



Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy

Torunn Højdahl  
torunn@krus.no<sup>1</sup>

## **Women in prison Methods and challenges in preparing for release**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this lecture is to draw attention to methods and challenges related to “Women in prison” and how to prepare for release. I will also talk about how we have been working with training and implementation of the women programme “WINNING” in Russia. WINNING is one of many methods / approaches.

When I use the term “women” in this lecture, it is to be understood as women who are either in prison, drug-abusers or victims of violence.

### **Background. Women in prison in Norway**

The TWIN PRISON PROJECT includes a range of activities. I have been working with education and training of prison staff related to the topic “Women in prison”.

- 1) Close to 5 % of the inmate population in Norway are women. Relatively few serve long-time sentences. The majority are convicted or charged with **drug-related crimes** (46%).
- 2) **Theft and other profit of crimes** represent the second largest group, approximately 23%. The third largest group imprisoned mainly for crimes of violence, approximately 18%. Among the community sentenced, 12% are women. (Source: Department-register of the prison service august 2004 and Højdahl & Kristoffersen 2004).

### **Life conditions**

An inquiry on the **life-conditions** of the inmates in Norwegian prisons showed that many of the women had different problems **growing up**.

- 1) 40% of the women in the inquiry had not grown up with both their parents.
- 2) Almost as many had experienced grave conflicts in their childhood home, and had parents or guardians with **drug-problems**.
- 3) Close to one third of the women had experienced **battering** and been in touch with the **child-care service**.

---

<sup>1</sup> Torunn Højdahl. Senior adviser / assistant director. Research and Development Department Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy. P.O. 6138 Etterstad.N - 0602 Oslo. Norway.  
[torunn@krus.no](mailto:torunn@krus.no) Phone: +4723067158 +47 92035259. Fax: + 47 23 06 71 02

- 4) Half of the women used **drugs** almost daily, and the majority of these had also injected drugs before imprisonment. Cannabis, amphetamine, Rohypnol, heroin, Temgesic and benzodiazepines, were among the most used drugs. The average debutant-age as drug-abusers among the women was **fourteen**. Among the selected persons for the inquiry, 63% of the **women had children**. Equally many stated that they had some form of **chronic disease**.

(Friestad & Hansen 2004).

### **The Swedish situation**

The Swedish prison population is 4900 inmates, and 6% are women. About 70 percent of the woman in prison are drug abusers or have a mixed abused. Compared to men, woman have a more complicated psychiatric attached to their drug abuse. The women have problems with housing, economy, work and relationships. Their Physical and emotional health is often worse than for the rest of the population. The women need somebody to talk with about their worries. They also have a great need to talk about things which have happened in their relations with men. Some 40 % have small children and they are worried about their situation. Many of them feel guilt and shame and feel that they have failed as mothers. Women have other surviving strategies than men. They may avoid talking about how they feel; they often don't trust others and don't take the time to reflect upon their life situation. The women in the Hinseberg prison in Sweden feel mistrust towards other inmates, the staff and other people (Lindberg 2005).

WINNING is translated into Swedish, and we have had an educational-seminar in Sweden in September 2006.

### **The Russian situation**

The total number of inmates in Russia are 867 864.

6.7 % are woman.

2.5 % are under the age of 18.

In 2006 there were 1045 correctional institutions in Russia (765 correctional colonies, 211 institutions for custody SIZO's, 7 prisons and 62 colonies for youth 14-18 years.

( 1.9.2006 National prison administration.)

In a paper written by General Director Shamshuno it is stated that during the last six years the number of inmates in Russian prisons have been reduced with 230.000. At the same time the budget for prisons has increased twenty-times. The number of people with tuberculosis has decreased from 100.000 to 48.000 during the last five years because of better medical treatment. 24 colonies have got a new profile. And the possibilities to be imprisoned in your own region are better because of three new institutions (paper Shamshuno 2006).

In a booklet written by the organisation "Help prisoners" female inmates are characterised with more frequent loss of their beneficial social links than men. The prisoners with children can have their children with them up to the age of three. Ten correctional institutions have houses where the children can stay inside the prison.

I have visited a female colony and the House of Child at the CC no 2 in **The Republic of Mordovia**. This house gets support from the "Penal Reform International". They also arrange a joint accommodation of mothers and children. The staff encourages the mothers to express their feelings, and wants to increase their responsibility. Mari Kannabikh has done a great job with these projects.

A 14 year old girl I met in a pre-trial detention in Archangels was next week going to a prison for young females in Ryazan. The colony is hundred of miles away from her mother, sisters and grandmothers. She had no hope of getting permissions to leave or that her mother could visit her during the long-time sentence.

