



**Identities of Confinement: Understanding the
Intersectional Experiences of Incarcerated Women
in Ireland and Beyond**

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Abstract

This research aims to inform the current penal landscape in Ireland for women intersecting across various identities. The intersectional basis for this study looks beyond just the singular

axis views of women in prison through the context of Kimberlé Crenshaw's explorations (1989) and considers other important factors that could shape their experiences, such as race, socioeconomic status, motherhood, age and the overarching factor of being a women, as they present as minorities within penal landscapes.

Through Secondary Qualitative analysis from Irish and UK sources, this research evaluated the elements that shape women's experiences interacting with healthcare and education inside prisons. The findings suggest that women are aware of their disparities and minority status' as the acts of storytelling and information sharing within the prison system gives insights and evaluations that shape their experience. Foreign National Prisoners and particularly the Travelling Community experience oppression in mesa to macro levels and this encourages more diversity in staff approaches so that dehumanising forms of negative behaviour affecting women in the form of labelling for example, could reduce. Foreign National Prisoner's also experience more concern about their family abroad at home and there is usually a desperation for money that leads to their incarceration. Women who are pregnant can also thrive in environments that support their wellbeing and needs. Comparisons between UK and Ireland showed that women can benefit more than others by being in prison but if there is an environment of hostility or improper facilities, this is not the case. Recommendations for future research could be explored both qualitatively as popularly recommended, or quantitatively through specialised cohorts of women in prison. Ireland's newest prison in Limerick is also a positive opportunity to expand research in this area.

Overall, this research contributes to Irish penology by combining sociological frameworks and applying them to existing resources, aiming to promote the various identities of women in prison and to encourage more qualitative, intersectional research in Ireland, particularly in the areas of education and upskilling.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Gender is no longer neither invisible nor ignored” (Heidensohn, 2002).

Throughout the studies of crime, women have been subject to underrepresentation by explorative criminologists, due to their lower statistical rates and the different pathways of their criminality. However, with the emergence of gender coming into focus, the sociological and legal pathways collide both historically and in contemporary discourse to enable conversations of the treatment of women by the criminal justice system. Female prisons are an example of a traditional institution rooted in masculinity.

From learning about these discourses and the further exploration of Intersectionality (Crenshaw (1989), this study delves into the Irish custodial context, looking comparatively between Irish and international studies to evaluate women's voices and their needs and experiences within the prison system.

The following research questions will direct this study:

1. What holistic supports, programs and services are currently available for women currently in Irish Prisons?
2. How do women intersectionality experience healthcare within prison?
3. What intersectional barriers are experienced for women accessing educational opportunities in prisons?
4. How can intersectional advocacy help improve Ireland's Penal landscape?

Through a comparative and intersectional lens, the identities of women will be analysed and evaluated with the objective of uncovering the barriers and invisible forms of oppression. Hearing the voices of these women aims to not only shed light on their lived experience, but also informs and encourages more potential research within this context and jurisdiction.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Though intersectionality has been a foundational source for gender studies and feminist criminology, applications into jurisdictions such as Europe and Ireland have been scarce. This comprehensive review of existing academic literature will not only provide a foundational basis for this research, but it will be a framework utilised to support and convey the current lived experience of women behind prison walls in Ireland and England.

The aspiration for this literature review is to provide a background knowledge to intersectionality and its application in healthcare and educational prisms within the prison setting as well as explaining gender and why it matters in the context of this research. Gaining an international and comprehensive approach to this topic, we can come to realistic conclusions and recommendations for reform.

2.2 Applying Intersectionality: Understanding People in the Penal System

To explore intersectionality, both in theory, implementation and practise, it is imperative that this lens is understood through its origins. By its definition, Intersectionality theoretically considers the complex and multifaceted ways in which stereotypes can ‘impede the fair and just treatment of an individual or group of people’ (Hester et al. 2020). Scholars have also defined the term ‘intersectional criminology’ as the evaluation on the ‘impact of an individual’s interconnected statuses in relation to crime’ (Bell, 2016; 106). Pillars that are often explored are the intersections of race, socio-economic status, age, disability, sexuality and gender. Originally introduced within the context of Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory in the 1980s and brought into practical exploration by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), this term exposed singular ways of legal and justice centred schools of thought to be limiting and unprogressive. Crenshaw’s explanations through landmark essays are elaborated on the marginalisation of Black women in law, theory and politics (Carbado et. al., 2013;303). These explanations have transformed thinking in many areas of sociology, politics, philosophy and in more recent application, in criminology. As perfectly described by Batastini et. al, (2022), there are few cohorts in society that exemplify the existence of intersectionality more than those involved within the criminal justice system.

Pillars of adversity, whilst improvements are being made to investigate this in literature, seem to be still looked at through a singular context of people who are involved within the criminal justice system. For example, research has gathered that recidivism rates for people in prison seem to be particularly higher in vulnerabilities including economic disadvantage, racism and sexism. However, the understanding of how this multitude of vulnerabilities can practically impact people, particularly women in the criminal justice system, requires a deeper understanding and consideration. Pillars such as these are being recommended to be cross-examined and explored in the context of outlining recommendations in order to overcome these barriers in achieving a fairer and rehabilitative justice system (Batastini et. al, 2022). In order to positively engage this perspective in research, the promotion of people-orientated language is important to point out here in the context of criminological literature. Whilst punishment-centred articles and reports emphasise labels such as “inmate” and “felon” to argue the harmful choices and wrongdoing of a person in prison, it has been argued that person centred language improves our awareness and solution focussed approach as policymakers, particularly within the context of intersectionality (Haymes et. al, 2018; Batastini et. al, 2022).

Scholars within this area have only recently begun to explore women and intersectionality through international contexts such as the United States, Australia and India. Much of the existing literature explores social implications of the lived experience of non-justice involved people which has shed light on important gaps in how we understand and provide a safer, accessible progressive society for those facing adversity. Dossa (2019) explores the lived experiences of Canadian Muslims, specifically those who are impacted by disability identity. This exploration further exemplifies the importance of interdisciplinary exploration of the lives of those who are marginalised by multiple means, aiding this research by exploring data of disability-identified offenders (Dossa,2009).

Some great examples of intersectional research within penal discourse can also be demonstrated here. Bell (2017) explores the impact of prison violence through pillars of mass incarceration, race/ethnicity and gender. The findings of which suggested that minority females commit more ‘violent infractions’ than white women. The intersectional lens has also been intricately used to explore the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia. Research here mainly critiques scholars for generalising findings, ultimately failing

to recognise the needs of these marginalised groups (Butler et al, 2007; Black and Trounson, 2019). Many articles refer intersectionality across male and female incarcerated people congruently. Academic perspectives also look at women in the Indian criminal justice system through ‘intersectional feminism’, again drawing from the essays developed by Crenshaw (Ramchiary, 2021). Here, the author adapted and combined this approach to conduct interviews with prisoners. Insight was gained into how prejudice and discrimination lead, not only to increased barriers within the prison walls but also exposure to harsher, ill-treatment as this literature review will further explore.

The overarching consensus is that intersectionality is not widely implemented in the discussion amongst women in prison but is more generally explored across all possible pillars of inequality - which is a great step forward. Scholars have made recommendations for intersectional factors to be explored such as racial and class inequalities which combined can influence recidivism and impact healthy reintegration. In order to look at women’s approaches inside prison specifically in order to address the overarching research questions, we must understand why there is a difference at all between male and female incarceration. This is in addition to addressing non-binary offenders as we delve deeper into the intersectionality of people who come into contact with the penal system.

2.3 Comparative gendered approaches to imprisonment

Whilst intersectional strategies for exploration have been widely recommended and encouraged, it has not escaped hegemonic masculinity which is important to explore whilst evaluating all avenues of discrimination within the justice system. Discussions within the realm of gender, crime and social control originate way back to sociological and philosophical depths from Michel Foucault’s deep exploration of sex and criminal punishment (Foucault, 1995; Pemberton, 2013). However, in contemporary and progressive literature, we understand that sex and gender are constructs performed and acted by prevailing discourse and various forms of power, particularly through the continued and active segregation of males and females through prison systems. The reinforcement of this masculinity and femininity within prison walls results in a very different experiential norm between the two types of prisons. Strictly referring to gender here, statistics obviously point to the over-representation of incarcerated men and the exploration by criminologists for many years focussed on developments and approaches to the justice-involved male (Pemberton, 2013;153). However, in the 1990’s,

increased attention and limelight was set on justice-involved females and the different pathways to criminality and indeed the overarching justice system between men and women were much more developed and understood (Wright et al, 2012;1613). Academic theories up to this point reinforced sex stereotypes and women in particular were studied with the approach of their gender roles of wife/mother/homemaker instead of their *actual* needs and rehabilitative measures (Feinman, 1983;24). Scholars have argued that prisons have traditionally been reproducing masculinity in all behavioural and practical purpose, reinforcing power and institutional hegemony, thus rendering women invisible to their needs (Newton, 1994). In response to this, many jurisdictions have introduced gender responsive strategies in order to better meet the needs of women in prison and there is much progression today from Non-Governmental Organisations in placing women's needs higher on the priority list.

However, there still remains a major issue and one that is the propeller for this piece of research. Academic investigation has shown the ineffectiveness of 'last resort' policies in relation to incarceration for women and imprisonment has become a 'first order response' for largely non-violent and petty offences which makes up for most women in prison (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, & Owen, 1994, p.2). This is opposed to male counterparts whilst most are incarcerated for serious violent crime, those who commit non-violent offences benefit more from 'last resort' policies (Covington, 2018).

