

Sanders, Kaelyn, Kayla Hoskins, and Merry Morash. (2023). A First Step in Understanding Influences on System-Involved Women's Changes in Financial Need. *Feminist Criminology*. 18(3), 225-249.

Reasons for this Research:

Women are becoming increasingly involved in the criminal legal system, and research demonstrates that system-involved women face a unique set of challenges that impact their criminal behavior and desistance. Poverty and economic marginalization are common influences on women's illegal activity. Research has not identified the influences on changes in economic marginalization for women on probation and parole. This research takes a first step in filling that gap. This study uses qualitative data to identify women's characteristics and circumstances associated with increases and decreases the financial needs financial of women on probation and parole for felony offenses.

The Study

- The Sample
 - The sample included 304 women on probation or parole in Michigan.
 - Most women (n = 160) identified as Non-Hispanic White, and 106 identified as Non-Hispanic Black.
 - The average age was 34.4 years old. The women had an average of 6.33 prior arrests, and those that spent time in prison served 43.7 months on average.
 - For the purposes of this study, we compared subgroups based on race (i.e., Black or other), age (i.e., under 40 or 40+), and increased or decreased financial need.
 - 43 women had a large increase in financial need, 43 had a large decrease.
- The Methods
 - The qualitative data came from three interviews that were conducted over the course of three months during the women's first year of supervision.
 - Women answered open-ended questions about barriers and facilitators for change in needs relevant to financial status (e.g., employment). They also answered questions about social safety-net benefits they received or needed and what they have done to make their lives better since starting supervision or the prior interview.
 - Data were analyzed in NVivo using a thematic analytic approach to inductively and deductively identify themes relating to possible reasons the women's financial need increased or decreased over time.
 - An inter-rater reliability score (*k*) of .95 was achieved, indicating near perfect agreement between the coders.
 - Subgroup statements were compared for themes showing an initial 10% or higher difference for women with substantial decreases and increases in financial need

Results

- General
 - Four broad categories were identified as possible explanations for change in financial need: individual advantages and disadvantages (e.g., mental health),

employment access, safety-net benefit access, and probation/parole supervision help or hinderance.

- Twice as many women with increasing financial need described poor or worsening physical health that impacted their ability to engage in typical daily activities.
- Women with increasing financial need also more often described having poor or worsening mental health and could not access treatment or did not follow through with treatment.
- More women with decreasing need mentioned receiving help or support to secure a job or education from a variety of sources that provided more personal or one-on-one help, which was not the case for women with increasing financial need.
- Women with decreasing need also mentioned getting “better” jobs more often than women with increasing need.
- A large portion of women in both groups were unsure of their eligibility for safety-net benefits, but slightly more women with increasing need described being unsure. Women with increasing need more often mentioned that they lost medical insurance or were denied disability insurance as well.
- For both groups, help from supervising agents was rarely mentioned.
- Race
 - For race, we compared 4 groups: 29 women who were not Black and who had decreasing need, 14 Black women with decreasing need, 32 women who were not Black with increasing need, and 11 Black women with increasing need.
 - Black women with increasing financial need more often described not being able to secure a new or better job. They also more often described experiencing a reduction in job opportunities due to their felony record.
 - Black women with increasing need also more often described not receiving effect treatment for their physical health problems.
- Age
 - For age, we compared 4 groups: 19 women under 40 with decreasing need, 14 women over 40 with decreasing need, 29 women under 40 with increasing need, and 14 over 40 with increasing need.
 - Women under 40 in both financial needs groups more often described having poor or worsening mental health but were unable to get much, if any assistance to mitigate their mental health issues. Women over 40 rarely mentioned mental health issues, but they did receive help when mental health issues occurred.
 - Women over 40 more often mentioned physical health issues and a lack of income boosting support. Women over 40 also less often mentioned obtaining a new or better job and were more often unaware of their eligibility for safety-net benefits.

Summary of Findings

- The change in system-involved women’s financial need is related to individual advantages and disadvantages, employment access, benefit access, and supervision help or hinderance.
- Women with decreasing need were able to access social support through personal and public resources that improved their employment access.

- Black women less often experienced improvements in employment and more often noted that their convictions adversely impacted their employment search.
- Women with increasing financial need more often describe worsening physical and mental health and issues accessing safety-net benefits.
- Older women more commonly mentioned receiving support for mental health care but not for their worsening physical health or issues with employment and safety- net benefits.

Implications for Practice

Probation and parole agents, judges, and others seeking to reduce recidivism by assisting women on probation and parole should take into account the special needs related to race and age. For Black women, employment requirements may especially difficult to meet because of disproportionate disadvantages of a record of felony convictions.