### **Russian prison staff**

My experience is that the Russian prison staff has their priorities in new methods for rehabilitation. They are concerned about the inmate's rehabilitation. They are interested in cooperation with foreign research institutions on research in the conditions for female inmates. And they want to learn about new methods. They lack literature about new methods and critical research. They are interested in taking part at seminars the Norwegian Correctional service has arranged both in Norway and in Russia.

### **Challenges**

Both the Norwegian and the Russian prison system face challenges in developing a social preventive aid, and in identifying measures to reduce relapse to crime and reduce substance abuse. We have unsolved tasks in securing the follow-up of inmates before and after release. We need better plans for release and the future for the women in prison. Women without a good social network and family need a place to stay after the release. Many women are poor and have no home to return to. And they have lots of fear. One woman I met said that her hope for the future was to be relieved from her fears. I have met women that have stayed 5-10 years in prison. Many of them have broken relationships with friends and families. Some are threatened to commit crime by men they don't want to have contact with any longer.

We can sum up the experiences as follows: Women in prison often have a problematic relationship to alcohol and drugs. They have a **limited network and few close confidants**. Many of the women have experienced violence and abuse. Having a close person and a **confidant** in one's surroundings is of great importance when it comes to mastering difficulties in life, and especially for women trying to get out of crime and violent relationships. Among the women in prison, we also find women who themselves have **exercised violence** and are **sentenced for homicide**.

Some women have male partners with violent behaviour. They struggle with anxiety, depression and other forms of **psychosocial problems**. It is common with several relational break-ups and loss or reduction of being together with their children. Behind the façade, we often find lack of knowledge and reduced skills of mastering different aspects of life. They have limited options of choice. Many of the women, both in Russia and Norway, **have the need of housing, economy, work, education and security to be able to live a full life**. They must be able to live **without fear** and anxiety of being threatened, battered ore abused.

For these women, WINNING constitutes a possibility to find alternatives in life, to start a process of change and to talk about their own situation. A cognitive program such as WINNING cannot be fully effective unless other aspects in the lives of the women are taken care of. Now, some words about the programme

## **WINNING – programme for Women**

The earlier mention findings / projects and experiences from visits in Russia were very useful when clinical Psychologist Marna Storksen and I elaborated the adaptation of WINNING to Russian conditions in 2004.

**The purposes of WINNING** are that the women can "win" over their alcohol- or drug-abuse, see alternatives in their lives and "win" over crime. Furthermore, we wish the women to have a better relationship with their children, learn about child rising, and be able to draw a line against violent partners or to get out of difficult and violent relationship with a man. For these reasons, we have chosen to call the group sessions WINNING.

We have put together a list of topics for group sessions that have the above-mentioned problems as a starting point. The Russian edition is not as comprising as the Norwegian. The Norwegian handbook for group leaders also contains examples from Norwegian research, literature and guideline documents.

**The WINNING handbook** is written for facilitators leading Focused Support Groups for women. The group's aim of involving the participants in reflective discussion of themes is dealt with in this guide.

The themes presented in the handbook are:

1. Introduction
2. Identity and self-esteem
3. Openness and communication
4. Change and choice
5. Substance abuse and dependency
6. Children
7. Grief and loss
8. Boundaries in relationships
9. Anger
10. Violence
11. Network and relationships
12. Finishing gathering.

We are now working with some new themes: "Sexuality" and Economy" and how to have interviews in one-to-one- situations. Common for all the lessons, is that we start from concrete events and situations, and ask the participants to tell their stories. **The manual is addressed to** group-leaders running the group sessions. We want to strengthen the women's ability to make choices and to find alternatives in life that give a better quality of life – including reduction of drug-abuse, violence and crime. **The Target-group of WINNING**

The manual may be employed in the correctional service, in probation, in centres for battered women and institutions for substance abuse. WINNING may suit women serving in colonies/prisons, who are HIV-infected, abuse alcohol, medications or drugs have a criminal life-style or have been battered.

Let me give you an **example**. In Russia we have had very good experiences with the topic “**Boundaries in Relationships**”. I will give an example from this session:

The purpose of the session is helping to understand what boundaries are, how people use them to protect themselves in the world, and to gain insight in the boundaries they have, and what boundaries they wish to maintain. Boundaries are lines we draw; mapping out what is OK and not OK for us. Some women may have too strict boundaries. Others again, may lack boundaries towards other people, or do not know which boundaries to draw.

