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Challenges Faced by Women Offenders After Incarceration

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ABSTRACT

The growing body of gender-responsive research on women offenders revealed fundamental differences between women and men offenders. However, limited research studies are available about the challenges of women offenders in Singapore. This qualitative study seeks to explore: (1) What are the post-incarceration challenges Singapore women offenders face; and (2) How do the post-incarceration challenges differ for women re-offenders versus desistors? Singapore women offenders faced challenges in the following 9 broad domains of (1) employment; (2) financial; (3) social network; (4) mental health; (5) role as a mother; (6) housing; (7) role as a caregiver; (8) leisure time; and (9) individual factors. Re-offenders tend to report more complex challenges, especially in the domains of social network and role as a mother. These findings highlight that reintegration is a gendered and context-dependent process that is shaped by women's experiences.

KEYWORDS

Gender-responsive; women offenders; challenges; desistors; prison; reintegration

INTRODUCTION

The growing body of gender-responsive research on women offenders reveals fundamental differences between women and men offenders, especially in terms of the realities and challenges of their lives pre and post-incarceration (Van Voorhis, Wright, Salisbury, & Bauman, 2010; Belknap, 2001; Covington, Bloom, & Rohnert Park, 2004). Often, the reentry of women offenders into society is a complex process revolving around multiple competing challenges (Richie, 2001), in the domains of mental health, employment, financial, social network, role as a mother and housing (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Koons, Burrow, Morash, & Bynum, 1997; Richie, 2001). Upon release, they are likely to return to the same environment and conditions that led them into crime in the first place, coupled with the added challenge of having to restabilize themselves in society (Richie, 2001). Combined with the limited human and social capital they have (Holtfreter, Reisig, & Morash, 2004), these challenges often contribute to women offenders' pathways back to crime (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009; Salisbury, Van Voorhis, & Spiropoulos, 2009).

Overview of Current Research

Presently, a majority of the existing gender-responsive literature are derived from Western countries, which may not be representative of populations in other countries, especially those with differences in criminal justice systems, societal conditions and policies across jurisdictions. This study sheds light on the challenges faced by women offenders specifically in the Singapore

context, which may be helpful in identifying and addressing the gaps in local and similar programs and structures elsewhere to better support women offenders in correctional settings. We seek to answer the following key questions:

- What are the post-incarceration challenges faced by Singapore women offenders?
- How do the post-incarceration challenges differ for women re-offenders compared to desistors?

About Singapore Prison Service

The Singapore Prison Service, as a correctional agency, enforces the secure custody and rehabilitation of offenders. Its vision – to be Captains of Lives – is focused on helping offenders take ownership of their own rehabilitation, by providing offenders with psychology and work-related programs during in-care and working closely with their family and community partners for after-care support. Approximately 10% of our inmates are women, and approximately 70% of the convicted penal population in Singapore have drug offenses. The overall recidivism rate for our inmates is around 24%¹ (Singapore Prison Service, 2019). Singapore Prison Service also operates the Drug Rehabilitation Centers (DRCs) which house citizens who misuse controlled substances and are detained to undergo mandatory rehabilitation.

In Singapore, the needs of the offenders are incorporated in both prisons and post-incarceration settings. Specific to women offenders, while in prison, they undergo gender-responsive psychological-based correctional interventions, addressing issues such as unhealthy relationships, mental health issues and struggles with multiple roles. In addition, parenting and family programs are in place to aid women to become better mothers and daughters, as well as foster a rebuilding of ties with their family members. To increase their human capital, educational opportunities and gender-responsive vocational trainings such as baking and hairdressing are available in prison. These trainings help facilitate their eventual transition into community, where they learn skills that allow them to secure a job post-incarceration.

METHOD

Participants

Twenty women re-offenders (those who had prior incarceration and returned to the correctional system) and 11 desistors (those who had not returned to the correctional system for at least 4 years)² were interviewed. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the research department of Singapore Prison Service. The re-offenders were recruited through random sampling of the existing women inmate population; the desistors were recruited through convenience sampling from the only female halfway house in Singapore and snowballing. All 31 participants agreed to participate in the study, yielding a 100% response rate.

