# Review of the Literature

*Women in incarceration.*

The entry phase of incarceration is described as the most vulnerable. Inmates describe the initial phase as “confusing”, asking themselves existential questions such as ‘Why did I do this?’ and ‘Who am I?’ (Vanhooren, et al., 2017). Inmates are immediately faced with a variety of challenges including, limited physical comfort, lack of privacy, perceived lack of safety, and limits to freedom (Vanhooren, et al., 2017). This initial experience is shocking and disruptive to the individual. Higher rates of self-harm and suicide are identified during this time of adjustment (Vanhooren, et al., 2017). It becomes evident that further examination and mental health support is needed, particularly during the entry process.

Incarcerated women experience levels of loss. The most profound to potentially experience is the loss of a child. Lewin and Farkas (2011) mention that the death of a child is considered to be the most traumatic of all losses. The authors also state that women who are incarcerated may experiences losses at a greater rate than the general population. As Lewin and Farkas (2011) examined this phenomenon, an array of coping techniques emerged. It is noted that although child loss and grief patterns were difficult and complicated, group therapy at the jail was found to be helpful to the women processing this loss (Lewin & Farkas, 2011).

A second contender to note in the experience of women who are incarcerated is substance use. Sanders, et al., (1997) examines substance use among female offenders. The authors examine a variety of variable including but not limited to, race/ethnicity, history of physical or sexual abuse, previous arrests and/or incarcerations, crime committed and length of current incarceration. The authors note that the high rate of substance use and criminal behavior among this population gives a clear indication of a need for substance related education and treatment.

A potential experience of incarcerated women also includes pregnancy during incarceration. Shaw et al. (2014) note few published studies of this experience exist. It is noted pregnant women and children to be particularly vulnerable. The authors also indicate the need for health care in such cases is quite large and often underserved, which result in ill health, delayed development and family disruption.

*Experiences of children and families.*

Several studies are noted to show the impact of an incarcerated woman on their families and children. Saunders (2016) notes that children often experience a considerable disruption when a parent is incarcerated. Miller (2006) states that the increasing number of children of incarcerated parents constitutes one of the most at-risk populations in the United States. Arditti, et al. (2017) indicate interest in social health and economic characteristics of both children and parents effected by incarceration. It is indicated that children of offenders often experience harm in the sense of traumatic separation, emotional suffering, and poor academic performance (Arditti, et al., 2017). Miller (2006) indicates that though the short and long term effects of an incarcerated parent on a child are hard to quantify, there is evidence to suggest that children are reacting negatively to the separation from the incarcerated parent. Trotter et al. (2016) also notes the disruption in care and custody to have a disruptive impact on the child’s experience. A question that becomes imperative for each of these children to face is contact with the incarcerated parent. Saunders (2016) explains finding in three main forms of contact, including visits, calls, and letters. Saunders (2016) notes the children report how the separation effected their ability to maintain a meaningful relationship with the parent. Arditti (2005) notes several systematic views which impact relationships between the incarcerated parent and their families. Examples include Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem. Adritti (2005) also mentions the effect of stigma and its impact on relationships.