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Women prisoners in the Colombian Caribbean and social-educative action: Multicultural faces in the feminization of poverty, conflict and social exclusion

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the main characteristics of women prisoners in the “El Buen Pastor-”, in Barranquilla (Colombia). The project was thought as an integrated program based on a differential gender framework, which would promote a more suitable reinsertion process and the development of new initiatives for equal penitentiary treatment and policies in Colombia. The instrument was the survey ENMURE, which focuses on women prisoners. The results indicated high levels of poverty among women in family conflict situations, with no formal education, and having experienced gender violence and consumption of drugs, previous to be in prison.

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Keyword

1. Introduction: Female prisoners and gender discrimination: conflict, poverty and social exclusion.

On a global scale women in penitentiary environment suffer from multiple gender discrimination for being women and moreover for being delinquents (Del Pozo and Añaños, 2013; Yagüe, 2010). Women prisoners are a minority penitentiary population reason why they do not benefit from the same number of infrastructures and programs than male population, they suffer higher consequences from social, professional and familiar uprooting. At the same time

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situations health rights and specific women needs violation are observed, such as lack or in some case complete absence of positive social environment adequate for minor's development like cultivating bonds between extended families and external children. The differential gender penitentiary treatment, in accordance with the international norms of the Human Rights and the rights against women discrimination and violence, as penitentiary and prison education rights (ONU, 1975, 2006; Del Pozo, in press), exposed the need of a comprehensive care toward this minority prison population from a differential gender based approach that takes into account specific circumstances of physic and mental health, drug addiction care, formal and social education, social and professional insertion, familiar uprooting support among other in order to create policies, regulations, programs and more egalitarian and social rehabilitation actions for this vulnerable population as it has been expressed through the needs and the realities observed by national and international organisms in Colombian researches (UNIFEM, 2006; Townhead, 2006; Antony, 2007; Parlamento Europeo, 2008; Del Pozo, 2013).

In this regard, it has been affirmed that international differences between imprisonment rates and its evolution is not explained by criminality's rates differences whereas by different social and penal policies and the degree of inequality they show. Ultimately "Women do not commit crimes but they endure more prison sentence and longer ones" (Cervelló, 2006:134), especially because in most of the cases are related to public health offenses. At the same time, female inmates tend to have a low danger profile and experience women feminization on several educative levels and its access, and economic and professional promotion (Añaños, 2013; Del Pozo and Gil, 2014). In Colombia like in other countries there are few preventive social resources to attend families in high vulnerability situation or in social risk position (Jiménez Ramírez, 2008; Jiménez, Luengo and Taberner, 2009), whereas in other countries remissions to social services are higher. On the other hand alternatives to liberty's traditional privation are inexistent in the Colombian penitentiary system or in any case common to the male's one, whereas in other legislations there are numerous possibilities such as house arrest, community work, semi-detention, specific rehabilitation taking into account a low violence rate in crimes committed by women, their good penitentiary behavior and a minor society concern in general, which make them more suitable to these alternative than men (Heidensohn, 2009).

On the other hand the international overview of mothers and children in jail is still a complex subject in many countries due to prison's conditions that are clearly against Human Rights most of the time, especially when children have to reside with mother until very late, increasing the risks in the minor's evolutionary development (Del Pozo and Mavrou, 2010). However most of the countries legally allow minors to stay with their mother in prison. By changing residence legal age, three general groups of age were established (18 months; 3 years; 6 to 7 years) (Jiménez, 2008). Women prisoners represent a low danger profile on a global scale; particularly in Colombia and in the same way they can stay with their children in prison until their third year (UNIFEM, 2006).

In Colombia, overcrowding situations, health issues, lack of infrastructure and penitentiary treatment define, according to the Human Rights and childhood protection, the need to develop comprehensive and specialized policies in order to respond to the numerous issues that families, mother and children, have before, during and after the imprisonment, after the social reinsertion and that must be undertaken during the penitentiary treatment for the women, mothers and children staying in the prison centers (Del Pozo and Martinez, 2015). These situations are even more exacerbated in the Caribbean Colombian women's case taking into account aggravating factors such as differential gender motives, a wide ethnic diversity with primary population groups: native population, the Raizal population from the archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina; the black and afro-Colombian community (which includes the Palenqueros' population of San Basilio in Mahates' municipality, state of Bolivar) and the Gypsy population (Observatory of the Colombian Caribbean, 2014).

2. Methodology

This research is part of the "Socio educative project research – differential gender based action of women prisoners and their families in Colombia: treatment model and action for public policy and equal care for reinsertion" financed by the "Universidad del Norte". The purpose of the research is to study the main characteristics of the Buen Pastor Rehabilitation Center women prisoners and their children, investigating from a comprehensive program with a differential gender based approach in order to improve reinsertion and to contribute with equal care proposals in Colombian penitentiary Public Policy. The Women Rehabilitation Center El Buen Pastor is an institute or penitentiary

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