Demographic information was obtained from all 31 participants during the interviews and corroborated with institutional records when available. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic variables. Majority of the participants had drug-related offenses (90.3%) and were mothers (87.1%). Almost half (48.4%) of the participants were married, while 35.5% were divorced or separated and 16.1% were single. All desistors have been in the community for at least 56 months (range = 56–348), while all re-offenders have been in the community for 4–170 months before their current incarceration.

Interviewers were selected from correctional rehabilitation specialists and research officers, and each interviewer interviewed one participant at a time. Before the start of the interview, interviewers briefed the participants about the study and obtained signatures for consent to participate

Table 1. Demographic data of participants ($N = 31$).

Participant Demographic	Re-offenders ($N = 20$)	Desistors ($N = 11$)
Average age in years (Range)	37.6 (25–52)	52.7 (36–69)
Average number of months in the community (Range)	53 (4–170)	193 (56–348)
Offence type		
Drug-related	17	11
Property	3	0
Marital status		
Married	9	6
Divorced/separated	7	4
Single	4	1
Mother	18	9

in the study and to be audio-recorded. Audio recordings contained no personal identifiers and were deleted after the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

The interview guide was semi-structured with a list of questions to understand the challenges faced by women offenders in 6 broad domains: (1) mental health; (2) employment; (3) financial; (4) social network; (5) role as a mother; and (6) housing. For re-offenders, the time period of interest is the period that they are in the community prior to current incarceration. The questions posed to the re-offenders are of the following structure, “What were the challenges you faced in <insert domain type e.g., relationship with your family>, if any, since your last release till right before your current incarceration?”. For the desistors, the time period of interest is the period they are in the community since their last incarceration. The questions posed to the desistors are of the following structure, “What were the challenges you faced in <insert domain type e.g., relationship with your family>, if any, since your last release till now?”. As the study was explorative, both re-offenders and desistors were asked if they faced challenges in any other domains of their life that were not covered by the end of the interview. The semi-structured interviewing method was adopted as it allowed for the incorporation of unexpected contents as they emerge, hence enhancing the quality and authenticity of the findings (Silverman, 1993).

The researchers analyzed the transcripts according to standard qualitative techniques (Berg & Lune, 2016), which included an open coding process to assign codes to segments of the transcript that participants verbalized facing challenges or difficulties after their release. Upon the development of the initial codes, we identified themes and returned to the transcripts to further understand the codes.

RESULTS

Findings

The present study found that the participants faced challenges in the 9 broad domains of (1) employment; (2) financial; (3) social network; (4) mental health; (5) role as a mother; (6) housing; (7) role as a caregiver; (8) leisure time; and (9) individual factors. Table 2 shows the summary of the 9 domains and its respective themes of post-incarceration challenges faced by the participants.

Employment

Almost all participants, 28 out of 31 participants (90%), experienced challenges in the domain of employment upon release. Both desistors and re-offenders reported that their lack of expertise in the various job requirements and experience of stigmatization due to prison record affected their securing and maintenance of a job. They also reported dissatisfaction at work due to poor job fit. Moreover, there were other competing demands such as caregiving, childcare and urine

Table 2. Summary of the 9 domains and the respective themes of post-incarceration challenges.**Employment***Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Lack of expertise
2. Experience of stigmatization due to prison record
3. Poor job fit
4. Competing commitments (e.g., childcare, caregiving, urine supervision) and work demands

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Unstable employment

Financial*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Difficulties in paying for housing rental and daily expenses
2. Lack of financial support from others

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Difficulties in paying for child / parent-care expenses
2. Difficulties in obtaining financial aid

Social Network**Family***Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Experience of stigmatization from family members
2. Antisocial influence from family members
3. Lack of emotional support from family members

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Conflicts with family members
2. Abuse from family members

Partner*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Antisocial influence from partners
2. Lack of emotional support from partners
3. Conflict with partners

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Abuse from partners
2. Lack of practical support from partners
3. Loss of relationships

Partner's family*Unique challenges faced by re-offenders*

1. Lack of support from partner's family members
2. Conflicts with partner's family members

Peers*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Experiencing of stigmatization from peers due to prison record
2. Antisocial influence from peers
3. Lack of emotional support from peers
4. Difficulties building prosocial circle
5. Ease of reconnecting with antisocial peers

Mental Health*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Mental health symptoms affecting daily functioning
2. Barriers in treatment seeking