Some findings from intersectional studies on women demonstrate the importance of diversity in research to gain a better understanding of what is happening on prison grounds. It is widely known that those involved within the criminal justice system are far more likely to derive from a severe level of poverty even far before they enter the criminal justice system (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). For women, one study in the United States showed that there was a particular prevalence of mental illness among women incarcerated within different subpopulations such as HIV positive women, those in segregation and those who have attempted suicide in comparison to those groups within the general population (Prins, 2014). Another study also showed that women may experience greater distress and pressure as some may rely on friends and family to care for their children whilst incarcerated (Christian et al., 2006). For women who are mothers, anxiety and stress are an additional *pain* of imprisonment, particularly for those on shorter

sentences and this can place unnecessary strain on other factors such as housing, employment, addiction, family ties and physical/mental health (Quinlan et al, 2022).

It is imperative to also acknowledge and explore the existing research responding to transgender, intersex and non-binary justice-involved individuals, to broaden the lens that is and will be utilised in exploring the findings within the context of this research. As mentioned, the prison system exists in a binary of male and female prisons reinforcing that only such genders can exist within prison. However, transgender and non-binary people who are sentenced to prison are forced into these binaries through the prison system in silence. As society has seen a growth of people identifying as such, the prison system has not been as progressive, simply because there is no capacity to accommodate them (Szuminski, 2020). Their appointment to each prison is classified based on their birth sex or genitalia. This re-classification is hugely problematic, research finding that there is a significant increase to personal safety, mental health problems and other issues faced by this cohort that cannot simply be dealt with in the same approach as cisgender offenders (Szuminski, 2020). New recommendations by researchers to approaches to this cohort of justice-involved people are being explored in states of the U.S. suggesting new wings that accommodate in all areas of basic necessities such as tailored mental healthcare, medical attention and safety measures. One article that was just published recently conducted a constructive review into gender affirmation care and mental health in prisons across Australia and New Zealand, with signs of improvements of human rights standards over the last five years (Dalzell et al, 2024). However, discrimination is still a prominent issue and collaborative policy development is yet to be implemented.

It is evident from the literature that the study of gender and the prison system has been through various phases. However, the school of thought is diverging in terms of penal approaches to gender and accommodating for all justice involved individuals. The words discrimination and prejudice resonate throughout the literature. As foundational literature continues to frame this research in order to investigate empirical secondary evidence of the lived experiences of women in prison, literature covering two essential portions of the prison system will now be introduced following a review of how discrimination can unfairly contribute to recidivism.

2.4 Discrimination and Recidivism

Naturally, literature has developed the solid conclusion that women who come into contact with the penal system come with a unique history that can immediately impact the custodial experience. This study aims to seek answers from the women on the inside of these walls in Ireland of these types of adversity. Furthermore, it aims to add to the already quantitative leads internationally by initiating qualitative, spoken word of lived experiences of possible discrimination, experience and access within prison. Through the different eras of reform and modern policy adaptations, the criminal justice system on a global scale is still male centred, resulting in an unclear picture of the needs of incarcerated women. Though it can be argued that the system pays less attention to women merely due to less women interacting with the system, a more pragmatic viewpoint is that most law-enforcers whether police officers or judges apply a more lenient attitude towards females and can often excuse or forgive (Haft, 1974). Whilst this is rooted within culture and society, it can ignore the needs of women and further exemplifies the hegemonic ideology to shield women from 'masculine' experiences such as prison.

As this study aims to incorporate more than just the singular factor of gender into the study of women in prison, race is a key component of the discussion as envisaged by Crenshaw (1989). There are leading studies in the United States of the negative impacts of racial injustice within the criminal justice system and this awareness has been spreading slowly across the Atlantic. It is unfortunately a common awareness of the over-representation of African American men in America's prison population. This is also reflected in the data available looking into women's incarceration. Whilst 12% of the women in the United States are African American, nearly 50% constitutes women who are in prison (Brinkley-Jackson, Carter, & Rolison, 1993; Eliason et al, 2004). In criminological literature, more attention has been given to women of colour and their greater risk of scrutiny and violence by law enforcement. For Latin American (Latina) women and for women for whom English is not their mother tongue, law enforcement and prison in particular can be a dangerous place (Eliason et. al, 2004;187). Some studies have found that Latina's in American prisons, 50% of those who died from medical problems were Latina. This was presumably due to their language barriers in accessing appropriate healthcare (Diaz-Cotto, 1996; Eliason et. al, 2004). This aspect will be important to assess when Ireland is analysed in chapters five and six.

In addition to literature assessing the needs of non-white prisoners and their potential barriers, research particularly in the last twenty years has increasingly focussed on the Irish Travelling Community, hereafter Travellers and their representation in prison systems in Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. Identified as people with shared cultures, values and traditions of a nomadic way of life, Travellers were officially recognised as a distinct ethnic minority in March 2011 after years of being ignored within different social contexts (Gavin, 2019). Travellers have also experienced barriers to educational attainment, often resulting in literacy and numeracy problems from leaving school at an early age (Derrington and Kendall, 2003). From a penal perspective, Travellers are over-represented and undercounted in the prison system (MacGabhann, 2011; Gavin, 2019). This is tied in with over-policing, similar to the issues mentioned in the U.S. with minority ethnic people.

When assessing holistic supports within prison, the aim of this evaluation links in with recidivism and looking at the *why's* and *how's* of the difficult pursuit of reintegration into society. Literature has been assessing recidivism, analysing the risks of reoffending and the different socio-economic factors that are likely causes. However, there has been little research on the intersectional factors of recidivism and furthermore, less literature regarding women's risk factors in relation to race, class, age and other societal factors. It has been long understood that both men and women can recidivate for multiple reasons, and we also know that the time in which people recidivate can be as quick as within the first six months and up to five years (Durose et al., 2014; Berry et. al. 2020). One key study that was struck the intersectional literature concerning recidivism was Berry et. al.'s (2020) US study where race and gender were evaluated in relation to risk assessment and various other factors that informs this research. Their findings highlight macro-level risk factors used to predict recidivism have different meanings for women compared to men. Whilst factors such as poverty are risk predictors generally, there is a key correlation found of women experiencing intimate partner violence and recidivism through their entanglements (Berry et. al, 2020;152). It is identified that generally, predictors of low educational attainment, unemployment and substance use are most associated with recidivism (Berry et. al, 2020; 135). These factors are also important to keep in mind when also taking race and gender against accessibility for supports that are accessible through prison and people's experiences with such programmes/supports. As this literature has provided the

singular tools in order to evaluate the current supports and their impact and importance in the context of this research, two core pillars of healthcare and education will be assessed.

2.5 Healthcare Behind the Walls

Research within the realm of healthcare in the prison system seems to have various methodologies, particularly through interviews from ex-incarcerated individuals and from various respondents across many different jurisdictions. For the purposes of informing this particular research, literature that places an intersectional approach on the people who are incarcerated is essential for forming a basis that will support reports and findings. Furthermore, exploring women's healthcare through this lens ensures that those invisible subpopulations are represented, thus informing this research in shedding a light on potential barriers to accessing the right to healthcare during their incarceration period (Gueta, 2020).

There is a wealth of literature addressing the healthcare concerns for marginalised women, but few addressing the experience within prison itself. From literature that does provide a glimpse of this, poor healthcare practises before entering prison as well as women entering the penal system with chronic health conditions tend to be more at risk of complications from HIV/Aids, human papillomavirus hepatitis C (Maruschak & Berzofsky, 2015). Many women have also encountered trauma, sexual violence and have also suffered with addiction upon entering prison (Laufer, 2019). The victim/offender overlap is important to flag here, as this represents much of this discussion, particularly when referring to the pillars of inequality that increases the barriers for accessing services within prison. The relationship between victimisation and later coming into contact with the criminal justice system has been well documented with research showing incarcerated women seven times more likely to have experienced physical or sexual abuse (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2010). Whilst the victim/offender overlap has been explored by scholars with regard to men as well as women, intersectional criminology has showed that women are more likely to have been victimised in their past before committing their crime, with women who have had a history of childhood abuse becoming involved with drugs at an earlier stage in life (Messina, Grella, Burdon, & Prendergast, 2007). Though research has not been able to fully explore the accessibility and success of drug treatment programmes, researchers argue that risk-assessments and available programming within penal systems to help women with addiction, for example, are not adequately utilised as

they were originally developed for male prisoners and subsequently applied to women (Van Voorhis, 2012).

It has already been discussed here that women who are non-English speaking or of an ethnic minority in prison, are single handedly more at risk for health complications. This factor already makes difficulties for prisoners coupled with the possibilities of inadequate provisions within prison. Researchers based in South Africa conducted numerous in-depth studies of Sub Saharan African (SSA) Countries that could demonstrate many pillars of inequality that could be carried through within the context of this research. Across this region of countries, authors described 'deplorable' conditions for incarcerated women (Van-Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda, 2018). Menstruation care for Zimbabwean women was unsanitary, where women described using newspapers, tissues and sometimes prison uniforms in place of sanitary pads (Makarati, 2013; Van-Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda, 2018). Poor nutrition was also a key theme in their analysis which found that poor quality of daily nutrition was recorded across various SAA countries (Van-Hout & Mhlanga-Gunda, 2018;6).

As mentioned briefly earlier, poor health and incarceration have seemingly appeared intertwined in research with a large number of justice-involved women presenting with severe mental illness including trauma and suicidal tendencies (Harner & Riley, 2013). Though recommendations have been widely spoken of in literature within the intersectional context, research still demonstrates little change in the mental health provisions for incarcerated women, and with little data to explore on an international level (Batastini et. al, 2022;932).