I will now tell you how we have conducted the training in WINNING in Russia, and who took part.

### **Partners of co-operation**

We have had a very good co-operation between **the Pomor State University in the Archangels** region and the **University College of Bodo** (in the north of Norway) and with the **Mozhaisk prison** in Russia. Once I visited the Mozhaisk prison, we were given the opportunity to ask the women what topics they found of current interest to discuss in groups. The women were concerned about how they could improve their stay in prison. In addition, drug-problems engaged several of the participants.

### **Partakers in training in Russia**

The Ministry of Justice in Norway, KRUS, The Pomor State University and the University College of Bodo arranged a three-day education-seminar in November of 2004 in Russia. The partakers had diverse target-groups: convicted persons, their relatives, released persons, women subject to violence, and women in a situation of crises. The goal was to give judicial and psychological help to people in a situation of crises, and some of the partakers worked with drug-abusers, HIV-infected persons and persons subject to addictions. Others worked with collaborators and management of the Penalty Execution and with convicts. Among the partakers were educated psychologists, specialists with secondary and higher education, and the head of the physicist education, as well as social workers, prison- and probation officers. **Three staff-members from the Mozhaisk colony took part**. We had many useful experiences, and a few surprises.

### **Experiences from the training in WINNING**

We were excited about the approval of WINNING in Russia. The staff had in general been short of **new textbooks**, and was **very content** with gaining insight into **new knowledge**, such as cognitive theory and critical research. They were also dazzled by the fact that we could talk so openly about problems when carrying out programs in Norway.

### **Research – before and after WINNING**

In order to study the effects of the group, **self-report questionnaires** have been developed for completion by the participants before and after attending the groups. These questionnaires measure progress in several targeted areas. In 2006 and 2007 we want to use the same questions in Russia, Sweden and Norway to make a comparative analyse. So far, we see that participants in the group enhance certain identified areas, such as self-esteem, ability to express anger assertively, and awareness of why they committed the offence.

## **Theoretical basis of WINNING**

In WINNING we have faith in the philosophy that **changes come from within. The women are themselves the experts on how to live their lives.** It was therefore a strange removal from an expert-position to a facilitator-position towards the group, in order to enlighten the participants' own choices and possibilities in life. Let alone these examples of differences, the wish and goal to help the women in seeing possibilities and connections in their lives commonly shared, and also to make beneficiary choices after release instead of crime.

The foundation for change, independently of methods and techniques, is the experience of being met with an accepting and understanding attitude. Group-leaders are to show that they listen to and are engaged in what the participants are saying them. The group-leaders shall strive to understand the feelings, thoughts and perspectives of the participants, without criticizing or passing judgement. It is possible to be supportive without necessarily agreeing with what the participants say or have done. **A good relationship** in terms of therapist respect, empathic understanding and attentive listening, is important (Duncan&Miller&Sparks 2004). We cannot force anyone to change, but through group sessions we may be able the women to find out what is possible to change based on their present life situation.

### **Solution-focused approach**

Despite the vast range of problems amongst the participants (everything from HIV-infection, drug-problems, problems of violence or a homicide-sentence), we wish to work with a **focus on solution.** We try to find possibilities and alternatives in the women's own lives.

We talk about experiences from periods of life that represent "exceptions" to the problems they normally experience. We have brought ideas from Insoo Kim Berg & Steve de Shazer (2004, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994) pioneers of the **solution-focused approach.** One of the foremost tasks is to enable the client to live a more constructive and satisfying life. We believe that despite difficulties in life, all humans have some strong sides they can mobilize to improve their quality of life and to see new possibilities. We cannot give up hope, but must search with a magnifying glass after sparks of light in the dark. To discover one's strong sides requires that helper and client together go through the process of discovery. With this as a starting point, it is important to explore the personal resources and the strong sides the women can utilize in mastering their problems (Saleebey in De Jong & Berg 2005:21).

### **Humanistic psychology**

The content of WINNING reflects the basic view of **humanistic psychology,** implying an encouraging attitude towards people's ability to change. People can change their lives, if and when they are ready for it. Individual resources and possibilities are focused upon in the group sessions. Methodologically, the guide is based upon the theoretical principles of Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick 2002) and theories of motivational change initially developed by DiClemente, Norcross & Prochaska and (1992). These theories have worked out a model that describes how motivational change is possible, and how the process of change should be supported by a facilitator. The role of the facilitator is to elicit and support natural processes of change and explore ambivalence.