Unique challenges faced by desistors

1. Detrimental effects of psychiatric medication on health

Role as a mother*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Difficulties rebuilding bonds with children
2. Continual separation from children
3. Lack knowledge to care for and discipline children

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Insufficient parenting support
2. Parental guilt
3. Different parenting style from children's temporary caregiver
4. Supervision conditions affecting parental duties
5. Conflicts and deteriorating relationships with children

(continued)

Housing*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Difficulties in securing stable accommodation
2. Experiencing antisocial influences in their house / neighborhood

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Poor housing conditions
2. Abuse in their housing

Role as a caregiver*Unique challenges faced by re-offenders*

1. Overwhelming caregiving duties

Leisure time*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Too much unoccupied time after release
2. Difficulty in having free time

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Facing discrimination when engaging in leisure activities

Individual factors*Common challenges among re-offenders and desistors*

1. Difficulties adapting to life in community
2. Easily perceived stigmatization from others
3. Reluctance in seeking help
4. Encountering triggers and temptations

Unique challenges faced by re-offenders

1. Low self-efficacy
2. Overconfidence

Unique challenges faced by desistors

1. Impulsivity
 2. Poor anger management
-

supervision which affected their employment. Re-offenders reported the additional challenge of unstable employment due to the employer's circumstances such as movement in business operations.

They haven't converted me to a permanent position yet because of my record. Usually what happens, is I get a good job ... then after six-months contract, [it's] finished. Because they don't convert you to become a permanent staff, because you have a record and it's not compliant to their requirements. – Participant Re-offender 13 (R13)

Many people say sometime when you want to pursue your career, you have to sacrifice a bit ... but I just release, I just about to get this quality time, this bonding with my kid and I can't afford to lose this. So that is when I think this job is not suitable. It takes a lot of my time and it really [is a lot of] pressure, it's too stressful. – Participant Desistor 10 (D10)

Financial

Nineteen out of 31 participants (61%) experienced financial problems upon release. Both desistors and re-offenders faced difficulties in paying for housing rental and daily expenses, such as food and transport. They also lacked financial support from others, including their family and friends. In addition, re-offenders reported challenges in affording child- or parent-care expenses and difficulties in obtaining financial aid from public agencies.

My father [had] Hepatitis C, last stage already. The only medication that can help him... over thousand [dollars] eh! ... I cannot afford already ... So I absconded, I went into trafficking. – Participant R14

My children can't even get bursary... I have to pay full-fledged school fees... Just because, why, your mom earns more than \$1500 a month. If I don't earn more than \$1500 a month, how I survive with the family? How I upkeep my family. If I earn more than \$1500 a month, I don't [get] subsidized! At all! I have to save for 3 months just to buy a laptop for my children you know ... – Participant R19

Social Network

Family

Many participants – 23 out of 31 (74%) – experienced challenges in their family upon release. Both desistors and re-offenders reported negative aspects of familial relationships which included stigmatization, antisocial influence and lack of emotional support from family members. In addition, re-offenders reported presence of abuse and conflicts.

When I was at work, I thought of earning extra cash, so my working hours were quite long – 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. ... it's two shifts. I was a cleaner. My mom started to have those thinking, 'Where you go? How come you come back so late? You better come back.' I'm in the middle of working! So I cannot cope with work so I chose to sell drugs. – Participant R18

So he's [stepfather] not happy... Then he slapped me many times... I told my mom what actually happened to me at home with my stepfather, she didn't even believe me. She side more to the husband, just because of that thing, she chased me out of the house. From there, I just keep to myself. – Participant R20

Partner

Twenty-one out of 31 participants (68%) experienced challenges with their partner upon release. Both desistors and re-offenders reported negative aspects of intimate relationships which included antisocial influence, lack of emotional support from and conflict with partners. In addition, re-offenders faced abuse (e.g., physical, financial, and emotional abuse) from their partners and some reported the lack of support from other family members in reporting the abuse. A portion of re-offenders also reported lack of practical support from their partners or grief from the loss of intimate relationships.