Motherhood is a particularly crucial pillar that must be understood as it is a multifaceted recognition. As mentioned previously, the anxiety and stress intensify with childcare, but particularly when factors such as poor socio-economic background, and ethnicity also is key to this experience. As explored by Travis & Wail, (2003;76) the idealized forms of femininity intensify this health risk for incarcerated women, as they feel that they are 'inadequate' or 'incompetent' to adequately provide to the needs of their children. In particular, women of colour may feel that they are not conforming to their gender roles within family or religious values. A valuable point to add here is that the practise of shackling women during pregnancy and childbirth, which was widely implemented in practise in the U.S., puts women in further

distress and reinforces the deviant treatment that does not prioritise the healthcare of any woman (Ocen, 2012). This practise further dehumanises women, many of which as previously pointed out by statistics have been incarcerated for petty crimes. The constitutionality of this practise has been discussed, with difficult stories of childbirth and the trauma induced when women's complaints of pain, bleeding or discomfort are ignored (Laufer, 2019). However, in recent times, legislation is changing to provide more protections for incarcerated women in the U.S., focusing more on holistic, dignity-based practises (Laufer, 2019;1808). For general access to healthcare, intersectional analysis has found to access services such as healthcare appointments are behind a paywall within about 70% of U.S. Prisons, leading to poorer health outcomes in particularly poorer and older prisoners (Fisher & Hatton, 2010). This is further exemplified by the limited access to health insurance for Black women (Gueta, 2020). The accessibility of essential services such as healthcare begs the possibility that women use incarceration as a means to access these services in a possibly quicker way than they would within their community (Gueta, 2020,8)

For women in prison, correctional health services are suggested to be based on an adversarial and punishment-based approach according to the literature presented from international perspectives. Women most affected by the institutional barriers of correctional healthcare seem to be those in poor socio-economic backgrounds, Black women, women who have a mental health diagnosis or trauma, those with an addiction and those who are pregnant or have children. These cohorts of women have been frequently mentioned in literature to face the least opportunity for humane, meaningful and timely access to services within the prison walls. Illness and trauma-centred responsive treatment was widely encouraged to be put into practise, particularly to be implemented through an intersectional informed lens (Covington, 2014). Though this literature lays the foundation for investigating healthcare within Ireland and England, another factor to remember is the meaningful impact of healthcare on shorter sentencing for women. This will be further addressed and explored in this study.

2.6 Impact of and Access to Education

Literature discussing both intersectional frameworks and prison education has been disappointingly scarce. Though intersectional criminology has suggested the exploration of education to better conceptualise how women in prison can discover their own capabilities and

identity through such successful programs (Batastini et. al, 2022;939). Unfortunately, from what can be gathered from this research, is that educational and vocational encouragement is rarely the priority for government or nation states (Ryder, 2020). As established earlier, women who are in prison mainly derive from areas that are marginalised by way of segregation, systemic racism as well as living in places with high police surveillance (Soss & Weaver, 2017). This results in limited employment opportunities and by the time women enter the prison system, are unlikely to have been employed. In the U.S. less than a third completed education post-secondary level and 37% had not completed High School (Ewert and Wildhagen 2011). As of the year 2018, research suggests that nearly a third of incarcerated women had been expelled or permanently excluded from school. This statistic will be particularly interesting to explore to evaluate if this figure has remained the same or has improved.

Ryder (2020) explored the origins of the Elizabeth Fry Society which was established under the notion that education held a power that needed to be utilised to help incarcerated women in Britain and across the continent (Fry and Cresswell 1848: 211; Ryder, 2020). For many years, this regime supported the intersectional school of thought to provide advocacy services and programs to marginalised women involved within the criminal justice system (Hayman, 2006; Ryder, 2020). Now, many of these original organisations have diminished, but there are developments within penal law that reinforced the importance of education in many jurisdictions, in addition to other agencies. In addition, the Penal Reform International's analysis found that prison-based rehabilitation programs 'rarely' provide the specific gender-informed needs of female prisoners. Upon further research, it is unfortunate to see that there are in fact fewer training and educational opportunities for women in prison in comparison to men in prison (Huber, 2015). Without any need to look into other pillars of inequality, this is unfortunately echoed in further research by Covington (2018). Not only are women given less opportunity to participate in educational or rehabilitative programs within a prison setting, but for those who are enrolled in such program, show promising and responsive results from participation. This particular research intertwines with earlier findings in literature where women do indeed have increased anxiety and fear of the central yard, possibly contributing to their non-participation in these programs (LeBlanc, 1996). Another piece of research delves deeper into the possibilities of effectiveness/non-effectiveness of women's participation in such educational programs.

Two studies conducted by Rose (2004) examines women's participation from middle school right up to college level education and training programs. Rose touches onto the intersectionality model here, where inequalities and possibilities explaining unsucess within these programs are explained by numerous possibilities such as budget concerns, incapability to complete programs and so forth. However, the findings speak for themselves when the proportion of participants within prison were significantly higher with those who received regular visits from children and family as opposed to those who did not. The presence of programs being available to women in prison also increased the likelihood of their participation (Rose, 2004). The findings here are also congruent with the literature within the penal healthcare model, where women have fewer available accessibility. This study emphasises the importance of familial relationships intertwined within the intersectional lens and reinforces the impact of motherhood within prison walls. Though this study did not actively seek intersectional pillars in respondents, this literature gives an insight into the essential pillars of exploration within the context of this research.

Researchers make the valuable point that the general public often fail to realise. That is the majority of incarcerated individuals return to their communities, and yet these are the individuals that are frequently disregarded in the general population (Kaeble et al., 2016; Batastini et. al, 2022). Studies have found that women who have been released from prison are 36 times more likely to die by suicide within the first year compared to the general population (Fazel and Benning, 2009; Pratt et al., 2010). Meaningful interventions such as education are crucial and have the potential to give women purpose going forward and back into the community.

Norway, for example has taken an approach that emphasises the importance of having a community centred organisation ready for women to reintegrate into society with rehabilitation programmes as well as educational opportunities (Ryder, 2020;144). This arrangement holds the community accountable for the success of these programs and shows the responsibility on non-governmental agencies to provide the support that is clearly so essential. This is opposed to the United States where access to opportunities to expand skillset are not only limited but also discriminatory, as women of colour receive lower wages than white women for kitchen or

laundry roles (Watterson, 1996; Eliason, 2004). It is also acknowledged in literature on the Irish Travellers that Prison education could be a 'golden' opportunity for those entangled within the prison system as this would improve not only their skillset with literacy and numeracy, but also reduce the discriminatory behaviour and bullying shown against them (MacGabhann, 2015:12). What research would benefit from is motivational factors of education for women and discover not only the benefits but the driving factors in completing some form of educational or up-skilling initiative, particularly for those facing intersectional barriers within the timespan of their sentence.

Education, whilst not hugely explored within the intersectional lens, has provided a drive for more insight into the barriers that women of all intersections may face when accessing educational/training programs within prison. Of course, as acknowledged by Rose (2004) it is up to the individual offender to engage within these opportunities *if* and *when* they are available and realistic in their situation. However, we see the benefits that it can give to women who are looking for that motivation to improve their contribution to society and can act as a social, familial and rehabilitative energy within what can be a difficult and bland environment.

2.7 Conclusion

The foundational literature explored in the context of this research has been imperative for further understanding the concept of intersectionality and the ways in which can be understood through two very important and often overlooked prisms within the female custodial setting, Healthcare and Education. Hegemonic Masculinity of the prison system was also acknowledged with a particular look at the binary that looms over the penal system. Various jurisdictions were looked at in their own variation of literature. The main gaps identified here, ultimately bringing this project to its current standpoint, remains the underexplored realm of intersectionality within both healthcare and education, acknowledging race, class and gender as well as other systems of oppression and discrimination. Though this chapter identified the main subgroups of women to identify within my findings, literature is missing key up-to-date reports and statistics within Ireland and England. The lack of lived experience of prisoners was also felt throughout the literature as mainly quantitative measures were applied. Though these pieces of research were insightful, it displayed a gap in this form of research methodology. However, there were particularly impactful insight and storytelling from South African research into incarcerated women across SSA countries. The word of the female prisoner needs to be

incorporated on a larger, but also more specific scale to gain a fuller picture utilising the intersectional lens. Now equipped with the relevant theoretical basis for this investigation, with acknowledgement to relevant studies thus far, the next chapter will now explain how this study will best achieve answers to the research questions methodologically outlined in this context.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to outline the methodology and rationale for this research study. As discussed through foundational literature, the intersections of gender, race, class and age all culminate a new meaning and understanding of inequality, particularly in a unique social setting such as prisons. This study investigates women's prisons through a lens of intersectionality in order to

assess the experiences of healthcare and education in Ireland through comparative analysis. Here, present findings will help inform Irish penology to ignite the incorporation of race, class and gender (etc.) into future policy and advocacy. Currently, there is a gap in this approach and this study aims to redirect focus onto women's multilayered experience with respect to identity in a contemporary, present-day Ireland. This chapter will outline the various components of this study that will ultimately aim to answer the research questions below.

3.2 Research Questions

In achieving an effective evaluation of experiences of programs, services and treatment for justice involved women within prison, the following research questions will lead this study:

5. What holistic supports, programs and services are currently available for women currently in Irish Prisons?
6. How do women intersectionality experience healthcare within prison?
7. What intersectional barriers are experienced for women accessing educational opportunities in prisons?
8. How can intersectional advocacy help improve Ireland's Penal landscape?

