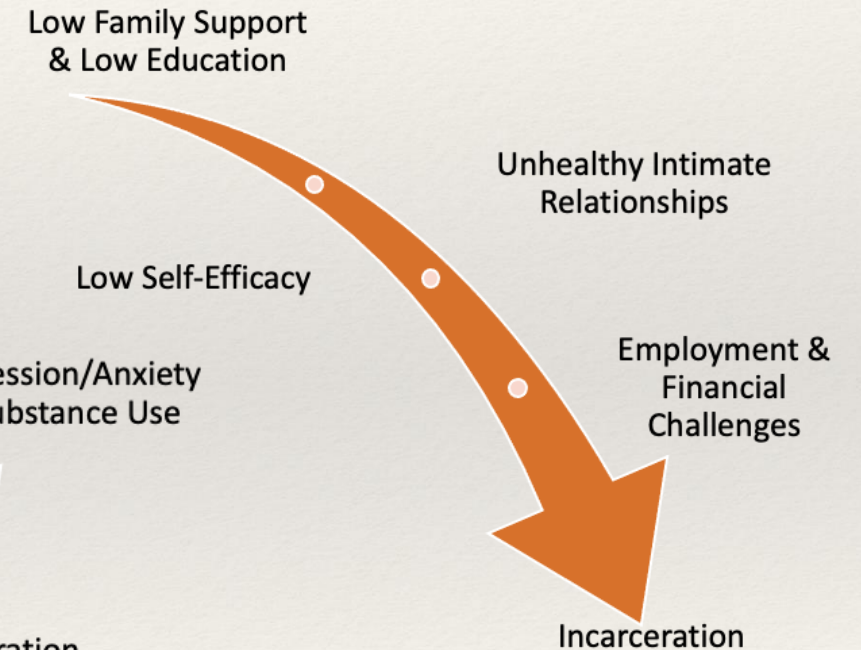
## Child Abuse Pathway



## Relational Pathway



## Social & Human Capital Pathway



Source: Salisbury & Van Voorhis (2009)

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# Major Psychosocial Predictors of Crime

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Primarily based on studies of boys and men

1. Criminal History
2. Antisocial Attitudes
3. Antisocial Peers/Friends
4. Antisocial Personality Traits  
(e.g., impulsivity, low self-control, hostility, etc.)
5. Unhealthy Family/Marital
6. School/Employment Problems
7. Substance Misuse
8. Poor Use of Leisure Time



**wrna**  
**Women's Risk Needs Assessment**

Created to Support Women's  
Pathways to Offending

# Women's Risk Needs Assessment Scales

Gender-Neutral Needs	Gender-Responsive Needs	Gender-Responsive Strengths
Criminal history	Housing safety	Educational strengths
Antisocial attitudes	Employment/financial	Relationship stability
Antisocial friends	Educational needs	Parental involvement
Substance use history	Anger/hostility	Family support
Recent substance use	History of mental illness	Relationship satisfaction
Gambling/Gaming addiction	Depression/anxiety	Self-efficacy
	Psychosis	
	Abuse/trauma	
	PTSD	
	Family conflict	
	Relationship difficulties	
	Parental stress	



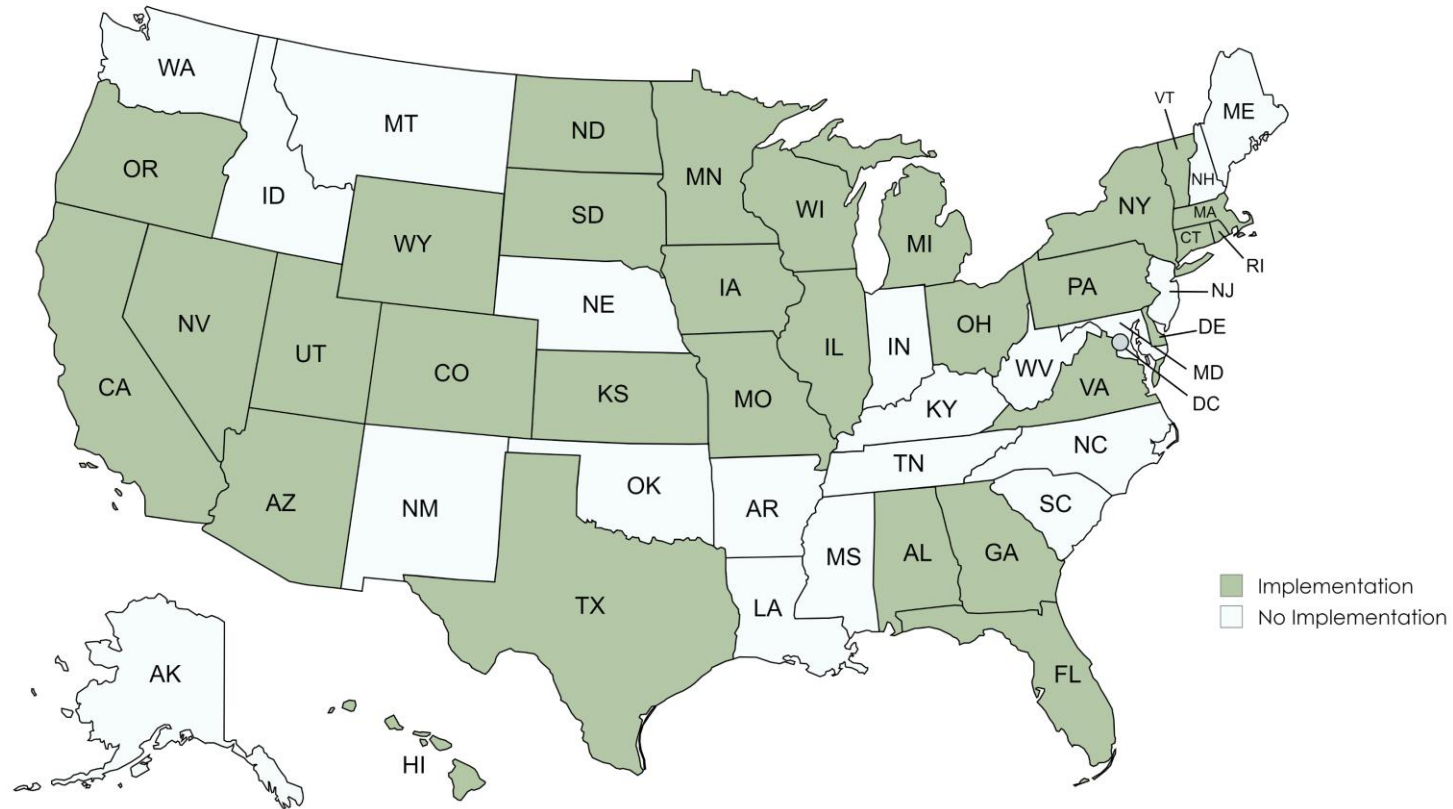
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# WRNA Implementation