During tagging [community program], I was already stressed up but I didn't talk to anybody at all... And when I reach home I've to talk to him (boyfriend), 'How are you feeling?' He will tell me straight, 'Can you just keep quiet and watch TV or not?' – Participant R14

I was pregnant... he (partner) beat me ... [because he said] I cannot see [another] guy... I was like... What! How I want to [not] see people? Then I have to look down, walk only... So just... from there he beat me ah. – Participant R1

Partner's Family

Only a few participants, 3 out of 31 re-offenders (10%), experienced conflicts with their partner's family, while none of the desistors reported challenges in this area. The challenges reported are regarding lack of support from and conflicts with their partners' family members.

My mother-in-law don't really like me, because he's (husband) younger than me. She also didn't even attend the marriage. She said, 'Leave my son.' She even offered me a check, 'but you have to leave my son, leave Singapore.' Which is crazy. So we had an argument. And we separated. Which was 2016. I still continued taking drugs. – Participant R5

Peers

A majority of participants, 25 out of 31 (81%), experienced challenges in the sub-domain of peers. Both desistors and re-offenders reported negative aspects of peer relationships which included stigmatization, antisocial influence and lack of emotional support from peers. These antisocial influence took place through face-to-face interaction, and interestingly, via social media as well. They also found it difficult to build a prosocial circle and this was further exacerbated by the ease of reconnecting with their antisocial peers. This ease of reconnection was facilitated by

the small geographical location of Singapore, ease of connecting via telecommunication and social media, and the networking nature of jobs such as sales.

That friend asked me to go over and [there was] full of drugs on the table ... Then they sent me those like smoke smoke videos ... Then they said, 'Just play (use drugs) la,' like devil calling, then I just play (used drugs) ... – Participant R6

Sometimes a drug addict don't want to borrow money, but just want to make more friends who don't take drugs. But some people cannot see that. – Participant D6

Mental Health

Some participants, 10 out of 31 (32%), mentioned challenges in the domain of mental health. The most common mental health symptoms mentioned were related to depression or anxiety. Both desistors and re-offenders reported that their mental health symptoms affected daily functioning (e.g., basic living and work) and that they faced barriers while seeking treatment. Some of these barriers include fear of stigmatization from employers, high cost of treatment, difficulty opening up to others and self-treatment using illegal drugs. In addition, some desistors mentioned the psychiatric medication had detrimental effects on their health.

I kept crying ... It was up to the point where I wanted to commit suicide by jumping down. I don't dare to go out alone in the past, I needed my boyfriend with me. If there are too many people, I will not be able to breathe ... I only know that when I see strangers or when I hear strangers' voice, I will be scared ... – Participant D2

But if you're talking about professional help like depression and stress, I just sort of let it pass ... And then I think, 'All these have to go and see doctor, have to spend money, no need.' – Participant R13

Role as a Mother

A slight majority of participants, 18 out of 31 (58%), mentioned challenges in the domain of role as a mother. This domain takes into consideration children of all ages. Both desistors and re-offenders had difficulties re-building bonds with their children after their release. Some continued to be separated from their children due to the caregivers of the children not finding them suitable or capable to care for their children. A number of mothers also lacked the knowledge to care for and discipline their children.

In addition, re-offenders reported insufficient parenting support from their partners or family members. They also had tremendous guilt towards their children for neglecting them or affecting them due to their drug use. Upon release, some participants faced difficulties in re-assuming their role as a mother due to differing parenting style from the children's caregiver when they were incarcerated. Their ability to perform their maternal roles was further compromised by their supervision conditions. Furthermore, some reported having conflicts and deteriorating relationships with their children.

When I was released, my son rejected me ... When I called my son, he rejected me, he did not listen ... He was scared ... He was afraid that I would go back to that path again [take drugs]. So he did not dare to be too close to me ... yes, he was afraid of being hurt and I lie to him again. – Participant D6

I got problem with my children custody, I cannot see my children ... the first three. Stress ... Sometimes I feel like, although there's a lot of people around me ah, but I feel lonely ah. Because I miss my children very much. Then I never get to see my children. – Participant R4

Housing

Housing was a concern for 19 out of 31 participants (61%). Both desistors and re-offenders found it difficult to secure stable accommodation and also experienced antisocial influences in their house or neighborhood. The difficulties in securing stable accommodation were at times compounded by difficulties in applying for a flat as they were unable to meet the Housing Development Board's regulations. In addition, re-offenders reported poor housing conditions such as overcrowding or poor hygiene, as well as abuse in their housing.