3.3 Research Design

For this study, secondary analysis is utilised in the form of publicly available resources such as Prison Reports, non-governmental agency (NGO) reports and case studies both reports based and academically based as well as a televised documentary. This is known as secondary research or desk-based research which utilises the published primary research of organisations and researchers in a secondary approach, rendering new perspectives and results (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Secondary research allows implementation of high-quality resources that are readily accessible and can be retrieved from libraries, internet archives and research organisations on a global scale (Reidel, 1999). This method is deemed most appropriate for this study as internationally scoped research is utilised for the comparative nature of best practise and recommendations to Ireland. This data also sheds light in the importance of reporting and

published qualitative interviews with prisoners which could not have been achieved with the limited time to conduct this research. This study is qualitative in nature, which means that this method aims to understand and present the experiences of people as they live through certain situations and offer individual perspectives from interviews (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; 216). This is preferred within the content of this research to quantitative analysis which utilises numerical data to test hypothesis and causation of certain phenomenon. Ultimately, this study aims to share spoken word from justice-involved women inside prison, having regard to their experience to better policy, advocacy and society rather than referring to them as a statistic.

3.4 Intersectional Approach

A unique and fundamental element to this particular study aims to hold attention to Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional lens by highlighting the importance of obtaining experiences of marginalised groups and intersecting identities. Scholars have recently explored how intersectionality can be hypothesised and construed methodologically which has aided in forming the most appropriate method for this study. Whilst quantitative approaches have tested "cause and effect" through an Intersectional Discrimination Index (Schein & Bauer, 2016) within various social settings by way of intergroup differences, adapting a qualitative approach is preferred by scholars, focussing on the lived experience to enhance support of policy and advocacy efforts (Batastini et. al 2022).

This study diverts from the "single axis" thought to the limits and barriers to accessing supports within prison as emphasised by Crenshaw (1989) and places the focus on understanding and recognising oppression from the diverse voices from aggrieved communities (Rice et. al, 2019) and recognising the institutional inequity that exists in society and further subsequently behind prison walls. This mainly applies to the social groups which are identified within Irish reports and the data which represents different ethnic, cultural or socio-economic groups such as Irish Travellers and Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs). By analysing the dataset in a way that is multilayered and referring to schools of thought, this study aims to take the intersectional lens and apply it to the experience of women in prison.

3.5 Socio-Legal Framework

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the women who interact with in-prison services, it is important to understand the context of Irish Penology and the system which governs prisons in Ireland. The first research questions exclusively aim to uncover this to place more context and understanding onto the subsequent qualitative analysis. The review of the Irish penal background in chapter four, adopts a socio-legal framework in order to gain knowledge of Ireland's attitude and response to female incarceration. Socio-legal research aims to employ the disciplines of both sociology and law to create a tool for data collection in the context of a legal structure and its implications upon society (Banakar & Travers, 2005). The influence of disciplines such as sociology have informed legal discourses, resulting in analysis of deviance from the law, this resulting in the contemporary rise of criminological studies (Harris, 1983).

In the course of informing this particular research, the realities of the 'law in action' encapsulated what the objectives of this research are; to inform of the effectiveness of Irish penal policy and who interacts with it (Banakar & Travers, 2005). This is firstly achieved by looking at historical contexts of penal discourse in Ireland and how women were legally and socially approached. This historical approach aids in comparative analysis of the law and the evolution of Irish society. This is followed by a comprehensive look at modern custodial approaches, including the two key analysis' of in-prison service supports that shape this study. This approach was deemed most appropriate as it aligns with the objectives of informing penal and social policy as well as teachings in the disciplines of intersectional penology. This informative method also provides an overview of the development of the Irish female typology over a period of time (Snyder, 2019).

3.6 Incorporating Inclusivity

Though this study aims to look at the scope of accessibility and experience of healthcare supports and educational opportunities for women in prison, this large area of analysis required specified understanding to maximise inclusivity and ensure all necessary aspects of study were respected. To achieve this, this research is informed by the methodologies of Critical Race

Theory (CRT) and its framework aimed at deconstructing bias or ignorance by acknowledging all intersections of identity and how they shape experiences of the people living through certain societal phenomenon's (Malagon et. al, 2009), such as prisons. This study also seeks to analyse data with the hope of a) broadening the knowledge of justice-involved women's intersectional needs by informative qualitative analysis and b) inform policy makers of the gaps currently in existence within Ireland's female prisons. In addition, full cultural identities will be utilised and sensible language referring to these identities will be a core value of conveying this research.

As the study of intersectionality is versatile in its explorations, meaning that multiple identities/subjects are interacted and analysed, critical self-reflexivity is also applied to this research. As explained by Rice et. al, (2019), research by white scholars sometimes do not recognise the processes of racism, ableism or other social forms of oppression simply because they do not relate to it, sometimes resulting in misappropriation. This requires a degree of asking reflectively as a researcher "what do I recognise/not recognise because of the positions I occupy?" (Rice et. al, 2019:415). As intersectional originally was coined to explicitly recognise Black feminist experiences, this is not forgotten in the course of this analysis.

3.7 Analysis

In order to analyse this secondary data, both online, library and documentary resources were utilised. Upon initial information retrieval, search engines such as Maynooth University Library and Google Scholar utilising boolean search strings (Aliyu, 2017) with keywords such as "women offenders", "intersectionality", "prison", "prison education", "healthcare inside prison" and "discrimination". In determining which sources were most effective and influential for this study, purposeful sampling as secondary sources were utilised in order of importance (Palinkas et al., 2015). For example, if women talked about the core themes within this study relating to their own mental health, pregnancy, involvement in school etc. these were utilised within findings. From this selected cohort of data, thematic analysis was subsequently applied.

Qualitative data utilised in this study is exhaustive of what data is available in relation to women's experiences within prison in the jurisdictions this study focuses on. As there are limited number of resources exploring this field of research, data is drawn and interpreted to find key information such as particular experiences of women's mental health, socio-economic status, race and education. Another form of data collected was a documentation aired by Ireland's national broadcaster Radio Teilifís Éireann called "Women on the Inside" (2014).

This two-part documentary depicts the lives of women inside both of Ireland's female prisons and they play a crucial role in showing the realities of prison to Irish audiences (IPRT, 2014). This documentary provides considerable amounts of lived experience which interacted with the themes within this current study. In addition, digital media is becoming more commonly used as a tool for qualitative inquiry and enhances the mobility of knowledge for communicating analysis within academia (Child, 2013; Borish et. al, 2021). Documentary analysis aided the contextual nature of interviews and the individuals participating in order to accurately describe the events and activities that surround included quotes. Without this mixed methodology, descriptions of participants would be limited (Borish et. al, 2021);10). At times within Irish data, qualitative datasets from prison officers of staff working closely with prisoners would be the only insight available. As this was a frequent issue in secondary analysis, in order to identify women-only qualitative interviews, the findings within the documentary in the Irish context proved to be insightful and eye-opening as well as informative.

Findings were comprised of reports and studies conducted within women's imprisonment in Ireland such including:

- Quinlan, C.M. (2011) *Inside Ireland's Women's Prisons Past and Present*
- *Women on the Inside*. (2014) RTE One, 15th September 2014 9.35pm
- Traveller Prison Initiative "Traveller Women in Prison 'Hearing their voices' (2017), St. Stephens Green Trust

In addition, there are also comparative elements of this study which are reflected in studies conducted demonstrating women's experiences in prisons across England and Wales including:

- Abbot, Scott, Thomas and Weston, (2020) "Pregnancy and childbirth in English prisons: institutional ignominy and the pains of imprisonment"
- Prisoner Policy Network, (2024) "Race to the top: A PPN report on race and ethnicity in prisons"
- Penal Reforms Trust (2019) "Women's Voices"

All data collected was thoroughly reviewed in order to compile evidence answering the research questions of this study and to evaluate appropriate thematic analysis.

3.8 Comparative Thematic Analysis

Given the multilayered, realist scope of this study, incorporating various forms of analysis with respect to identity, qualitative analysis has been deemed the most appropriate. In the case of any qualitative research, it is important to understand what framework best suits the data collected to convey answers to given research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 8). Thematic analysis is a method which is used to identify, analyse and report patterns in a given dataset, otherwise known as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006;8). Themes capture important key aspects of data in relation to given research questions and subsequent codes are generated from these themes which specify key facets of information. Thematic analysis can be adopted in a realist approach as deemed most appropriate for this study and reports on the experiences, meanings and reality of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006;9). In addition, theoretical thematic analysis (TTA) is most appropriate given the application of intersectionality to secondary data. TTA is defined by researchers theoretical or analytical interest in an area which tends to provide less descriptive data overall but leans more so into the analysis aspect of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006;12).

As this research looks comparatively at Ireland with England & Wales, this is following in the methods of comparative analysis within IPRT reports that follow similar reviews of various aspects of prison culture and penal attitudes between both jurisdictions. Methodologically this is carried out by way of two separate thematic analysis in both key areas of prison life: healthcare and education representing both Irish data and data from England & Wales.

3.9 Ethical Issues

All data collected as part of this study was of a secondary nature, combining publicly available qualitative data to investigate aspects within the experiences of justice-involved women within prisons. As no primary data was collected within the course of this study, no ethical approval was necessary.

3.10 Limitations

There are many benefits of utilising methods outlined above within the context of this study, naturally though it is imperative that limitations are explored to aid future research progression and acknowledge the secondary research design applied here.

The usage of secondary qualitative data poses the key limitation of the lack of control over the data arising from the secondary resources used as no primary ethics influenced the data utilised (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). The usage of purposeful questions posed directly to a cohort of respondents, in this case justice-involved women, would result in more solidified evidence of intersectional disparities within areas such as in-prison healthcare and prison education and the multi-layered barriers that can influence a women's prison experience.