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# Four Core Pathways to Prison

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- ❖ **Type 1: Quasi-“Normal”** Non-Violent and Addicted
- ❖ **Type 2: Lifelong Victims/Survivors**, Abusive Partners, High Addiction & Depression
- ❖ **Type 3: Socialized to Crime**, Economically Poor, but Low Victimization and Few Mental Health Problems
- ❖ **Type 4: Aggressive Antisocial**, High Risk/High Need, High Victimization and Severe Mental Illness, Violent in Jail/Prison Environments

# Type/Pathway

California 1 sample  
(N=718)  
Brennan et al. (2012)

California 2 sample  
(N=1,514)  
Brennan et al. (2008)

Massachusetts sample  
(N=1,798)  
Brennan & Jackson (2022)

## Type 1: Quasi “Normal”

*Mostly non-violent drug & property offenses with substantially below average criminal involvement; many in prison for first time; dominant issue is substance use; generally higher than average SES; little evidence of MH needs or prior trauma/abuse*

35%

38%

28%

## Type 2: Lifelong Victims/Survivors

*Mostly non-violent drug & property offenses with high poverty and educational and work deficits; many with domineering and violent intimate partners; high rates of early sexual and physical abuse that continues into adulthood; high levels of depression/anxiety, substance use, but little evidence of suicidal ideation*

24%

26%

24%

## Type 3: Socialized Subcultural

*High criminal involvement, drug use, and drug trafficking; extreme poverty, disadvantaged neighborhoods with little positive social mobility/employment; heavy antisocial influence from families, peers, and intimate partners facilitating antisocial attitudes; yet low levels of MH needs and prior trauma/victimization*

28%

30%

28%

## Type 4: Aggressive Antisocial

*Highest criminal involvement of all types mostly for drug & property offenses; yet incur violent infractions in prisons; very high rates of prior sexual and physical trauma, and serious mental illness (psychosis); high rates of suicide attempts and self-harm; high on virtually every risk factor*

13%

6%

19%

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Most extreme anger/hostility scores & high child trauma scores

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“My parents were very, very abusive and I have a problem with that...I have a fighting problem. It takes a lot to get me mad, and you’ve got to keep egging it and egging it and egging it before I actually do something, but I do act out physically, which is not good, and I think that that has a lot to do with the way I was brought up.”

*–Marta, 23 year-old Latina*

“He’d like, get a hollow look in his eye, and then he’d just start pounding on me, yelling at me, beating me, um, and then he’d throw me down and rape me, kick me, stomp me into the floor.”

*–Amanda, White, 50 years old*



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# Final Thoughts

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- ❖ Girls and women are far less dangerous and violent compared to their male counterparts.
  - ❖ When they are violent, it is often due to poor emotional regulation as a result of victimization, to defend against further harm, or to defend a reputation. Further, they are far less likely to use guns in their violent behavior, and are rarely primary instigators of violence.
- ❖ Women have unique risk factors that fuel their pathways to crime/recidivism, as well as strengths which insulate them from recidivism.
- ❖ The blurred boundaries between victimization and offending is particularly prominent among justice-involved women, *especially girls/women of color*. Brain studies suggest that trauma affects girls/women distinctly compared to boys/men.
- ❖ Dysfunctional relationships (both with the self and others) are primary drivers of both women's offending and motivation to positive behavior change.



Thank you

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