I didn't sign the 2-years [rental] agreement to continue because mainly too many drug friends know where I'm staying ... because the place was so infested with drugs like fifth floor, second floor, third floor ... It's like very easy to access drugs ... So if I've no time to get my drugs, just go down to get from them la. – Participant R5

He (partner) started drugs again ... I managed to get my daughter, managed to run away from him, stay in my mother's house. He knows that I will come back, so he says, 'I change,' then when I go home he started [using drugs] again. This time he's much wiser la, he took my daughter and said, 'You want to go, go out la, don't take your daughter ah.' When I tried to take my child, he will slap me. – Participant R18

Role as a Caregiver

A couple of re-offenders, 2 out of 20 re-offenders (10%), reported being overwhelmed by their role as a caregiver, while none of the desistors reported challenges in this area. For this domain, caregiving is defined as care provided to vulnerable adults such as family members who were elderly or had some form of disability. This does not include care provided for children or partners.

I'm taking care of my family, my parents, his parents. So I basically take care of two different households. Two power supply bills, cooking food on two tables. – Participant R13

Cause last time, after come back from work, I still have to bathe my brother. Now he 35 years old but we still have to bathe him ... My brother cannot talk. Cause I come back from work, to my mom's house ... I bathe for him, give makan [food]. – Participant R17

Leisure Time

Slightly more than a third of participants, 12 out of 31 (39%), experienced challenges in the domain of leisure time. Both desistors and re-offenders reported two ends of an extreme – either having too much unoccupied time after their release, or difficulty in having free time for recreational pursuits. In addition, some desistors faced discrimination while seeking volunteering opportunities.

During those early days, when I have to manage my son ah, and have, I have to bring him to the bible study group and he's so clingy and he will cry and cry ... When I leave him there, I have to harden my heart and say, 'No, I must leave him there, I have to go for my bible study.' – Participant D3

Because as the years goes by, my children are getting bigger ... my responsibility becomes smaller so I have a lot of me time. So when you have a lot of me time, you have a lot of unhealthy habits, gambling habits. So when you lose, you top up. When you snowball, you have no choice but to relapse back into theft ... Not only to pay off my debts honestly speaking. Also to service my gambling habits. – Participant R19

Individual Factors

A majority of participants, 19 out of 31 (61%), reported challenges in the domain of individual factors. Both desistors and re-offenders faced difficulties adapting to life in community upon

release and reported reluctance to seek help even when they needed to, due to their tendency to keep to self or distrust in others. They also easily perceived stigmatization from others due to feelings of inferiority or fear of being judged by others. This affected their willingness to participate in multiple areas of life, such as making friends or performing at work. Furthermore, they also faced addiction-related issues such as encountering triggers and temptations for their unhealthy behaviors (e.g., drug use or compulsive gambling).

In addition, some re-offenders reported general low self-efficacy which led them to inaction towards positive changes such as checking into treatment programs. On the other hand, some re-offenders reported over-confidence in their ability to handle risky situations such as influencing their drug-using partners to stop drugs. Additionally, desistors reported trouble in controlling their impulsivity and anger.

Keeping a person away for a long, long time will not help the person in reintegrating back into the society. Because they (prisoners) are so used to prisons, prisons give instructions, they just cannot live their own life. When they are out, they have total freedom, they just cannot handle the freedom! Because in prison, 7 o'clock you need to get up ... 12 o'clock you take your lunch, but outside I have to decide everything on my own. It's too overwhelming. – Participant D4

In my heart I always will feel, how to say, inferior ... I don't want to let other people know that my background is like that ... I need to be very normal ... But I still have the past pattern (vulgar words and lying behaviors) I had. Was very afraid that pattern will come out. [I was worried that] when it comes out, they (other people) will think like, 'Don't know what kind of woman this is.' – Participant D5

DISCUSSION

Our study found that a central theme throughout the women's narratives revolved around facing multiple competing demands while having limited human and social capital. Upon release, women offenders usually return to dysfunctional or antisocial networks. As they grapple with staying safe from these negative influences, they are also overwhelmed with financial and housing problems. Despite so, having quality employment options is a struggle due to stigmatization and lack of expertise due to incarceration. These factors make it hard for them to improve their financial situation.