Naturally, using secondary data encounters limitations, particularly when embarking on research which may not be fully explored or realised to its full potential without primary exploration. As mentioned by the Irish Penal Reform Trust, a non-profit organisation centred on promotion and publications surrounding penal policy conversation and positive reform, official reports published by Ireland's Department of Justice monitoring women's prisons may not be published and have been delayed in both past and present contexts (IRPT, 2023). In addition, the presence of intersectional designated research is substantially lower in Europe and the UK as opposed to its exploration in U. S. contexts, as explored within the literature review. Whilst this data aims to conceptualise the intersectional prison experience, the datasets presented present isolated elements of race, socio-economic status, age or other forms of identity (Cole, 2009:177). Due to this shortage of data, there is also limited qualitative analysis on educational opportunities as opposed to the various intersections of healthcare for women. Nevertheless, themes were still identified and intersectionality understood through both areas, which is in keeping with the main objective of this study.

3.11 Conclusion

In order to bring perspectives and experiences of women of all colours, backgrounds and ages into limelight, it is imperative to evaluate the most appropriate response. In conclusion to this chapter which outlines this present study's methodology, women involved in prison will be looked at through existing secondary sources, rather than seeking primary responses to evaluate, acknowledge utilise the current available studies (Reidel, 1999). The four research questions outlined ensure that the objective of this study is clear and organised, ensuring that

this study yields best possible results. As intersectionality as a discipline and a research method can be broad, exploring methodologies through recommendations from previous research proved useful in establishing this study's method. A socio-legal and comprehensive review of literature reflects on women's criminality and custodial response in Ireland with a view to comparatively analyse the findings of today's women behind bars. As well as this, comparative analysis also reverts back to established literature in chapter two, to see Ireland's stance on women's provisions within the pillars of healthcare and education.

Chapter Four: The Irish Female Custodial Review

4.1 Introduction

The rationale for this research pays particular attention to the Irish custodial system, particularly within the needs and responses of justice-involved women. Within a review of the literature in chapter two, approaches to imprisonment were evaluated with a focus on gender response and its intersecting social groups with whom they come into contact with. In order to evaluate the accessibility of support services both internationally and within the Irish context, it is imperative to look at the current provisions of the Irish Prison System and its foundations in custodial responses to those in custodial care.

This chapter will give a socio-legal exploration of the Irish Prison System as it stands and in tandem with the intersectional viewpoints of this study. Overall, this chapter seeks to answer what is there to offer the female prisoner in Ireland with regard to holistic services and facilities. This chapter will also aid in thematic analysis in chapters five and six where elements of modern imprisonment in Ireland is referred to by the voices of the women themselves.

4.2 A Historical Review of Irish Imprisonment

Women in Ireland played incredibly essential roles within Irish society, way back from the times where Ireland was a colony of England in the nineteenth century. However, the restrictions placed upon them contributed to the almighty and male-dominated public sphere. Women were not allowed to engage politically, could not vote and were given few upskilling opportunities and had to cope with pregnancy and childbearing (Quinlan, 2011;15). In these times, it was clear that women were undermined and struggled to cope, turning to prostitution and drunkenness as a survival strategy. Women also sought shelter from their circumstances in prisons where county gaols were the main form of imprisonment for mainly shorter-term sentences for mainly petty offences, drunkenness and prostitution (Quinlan, 2011;16). Imprisonment carried rehabilitative and disciplined measures and acted as a form of deterrence, though longer sentences were aimed at reflection of someone's error of their ways. It was believed that ultimately criminals were responsible for themselves, their actions and their own circumstances (Quinlan, 2011;17). Crime was believed to be a disease and the only way to protect them from 'infection' spreading to contemporary society was through segregation. After release, those segregated or imprisoned were continuously monitored under police supervision.

Once Ireland became an independent nation-state, women were promised equal citizenship, however Catholic social teachings taught that moral purity reflected the social identity of a woman; tasked with the 'guardians and upholders of virtue in the home' (Fischer, 2016). Irish womanhood became synonymous with home-centred, domestic duties and child centred values. A woman's body was also under particular scrutiny and non-adherence to Catholic values were subject to subsequent punishment (Fischer, 2016; 823). Unmarried mothers were considered to carry 'illegitimate' children and equated to the undesirable norm for Irish women - which carried shame onto families and communities. Due to women's expectations of determining the future of the country with 'their dignity and purity', women who were outside of these 'norms' were perceived as a danger to not only Irish society, but the image Ireland portrayed, regarding

them as deviant (Irish Independent, 1925; Fischer, 2016;823). Law, society and religion entangled to become institutions of segregation and hideaways from society in the form of Magdalen Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes as well as Industrial Schools for stigmatised or deviant youth (Black & Ring, 2023;20). These institutions were run collaboratively by the Irish State and Catholic Orders. Whilst well known in Irish society as a form of detainment to ease the burden on families from shame and guilt, people committed there provided services integrated with the Irish economy, delivering services in which the profits were retained by these religious orders (Gleeson, 2017; Black & Ring, 2023). Women were treated atrociously through these prison-like institutions and those who escaped could be arrested (O'Rourke, 2015). Survivors of these institutions have opened up through testimonies describing forced labour, denial of pain relief, beatings and an overall extremely punitive system (Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation, 2021; Black & Ring, 2023)

To this day and for decades to come, survivors of these institutions seek transitional justice for the harm caused to them in the form of pillars such as investigation, truth-seeking, guarantees of non-repetition, accountability and reparation from those responsible (UN Secretary General, 2004; Black & Ring, 2023). Though these institutions have been abolished for over 30 years, new commissions and reports established to uncover more disturbances within these institutions remind us of how Ireland used to construct the idea of criminals and place unmarried mothers, illegitimate children and anyone living a life outside of the ideal construct of Catholic family values in the centre of a criminal description. The significance of historical imprisonment is important to highlight as it is not only a dark element of Ireland's past, but it also depicts Ireland's attitude towards women and this study in and of itself analyses today's custodial response in comparison internationally but also in comparison to historical viewpoints of female incarceration in Ireland.

4.3 Modern Custodial Ireland

In today's Irish Criminal Justice system, the Irish Prison Service (IPS), established in 1996 is a key component of the services which combine law enforcement operations across Ireland under the Department of Justice (Quinlan, 2015). As explored previously, penal committals were made in the form of local gaols and more punitively, religious institutions. However, an increasing number of women were detained by the Irish Prison Service led to the need for a purpose-built female prison, as up until then women had a wing of St. Patricks Institution in

1990 (Quinlan, 2008; Quinlan 2015) A specially designed female prison was opened in 1999 as the Mountjoy Female Prison or the Dochas Centre as it is known by hereafter. At the time, this open planned prison was seen as an example of best practise female custodial responses in Europe (Quinlan, 2015;341). However, the landscape of female incarceration had changed significantly since then.

Prison Landscape

There are two female prisons in Ireland currently to accommodate the 3.8% of women who make up the Irish prison population, the Dochas Centre and the female wing of Limerick Prison. As of October 2023, a newly refurbished wing of Limerick's Female wing, a closed medium security prison opened as part of a trauma-informed Scandinavian model aimed at fostering rehabilitation and reducing recidivism (Dunphy, 2023), however we will return to this model and its possible efficacy. The main committal unit is the Dochas Centre in central Dublin for all Courts outside of Munster. The Dochas Centre, which is also a closed medium security prison has a daily average prisoner population of 718, according to the most recent report published from the IPS (2022) compared to Limerick at 34 as the daily average.

Though women represent a much smaller amount of the prison population and those offenders being committed to prison, it again emphasises that issues can remain unresolved or delayed as they sometimes do not seem as a priority, as explored in chapter two of this study. This is reflected in the ongoing issue of overcrowding explored by Bulter (2015) which has progressively worsened, resulting in increased tensions, self-harm, bullying and diminished opportunities for expanding rehabilitative programmes or opportunities (Rogan, 2010; Butler 2015;346). As of 31st January 2023, the Dochas Centre was operating at 112% capacity and Limerick operated at 164% capacity (IPS, 2023; IPRT 2023). Issues surround in-cell sanitation has also been long-documented, including the concerning number of prisoners 'slopping out', though the most recent IPS report states that the new additions of sanitation in self-contained apartments to Limerick's female wing reduces this inhumane and degrading practise (Warner 2012 & IPS 2022;12).

Staff, equality and provisions

This study aims to uncover the experiences of women within prison, however, in any prison landscape it is also important to understand the influence of the staff whose duties are to care for and build relationships with those within the confines of the unique space that is prison. In

addition, when discussing the perimeters of healthcare, holistic programs and education in prison and those that deliver this care, this cannot be discussed at length without the staff who are ultimately an example of promoting pro-sociality, law-abiding norms and values that can make a difference in the lives of the offenders on the inside, regardless of gender (Collica-Cox, 2018). This aspect is undervalued and overlooked both at scholarship level and in reporting, implementation of these prison programmes and healthcare with regards to staff will be analysed in the Irish context and hereafter referred to within qualitative analysis.

According to the latest publication by the Irish Penal Reforms Trust: Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) report (2022), staff are carefully selected to ensure gender-responsive and appropriate maintenance of professional standards through ongoing training. This includes trainings on disability awareness, LGBTQ+ matters and human rights as well as training through e-learning portals in line with European Prison Rules (IPRT, 2022;26). The needs of Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) are also being incorporated into staff training where not only do Recruit Prison Officers must complete modules outlining equality and human rights, but staff also have a duty of care of continuous professional development (CPD) must be deployed at all times (IPRT,2022;42). However, staffing shortages seem to pertain as a substantial issue among Prison Officer staff in ensuring that staffing numbers equal the rising number of prisoners committed within Ireland. Specifically turning attention onto the Dochas Centre, the Visiting Committee Report (2021) staff were found to be unequipped to deal with serious mental health issues affecting women and this is emphasised with the lack of prison officer and medical staff within the Dochas Centre specifically. In a survey dispersed by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (2020) the majority of staff also did not feel involved or heard in IPS's decision making, which can inevitably have a knock-on effect with the small and intimate numbers of staff present in Ireland's women's prisons (Office of the Inspector of Prisons Report 2022; IPRT 2022). Staff aiding educational opportunities within the Dochas Centre specifically are also having issues with re-deployment and other operational reasons, leading to educational disruption for those receiving prisoner education (IPS,2017). There also is a notable worsening of the rate of full-time medical staff such as nurses and GP's available within prison settings (IPRT, 2022). This has also declined since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic with the Inspector of Prisons noting numerous times that there is currently and has been a need to reduce healthcare waiting lists, due to staff recruitment and retention difficulties (IPRT, 2022) though it is unclear what numbers refer and clarify specifically to women's prisons.

