

## **GENDERED PATHWAYS TOWARDS DRUGS AND INCARCERATION: RESULTS FROM A RESEARCH IN THREE FEMALE PRISONS IN ITALY AND PORTUGAL**

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**Background:** Women in prison constitute 3% - 8% of the prison population worldwide. Most women are in prison for non-violent offences, including drug related crimes. Research conducted in three female prisons in Italy and Portugal aims to better understand the characteristics, pathways, and gender related factors in women's drug problems and incarceration.

**Method:** A mix method -quantitative and qualitative – was used. The (adapted) European Questionnaire on Drug Use among people in Prison (EQDP) was administered to incarcerated women and in-depth interviews were conducted with women and staff. Descriptive statistics (SPSS) and content analysis software (MAXQDA) were used for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Research was carried out in one prison in Italy (49 questionnaires+17 interviews), in one in Portugal (175 questionnaires and 18 interviews); it is ongoing in a second prison in Italy (Torino, hosting 120 women).

**Results:** Final results will be available by August 2022.

**Conclusions:** Preliminary findings show that a large proportion of women who are in prison is involved in drug use or trafficking. In both countries most incarcerated women come from disadvantaged social backgrounds and have experienced multiple traumas, including sexual abuse since childhood.

Global socio-economic events (e.g., 2008 economic crisis, COVID19 pandemic, etc.) represented a turning point in some women's criminal involvement.

Different women's groups were identified:

- a) women with drug addiction history, incarcerated for acquisitive crimes;
- b) gypsy (Portugal) and Rom-Sinti women (Italy), in prison for drug trafficking (Portugal) and property crimes (Italy): few with substance related problems;
- c) migrant women in prison as drug couriers;
- d) few women in prison for violent crimes - no relation with drug issue.

The prison organisation and the relations inside the prison play an important role in women's condition. Gender is a key factor in understanding pathways towards drugs and incarceration; women's agency is an important resource in rehabilitation.

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