On top of employment responsibilities, women offenders are expected to resume the other roles that they play, such as a mother, wife and daughter. However, some face persisting mental health issues and had limited emotional support to face all the challenges due to unsupportive loved ones or lack of prosocial peers. Interestingly, local women offenders also found challenges in fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities towards their elderly or ill family members. With most of their time taken up by the key roles they play, they were often left with little time and energy to engage in personal leisure pursuits. Local women offenders also face challenges within themselves, such as feelings of inferiority and hence could be reluctant to seek help.

While the nature of issues faced by desistors and re-offenders are similar, re-offenders tend to report more severe and complex challenges within each domain, especially in the domains of social network and role as a mother. In particular, they experienced more instances of abuse and conflicts with their loved ones. In terms of their role as a mother, they not only had insufficient parenting support from their family members and partners, but also experienced conflictual and deteriorating relationships with their children. Collectively, this is reflective of the more entrenched situations that re-offenders are in, increasing the difficulty of their reintegration and sustaining their resolve not to relapse into their old ways. Another possibility is that re-offenders have weaker coping skills – both practically and emotionally – such that they would perceive their situations as more challenging than desistors would have.

These findings highlight that reintegration is a gendered and context-dependent process shaped by women's experiences and their past. The post-incarceration challenges are not distinct and separated, but instead, "form a complex web of concerns and stressors that often compete with and exacerbate one another", as noted by Richie (2001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with previous literature, our findings suggest that reintegration services for women should be of a differentiated approach from those designed for men. Prison programs need to address the unique challenges that women offenders face in the community and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to overcome them. Community reintegration services for women should take into account the environmental challenges that the women are returning to, the women's lack of human and social capital, the multiple roles that the women play and the systemic and societal barriers that the women face. Specific factors such as mental health issues or experiences of abuse that are more prevalent in the women's context should be taken into account as well. This is especially so for re-offenders, who require more social and emotional support in their eventual reintegration journey due to the more complex challenges that they face.

In Singapore, we try to consider these gender-specific needs as we craft our interventions, as per the section earlier on the Singapore Prison Service. These interventions help to increase the self-efficacy of women, build up and maintain their social capital. While these efforts have been well-received by our offenders, this study has provided greater specificity on their needs and directed us towards the areas that subsequent interventions can be focused on. For instance, strengthening training opportunities or introducing the women to social support groups can help to enhance skills and access to community resources upon their release. In addition to building up their capabilities, we can also try to be more sensitive towards their constraints, such as being more flexible in our approach towards them and taking into account their urgent parental or familial responsibilities, or linking them up with vocations that allow them to have flexibility in work timings (for ease of taking care of their children). We will continue to customize our existing interventions to our women offenders so that they can be more effective in reintegrating them in society and reducing recidivism.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has several limitations. Firstly, desistors in this study were recruited based on convenience sampling and may differ from the general population of women desistors released from Singapore Prison Service. Secondly, the number of desistors interviewed were almost half that of the re-offenders, due to difficulty in recruiting desistors. This might have contributed to the more complex nature of challenges reported by the re-offenders. Thirdly, this study was designed to elicit the women's post-incarceration experiences and did not attempt to ascertain the authenticity of the women's self-reports nor deduce any causal link to their reoffending. The women interviewed were also already involved in the criminal justice system, hence the challenges discussed here might not relate to the influences on initial crime.

Additionally, as all of our participants are adult women above the age of 25 at the point of sampling, the challenges reported here might not be representative of the experiences of younger offenders. Future studies should therefore explore the post-incarceration challenges faced by young women offenders under 25 years old to gain a more holistic picture of the challenges women in general face. Lastly, future studies can also explore the protective factors that help the women offenders cope with the complex challenges they faced upon release.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the literature on the importance of gender-responsive programming and policies to account for gender differences in the correctional setting. By focusing on challenges specific to women offenders, this study has advanced our understanding of the complex and intertwined challenges women face post-incarceration, especially for re-offenders, specific to the Singapore context. We hope that this study will also be useful for our counterparts in other jurisdictions as they learn about the needs of their offenders and tailor their interventions accordingly.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

1. Recidivism rate is defined as the percentage of local inmates detained, convicted and imprisoned again for a new offence within two years from their release.
2. The common term “offenders” used in this paper refers to both women detained in DRCs and convicted inmates in Prison.

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