Female Committals

As explored within this current study's literature review, there are quite significant differences to female and male incarceration in pre-custodial, in-prison and post-release periods, for example familiar responsibilities and greater stress for child safeguarding whilst incarcerated (Christian et al., 2006). However, this is also kept in mind when evaluating Ireland's current response to female incarceration with regards to what kinds of committals exist for women in Irish prisons and the practises governing their custodial care. According to IPS's Annual Report (2022) around 632 women were committed to prison, making up over 10% of the overall committal rate for 2022. Whilst most women were sentenced to prison, the second highest rate of committal were held on remand (IPS, 2022). These rates of sentences can be detrimental for women as their circumstances are generally not feasible to access the services required to improve their circumstances upon release (IPRT,2022).

Behind these statistics, the majority of these women are committed on a short-term basis, usually less than a year. This is a very important aspect to consider when integrating intersecting factors in addition to the complex needs of women which will be looked in-depth within this study. So far, there has been some attention to remand with attitudes in addressing justice-involved women and how this is a repetitive cycle for women in this position. The launch of a pilot scheme by the Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024 (the 'Review'), however details about this report and interim measures are yet to be seen and implemented (IPRT, 2023). Whilst widely documented that women's committal to prison can largely be an effect of unmet social needs and a clear lack of support within their communities, the IRPT states that an estimated 85% of women in the Dochas Centre have addiction issues and 60% have mental illnesses, compared to 27% of men (Kennedy et. al, 2005: IRPT, 2023). Addiction and mental health intertwined in its treatment by healthcare provisions are also important to stress here for the purposes of this intersectional study, as it facilitates that ongoing support and treatments are thus essential.

Race and ethnicity are naturally a key intersection of identity for prisoners within this research and thus important to explore Ireland's present response to these cohorts. In July 2021, Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) comprised of 15.3% of those in custody in Irish Prisons (IPS 2021; IPRT, 2022). Among female FNPs committed to prison, 16% were Romanian. FNP's in research is referred as the definition of someone who serves time in a penal setting in a country

of which they are not a citizen (Pakes & Holt, 2017; IPRT,2022). Much statistical and qualitative data has shown that Irish Travellers are overrepresented in the Irish Prison System as explored in chapter two. Identified as an ethnic minority, Travellers still struggle to access services due to discrimination both as women and as Travellers (IPRT, 2022;21). Reports from the IPRT tells of serious overrepresentation for women in Irish Prisons and that they face particular intersectional discrimination on varying factors with 22% of female prisoners identifying as such (IPRT,2022).

In terms of progress overall for female incarceration in Ireland, the IPRT (2023) notes a positive change where once a considerable percentage of women would be committed to prison for the non-payment of court-ordered fines, this has declined since the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery Act 2014 (House of Oireachtas, 2023; IPRT 2023). This type of offence was significant in comparison to male counterparts committing this same offense but progress such as these implementations seem to be slow, however successful upon implementation.

Non-custodial provisions, community and reintegration

As explored through female committals in Ireland, women generally serve shorter sentences than men (IPRT, 2023;27) which can make integration difficult and potential barriers to meaningful interventions to maximise healthy re-integration. The 2014-2016 IPS Strategy: An Effective Response to Women Who Offend recognised the need for a distinct approach to justice-involved women in the penal system. However, as of the IPRT's (2022) report on its progress on implementation, many actions have not been taken. It is also worth mentioning that Limerick Prison new female wing, whilst a welcome priority, was delayed and overdue in terms of the issues of overcrowding and general lack of resources. It has been critiqued that there is a serious equality issue when it comes to the lack of an open prison for women with regard to women's reintegration, particularly those on short sentences for non-violent crimes (IPRT, 2024; Holland, 2024).

The Irish Probation Service as another key component of the Department of Justice, has also responded to strengthening their initiatives that are gender specific. The development of the female-specific Community Return and Community Service options are coupled with other projects funded by the Probation Service such as the 'Building Recovery Inwards and Outwards' (BRIO) programme which are a positive development for non-custodial options and available avenues for justice-involved women. However, gaps in transparency exist from

reports on the uptake of community sanctions and their numbers are yet to be unveiled and evaluated upon (IPRT, 2023).

In Irish Prisons, the Resettlement Service managed by the Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO) works in partnership with the Probation Service to deliver a ‘through care’ approach for women to support linkages between women within prison and rehabilitation and community outreach prior and during the release and reintegration process (IPRT,2023). Two projects in co-ordination with DePaul and Focus Ireland help to provide homeless accommodation and financial support to women, known as Tus Nua and Outlook. In addition, the Outlook program which is also co-funded by the Probation Service and operated collaboratively by Focus Ireland is an initiative that aims to support women serving sentences of imprisonment or on probation who pose a low risk to society to reintegrate with their communities (Kildare Street Probation Service, 2022; IPRT, 2022). In operation only since 2019, the service has the capacity to help ten women at a time and has helped upwards of 51 so far in its establishment (Clarke et. al, 2024). The program helps prevent homelessness and recidivism among female offenders by providing temporary accommodation and holistic trauma-informed support (Clarke et. al, 2024). In its most recent report of June 2024, Focus Ireland outlines its commitment to post-release approaches which is a substantial and positive step in preventing recidivism, particularly in the cases where women have been sentenced to shorter amounts of time.

4.4 Healthcare Services

The documentation of health among women is understood in detail through various IPS Visiting Committee Reports as well as non-governmental agency reports. However, there were no explanations of *how* the healthcare service worked and what was foundationally accessible to female prisoners. In addition, where health centres were based and how accessible they were. However, Quinlan (2006) who has revealed deep explorations on female imprisonment, delves into the healthcare provided in the Dochas Centre. Furthermore, Quinlan also interacts with nurses and doctors within the healthcare centre, which will be explored more in the healthcare analysis chapter of this study.

The Dochas Centre Healthcare Unit is a three-storey building centrally located within the prison. As Quinlan describes its size and position both physically and symbolically show signs of ‘curative capacity’ as well as the prisons ‘discursive positioning of imprisoned women as ill’

(Quinlan, 2006;175). The unit is comprised of a dental surgery, nurses' station, treatment room and a pharmacy, which are all secured. When overcrowded, the unit is contained by prison management and women collected acquired their medications under Prison Officer escort (Quinlan, 2006;176). Words such as disciplined and surveillant nature summated the experience within the healthcare centre.

As for Limerick's Female wing, Quinlan gathered one doctor's testimony that Limerick Prison was generally unhappy with their facilities and prompted negative experiences from both a staff and prisoner perspective (Quinlan, 2006;182). Though no new data from the newly built Limerick Prison is available, it is hoped this data will reveal a much more positive and unproblematic testimony

Mental Health and Addiction

As foundationally evaluated, women have significant mental health issues for some time before their committal to prison due to various factors in familial life and possible domestic and sexual abuse. The Dochas Centre Visiting Committee (DCVC) in 2021 highlighted the significant concerns surrounding the provision of adequate mental healthcare and described the prison as a 'dumping ground' for mental illness (IPS,2021; IPRT,2022). There has been a continuous inaction of appropriate psychiatric services and that the Quality Network for Prison mental Health Services Report (2019) found that the psychiatric in reach team is at risk of burnout (IPS ,2021;4). The case seems to pertain that women who are being convicted of minor charges also have severe mental health issues. In the available data on the Dochas Centre, 67% of patients were actively homeless, 41% reported childhood abuse or neglect and 18.52% reported domestic abuse (Finnerty, 2021; IPRT,2022).

Embedded into mental healthcare is the provision of addiction services and treatment, particularly those who's crimes are entangled with their addiction problems as identified within IPRT data. Addiction services are identified as the most basic and urgent need by the women inside prison walls (McHugh, 2013; IPRT,2022). Unfortunately, addiction is only discussed in desirable and attainable strategies within the IPS Annual Report and fails to detail how these

services are delivered and their efficacy within prison walls through robust anti-drug policies exist within the IPS. A possible explanation for this is hoped that those suffering with addiction are diverted away from the criminal justice system (IPRT,2022), however this will be analysed further in this study's findings.

Maternal Healthcare

According to the IPRT, caregiving responsibilities and children's best interests are often overlooked at sentencing, despite many female prisoners in Ireland being mothers and carers (IPRT,2022). As of 2019, there were nineteen pregnant women cared for at the Dochas Centre and four in Limerick. As explored within international literature, being a mother behind bars can be extremely challenging with negative emotional consequences resulting from family ties within prison. However, there are serious gaps in Irish data in this area, particularly regarding the children of imprisoned mothers.

Limerick Prison's new Female Wing, which is designed with a particular Scandinavian, trauma-informed style, is accompanied by up-to-date mother and baby units (IPRT,2023). Maternal care provided to women is shared between the maternity hospital and the Healthcare Team in prison. Expectant mothers are catered for to have their children born within hospital and that they can care for the baby up to the first 12 months of its life.