## **Experiences with training**

**We utilized role-play and exercises in smaller groups, and plenary model learning.** This is a model of educating which the Russian staff was not accustomed to. The feedback showed that experienced-based learning with plenty of exercises gave great results. It is effective because the staff-member can immediately practice what she/he has learned. The staff told us that earlier they have worked mostly alone. We are therefore very content with the establishing of networks among them.

Some time ago, I took part and lead **WINNING-groups in Mozhaisk female prison in Russia**, where the topic was "Raising children" and "Grief and loss", as well as a finishing gathering. I was very impressed by the women who had written poems about their experiences of grief. It was quite an emotional group with a large degree of openness. The women gave emotional descriptions of their lives and of how they could improve after release, for both their children and themselves. The Russian women spoke very openly about how they had learned to analyze their problems, and gained insight in their patterns of thought and action. If they manage to put this into practice after release, this is very promising.

## **Effects**

The Russian staff said that they want to continue to work with WINNING to prevent drug abuse and crime. Centres for battered women have benefited from the topic "boundaries, violence, network and relations". Feed-back from the women imply that they have gained a better understanding of network and relationships. It is very important that inmates saying they are experienced being treated with more respect and dignity. We see that an important effect is that the treatment of the inmates is humanized. In addition, we have had several discussions on the matter of release. We wish to put more effort into cooperation on this issue.

## **Seminar in Archangels October 2006**

Last year we had a seminar in Archangels with delegates from Norway and Russia. An assistant Director from the Mozhaisk told us that 8 of 10 of the inmates had problems with substance abuse. 80 % of the 1007 inmates was imprisoned because of serious crime and had 5-10 years with sentences. The staff is very concerned about rehabilitations programs, such as WINNING. The also motivate the woman to take part in activities as dancing, writing poems, drawing and singing to create their cultural sides. The Colony arranges WINNING groups twice a week during a 3 months period. The plan to have WINNING at all the wings and want to use the inmates as group leaders, as self-help support groups.

## **Finally-2007**

WINNING is just one of many efforts in the Norwegian correctional services. In the Norwegian prisons we have started the line of work for all the inmates to have plans for future. In addition, the ones in need of long-term help should have an individual plan and a contact-person in the welfare system. We depend upon cooperation with social security offices, employment offices and educational institutions when we are preparing a release from the prison. We also have shelters where battered women can stay for a week or more.

In 2007 The Correctional Service of Norway, Staff Academy - KRUS want to pay special attention to further strengthening the educational process and research activities, improving training and courses in cooperation with the Russian system and the Academy in Ryazan. We

have signed an agreement with the Academy in Ryazan of intention in that regard. I hope we can continue our cooperation by exchanging students and staff and cooperate on professional themes/topics.

I would like to express that I am very happy and content with the cooperation with Russia. As for this year, we are planning an experience gathering with the Norwegian and Russian group-leaders in Norway. We are arranging a seminar at KRUS in Oslo the **14.th of June 2007** with persons concerned about women's situation. I hope some of you present here, would be interested in helping and joining us in the arrangements.

### **List of references**

- Antonovsky, A. (1991): Halsåns mysterium. Stockholm: Natur og kultur.
- Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy. The exercise of control. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Berg, I. K. & DeJong, P. D. (2005). Løsningsorienterte samtaler. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Berg, I.K.&Miller M.D. (1998). Rusbehandling. Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal.
- Berge, T. & Repål, A. (2000 og 2004). Den indre samtalen. Innføring i kognitiv terapi. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Bernfeld, Farrington & Leschied (red.). (2001): Offender Rehabilitation in Practice: Implementing and Evaluating Effective Programs. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Duncan, B. & Miller S.D.& Sparks, J. (2004): The Heroic client. A revolutionary way to improve effectiveness through client-directed outcome-informed therapy. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.
- Friestad, C. & Hansen, I. L. S (2004). Levekår blant innsatte (Fafo rapport 429).
- Hubble, M. A., Duncan, B. L. & Miller, S. D. (1999). The Hearth & soul of change. What works in therapy. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Højdahl, T. & Størksen, M. (2004). VINN-samtalegruppe for kvinner. KRUS handbook.
- Højdahl, T. & Kristoffersen, R. (2003). Evaluering av innføring av samfunnsstraffen. Oslo: KRUS-publikasjon, Dokumentasjon og debatt nr 1.
- Lindberg, O. (2005): *Kvinnorna på Hinseberg*. En studie av kvinnors villkor i fangelse. Rapport nr. 14 . Kriminalvårdens forskningskommote.
- Proschaska, Norcross, J.O. and DiClementes, C.C. (1992). *In Search og How peoples Change*. American Psychologist.