The DCVC Report also highlights that in 2021 it was aware of an issue with a termination of pregnancy that had happened for the first time to their knowledge and that clear policy should be implemented to ensure safe abortions for female prisoners (IPS, 2021).

LGBTQ support

Training provided to IPS staff including prison officers, according to the IPS's latest report in 2022, also includes the awareness of LGBTQ+ matters. Within the DCVC report, the need for clear, fair and supportive transgender policies to be implemented was a key portion of the report. This follows a transgender woman who was in the custodial care of the Dochas Centre. Upon her arrival, the prisoner was accompanied by the Governor through what is called a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which in short means extra protection for prisoners at risk of harm by other inmates (DCVC,2021;6) This was in lieu of a formal Transgender policy.

Furthermore, the report explains the insufficient response for waiting for circumstances such as these to be put in place as the emotional impact of this practise could be detrimental long-term. This is also not addressed in future policy strategies published by the IPS's most recent Annual Report (2022)

4.5 Educational Opportunities & Programmes

Education within the Irish prison system is based on two influences: the Council of Europe policy and the "principles of adult and community education", offering broad and flexible programmes (Behan, 2014). These are delivered in tandem with outside agencies such as City and County Educational and Training Boards and those who participate do it for various reasons as outlined within this current study's literature review.

However, a substantial factor that was raised in chapter two upon scholarly evaluation of women interacting with prison education was the short committal rate. This is echoed by the IPRT; particularly for women, the prospect of delivering meaningful educational services to those within custody can be difficult (IPRT,2022). The DCVC report (2017) gives a more descriptive overview of the provisions of educational opportunities within the Dochas Centre. The Dochas Education Centre offers curriculum in accordance with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) levels and includes courses such as Personal Care and Presentation, Numeracy Skills, reading and writing (IPS,2017;4). Some other courses offered within the Dochas Centre include Child Care, Nutrition, Computer Literacy and higher-level courses of Communications, Functional Maths and Occupational First Aid. The Dochas school also offer accommodations for prisoners to sit State Examinations subjects and facilitates study with the Open University (IPS, 2017). However as mentioned earlier, staff shortages have had a knock-on effect on prisoner education and the Visiting Committee strongly urged these shortages and problems to be resolved. This could discourage participants within these educational programmes with the belief that there is 'no point' in signing up for a course (IPS, 2017). Particularly concerned with provisions and accessibility for Irish Travellers, the St Stephens Greene Trust evaluates Traveller's engagement with Prison Education. The organisation also notes the importance the encouragement of Traveller prisoners to get involved in educational opportunities from empowerment and normalising the idea of routinely learning (Travellers Prison Initiative, 2016). A joint strategy report published by both the IPS and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETB) in 2019, envisions core missions and strategic plans to continue the highest

standard of educational practise. However, the report does not reflect on previous practises or give indications on performance and success of educational attainment or provide any data in relation to its uses within female prisons (IPS, 2019).

The IPS also endorses the Mountjoy & Maynooth University MJMU Partnership which is Ireland's first University-Prison Partnership which promotes access to higher education and promotes the reintegration of prisoners and former prisoners into society (Garrihy, 2023). The partnership has been strengthening since its establishment in 2019 and creates shared learning spaces for students in prison and students in university and understanding both environments. This partnership realises the power and potential of educational opportunities for prisoners as well as encouraging the bridging of the societal gap with regard to students learning from prisoners. In addition, the Unlocking Potential Project (UPP) also seeks to build on these aspirations for further removal of barriers to ensure higher education is more accessible to those within prison and in the community with past convictions. The project also helps to support Higher Education Institutions (HEI) staff in unlocking potential with students and enforcing empowerment. These programmes are an excellent initiative that prisoners can access in addition to breaking the stigma of convictions being a barrier to accessing educational attainment.

Recently, Limerick's newly built Female Wing also offers new opportunities, both educationally and vocationally in expanding skillsets for women committed to Limerick Prison. However, it would be hugely insightful to see the implementation and success of these programs, particularly with data concerning types of education offered and who is availing of these (i.e. those with children or FNP's).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to draw attention to Ireland's Prison Landscape, paying particular attention to women in Ireland's custodial response in past, present and future contexts. Through historical contexts, women have faced multifaceted experiences at the hands of the Irish State in which effects are still widely explored and realised today. Though the current custodial response for female offenders is much more humane, there are still aspects of healthcare and services that leave much to be desired. Many of the recommendations from the Irish Prison Service and non-governmental agencies across all areas of prison life still require implementation. There were some notable signs of progress in other areas of penal

environments such as hygiene and strategies to reduce committals. This chapter has informed the current and most updated implementations of the treatment and accommodations for female offenders in a socio-legal framework aiming to address the current supports available to justice-involved women in Ireland. Therefore, this chapter now lays the foundational understanding of women in Ireland's custodial care that will inform the qualitative analysis of datasets exploring women's intersectional accessibility across holistic services available within Irish prisons.

Chapter Five: Intersectional Healthcare in Women's Prisons

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research study is to evaluate the intersectional identities and factors of women in prison and their experiences engaging within two core areas of prison: Healthcare and Education. So far, this research has gathered evidence of health practises across various jurisdictions and the gender-specific approaches to the needs of women in custodial care. International perspectives suggest that health services are based on an adversarial approach and that intersectional identities such as Black women and those who are non-English speaking are twice as likely to experience health barriers and responsive, meaningful treatments. Furthermore, the incarceration of minority women also begs the possibility that women utilise incarceration to access these essential services in a more responsive form on the inside (Gueta, 2020).

This chapter will seek to comparatively and comprehensively answer the second research question leading this study; *how do women intersectionality experience healthcare within prison?*. As this research progresses with the first of two areas of in-prison services, healthcare will be evaluated with regard to intersectional dimensions as foundationally explored in

chapters two and three. This chapter surrounding healthcare in prison aims to provide a comprehensive overview of women's experiences in their interactions inside prison to hear the voices of those serving sentences in prisons in Ireland and across the UK. Utilising thematic analysis of secondary qualitative data accumulated through purposeful sampling, four identified themes will be looked into.

As well as this, the basis for the fourth research question on comparative lessons from beyond Ireland will also be developed within the discussion and evaluation chapter following these findings.

5.2 Motherhood, Guilt and Gender Disparity

Theme 1

For women, there are clear differences in approaches to imprisonment both in literature and statistically. However, as one of the foundational elements of this intersectional study, gender will form as the first theme identified within the qualitative dataset. Furthermore, gender recognised by the prisoners themselves was found in the theme's codes.

In the first seconds of the revealing and pragmatic series *Women on the Inside* (2014), it is clear that the prisoners quoted are aware of their position as women and the immediate disparity in being a 'female prisoner'. "I do think it's harder on a girl being in prison, a mother especially" says a young mother of four, soon to be five. "A male prisoner, his wife will come up to see him, she will bring all the children and make sure he has what he needs... The females don't get that luxury" (RTE, 2014). Further to the expectations of womanhood, particularly the expectation of childbearing and femininity (Quinlan, 2011:15), this is reflected in prisoners experience and the prospect of motherhood. One woman reflects on the treatment of women and the dehumanising nature of being a woman and a mother inside prison. "In the prison the woman are like dolls in a dollhouse. In here I feel like a child, but I am 34 years old, and I have children...They are all here treated like children (Quinlan, 2011:167). This echoes the institutionalised hegemony and masculinity that exists and is reinforced inside prison walls

(Newton 1994). Despite this though, prison officers' comment on the subtleties within the Dochas Centre, "They are called 'women' not prisoners, and landings are not 'landings' they're called 'houses'" (RTE, 2014). This gendered disparity is also mentioned in reflection by other staff, of whom are healthcare workers and doctors who work with female prisoners and potentially hold insight from previously working with male prisoners. One doctor described his experience with female prisoners; "The woman are more vocal, more inclined to express themselves...to be verbally abusive, women prisoners unhappy with their medication will pretty much make it obvious...men are more accepting" (Quinlan, 2006:182). However, in accessibility of healthcare within the Dochas Centre is quite high, particularly within the cohorts of female prisoners serving shorter sentences; "The women [on shorter sentences] might have headaches, toothaches or period pains, they may have fallen and hurt themselves, they may have been in a fight and been hurt, or they may get a panic attack, or they might be upset about something"(Quinlan, 2006:181). This aspect we will return to in its repeated code in other themes.

This pressure that women in prison feel amounts to factors both inside and outside the prison. These specific pains of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958) are reflected within conversations contained within the dataset mentioning being a parent or parent to-be in prison. "I get lonely in here. I miss me family being around me and talking to me all the time" (Quinlan, 2006: 216). During the course of the RTE documentary, the woman of four documents her pregnancy and birth of her baby son. "I feel like the worst person in the world...I feel so bad for him (the baby)" (RTE, 2014). Committed to prison for drug offences, the woman felt that as a mother, she naturally missed her children, however it was clear that the accessibility of maternal services and the custodial support was better for both of them, even though she knew it wasn't the 'right' thing. "It's no environment for a child...but in some aspects it has been a benefit with [the baby] being in here...I get to rest" (RTE,2014). The support within prison, particularly the Dochas Centre where 'Phoenix House' caters for those who are pregnant or with young babies, appears to better support the women as opposed to the lives they lived on the outside "it's better in this house... we have our own garden we can take them outside... I can keep my baby with me. I know eventually I'll be going home but that seems very far off" (RTE, 2014). This suggests that economically and financially, pregnancy can be more stressful on the outside or at home, therefore pregnancy within prison could be a blessing in disguise for some women in terms of access and support, particularly with the adequate facilities within the Dochas Centre.

Reflective of the explorations by Travis & Wail, (2003) the feelings of incompetency or inadequacy were also found through women incarcerated in England & Wales. “You know, although you are pregnant, a part of you forgets that you are pregnant. Because you’re in [prison] there’s a lot to deal with. It’s terrible really because you don’t focus on what you should be focusing on, it all goes out the window” (Abbott et. al., 2020:664). Another woman felt ashamed for being pregnant within the walls of the prison, “I try to hide my bump...wear baggy clothes (Abbott et. al, 2020). The culture and environment that surrounds pregnancy and maternal services has a significant influence of the feelings and emotions of being a mother in prison. When facilities are revitalised into purpose-built spaces, there is an increased ‘normalisation’ for both prisoners and the general public in view of prison reform (Jewkes et. al, 2019;10). However, the general consensus is echoed by one woman: “Prison is not the place for pregnant women” (Abbot et. al, 2020: 666).

Another key code found within the qualitative findings was the anxiety and fear experienced surrounding other prisoners’ outbursts and violence. One prisoner, Jane, described one terrifying incident; “[A woman] was shouting at me and I tried to shut the door. I had to quickly catch it and hold the door shut. And she kept trying to push the door on me... I told her to go away, and she kept saying. I wish your baby dies” (Abbott, et. al, 2020; 664). Inescapable visibilities of bumps can bring out raw and unprovoked reactions in fellow women also incarcerated, perhaps from their own trauma or from missing their own children. This problem is another key issue within the Dochas Centre for pregnant women. “I live in fear of what might happen... And I don’t know how to get [the baby] out of there” (RTE, 2014). This is the words of the same pregnant woman who spoke earlier following an altercation which resulted in the woman rushing her and her newborn son out of the common room.

Accessibility to antenatal services and connectivity between in-prison and outside of prison was pointed out by one prisoner; “I have [health issue], but eh I never knew I had that until last year. I went for a [different health issue] and the specialist said I have another thing to do, a scan like they scan the baby, and he found that I had a [health issue]. I didn’t get that looked at since I came in. [The prison knows about it] but they are not going to take me out to the hospital...I can’t see him” (Doyle,2017). This is an important point made by a woman identified as a Traveller because this enters the intersection of being a minority within a minority. This also

emphasises the lack of control, even through a woman's own health difficulties. "You're basically controlled... it's like you're a dog on a lead and you have only got so much before [the prison officers] are pulling you back" says another who has had a negative experience with outpatient antenatal services (Abbott, 2020:664)

As explored within Ireland's current custodial provisions, women may keep their baby for up to 12 months before giving the baby over to family so that the woman can serve the rest of their sentences. Upon release, the women who gave birth whilst serving her sentence in Dochas is released and was grateful she was able to keep her baby and her sanity whilst in prison "My friend has been away from her daughter and she had to give up her baby at 12 months to her family...I don't know how she stayed strong and continued her sentence" (RTE, 2014). Through this theme of maternal experiences and insights of gender disparity, the clear signs of emotional impacts of pregnancy and child-rearing in prison can be difficult to navigate. This can be particularly difficult when the appropriate facilities do not support gender-responsivity and proper resources. These mental health barriers feature prominently in the next theme identified within women's prisons.

5.3 Women Imprisoned Emotionally

Theme 2

As explored earlier a substantial percentage of women who are currently in prison in Ireland suffer from mental health problems, particularly in comparison to male prisons in Ireland. Nevertheless, prison can act as an opportunity to deliver healthcare to marginalised women due to social exclusion and health inequalities (Baybutt & Chemal, 2016). This fact drives this current study through digging deeper to evaluate why this is the case for many justice-involved women. However, with the Irish contextual review of this study in chapter four conveying inaction of progress in some inherently essential services, minority groups could be left at even more risk of societal deprivation and access to the appropriate healthcare and psychiatric care they may require.

The Dochas Centre has been described as "half a mad home and half a prison" by one woman, but this is a reality shown time and time again in IPS reports and particularly investigatory reports by the IPRT. Women carry feelings of isolation although they are in a space with women of various and sometimes similar personal and justice-involved circumstances. "One day I was

so upset I just cried all day, and I felt like [self-harming] just to release some pain and some anger out of me” says one woman who struggles to cope with her sentence and her life within prison” (Doyle, 2017:51).

However, a common theme present within mental health services was the treatment of staff, particularly within programmes and regimes that are built into the healthcare policies for female prisoners. The interviewee’s multiple sources of research frequently comment on the ‘padded room’, which is a particular feature of those going through particularly destructive and harmful mental health problems. “If you go in and tell the governor you’re suffering with depression, they’ll have the pad stripped and you’re in it. That’s what they do around here” one woman from the Travelling community explained (Doyle, 2017;52). “...Even though you’re depressed, or whatever way, you can’t cope, that’s exactly what they’ll do. To stop suicide because they think that you’re gonna do serious harm” (Doyle, 2017;52). The padded cells, central to the disciplinary controls in both the Dochas Centre and Limerick prison. However sometimes women with serious mental health problems or addiction issues were sent there, or some women tell stories about being tricked into going to it. “They treat you like a piece of dirt...They drag you all around and put the gown on you and then they put their arms over their faces and heads and run out” (Quinlan, 2006:221). However, the self-awareness of some women comes through in their descriptions of sometimes asking to be put in the padded cell. “It’s horrible, feels real claustrophobic, nothing it it...but it’s a good idea. It keeps you safe and important especially for me and people like me. I’m suicidal from time to time and they often take me to the pad to keep me safe”. This was identified as a facility in lieu of company, confidantes or support, desperately needing someone to talk to and not having anyone (Quinlan, 2006:221).

However, psychiatric support and counselling are available to prisoners if required. Access mental health services in England & Wales are what is named Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBP) which helps prisoners’ attitudes and thinking behaviours (PRT, 2023:4). Women speak in mixed tones about these rehabilitative approaches and their efficacy. One woman describes group therapy as “the root of all evil. It makes people more vulnerable” (PRT, 2023;4). With the many intersections of mental health problems, addiction, poor socio-economic status impacting their experiences, group therapy seems to be more destructive. Many of the women interviewed within British research have engaged with some form of group or individual therapy. However, Quinlan’s (2006) interviewees in Ireland had little engagement

with therapy, with only 16% of those interviewed engaging with therapy/counselling at all (Quinlan, 2006:223). “Completing a programme does not mean my risk suddenly disappears” explains one woman. Another reflects on what the mental health rhetoric should entail. “A bad programme would be one that is too formal and generic, they just don’t get to the root of the issues. They should be based on the individual” (PRT,2023). The ‘individual’ approach is also suggested by another woman; “One to one intervention feel so much safer” (PRT,2023). The initial assessments are also found to be tedious and are described as a ‘box-ticking’ exercise by one woman, who feels that her needs are just not taken seriously. “It is important to get to the root of why someone committed a crime, but then you come in and get assessed, it feels like your there to tick boxes... You’ve done the course, you’re cleared now, rather than actually dealing with the issue” (PRT,2023:4). Meaningful assessments to help women seem to be inadequately applied and from previous research, has been shown to be originally developed for male prisoners and subsequently applied to women (Van Voorhis,2012). A Traveller woman said that she would rather engage with the external services instead of the in-prison programmes; “Nothing in here is confidential. ‘Cos it always gets back. I’d go to the Traveller Counselling Service” (Doyle, 2017:51). This potentially has a knock-on effect for those coming into the prison on shorter sentences not to engage with any rehabilitative/counselling program.

5.4 “She’s happier in here”: Intersectional Addiction

Theme 3

Prison can and does help women who are in desperate need and societal deprivation on the outside. One woman opens the *Women on the Inside* documentary by saying “Jail has saved many lives. People coming in off the streets and they are ready for their death bed, and it builds you up, and takes care of you, and then sends you back out” (RTE, 2014).

Addiction is documented within the women currently serving time in the Dochas Centre. It is not only a common reason among others why women end up in prison, but it also has followed them into prison, and this seems to be an underlying theme with a vast majority of respondents throughout the dataset. One woman who has had over 300 previous convictions for petty charges, has been homeless and has an alcohol addiction. “I find it easier to cope in here than out there” she reflects. “Well, this house is always open, you can’t be thrown out of here”; she says she’s “happier in here than outside” (RTE, 2014). Women who suffer with addiction are

almost all Irish women and tend to lead lives of petty criminality and recidivism, mostly to support their addictions (Quinlan, 2006:239).

Women who are in and out of committals are also released into homeless accommodation, but often these are last resorts due to lack of available emergency accommodation. Furthermore, women are at risk of engaging with their old social circle that could affect their sobriety and could ultimately lead them back into prison. One woman featured in the RTE documentary is told by her support worker that the only accommodation available is a place that houses addicts that could put her at risk of re-engaging with criminality. “It’s hard staying away from the people, places and things from the old life” (RTE, 2014). Once told about where she will go after she leaves prison, the woman breaks down; “I don’t want to go backwards...this is how people get back into prison” ...” I’ll be telling the judge to lock me up again next month” (RTE, 2014). This happens on two occasions throughout the documentary;” They’re just throwing you into places where there’s drugs and drink, I need a place to be stable (RTE,2014)

From hearing these women’s stories, the emotional turmoil that comes with being an addict in prison is multilayered and isolating. As discussed earlier, labels can sometimes be used to differentiate prisoner needs but can also negatively impact on prisoner identities and emphasise stereotypes (Abbott, et. al, 2020) One traveller woman expressed the embarrassment with her own identity; “Cos people like, expect differently from a travelling woman my age. Not being in addiction, supposed to be looking out for my family. Not be causing trouble... Travellers look down on me and I think settled people also” (Doyle, 2017:35). Women who were interviewed also have the view that younger and younger people are entering prison suffering with addictions. “They don’t know right from wrong. They don’t even behave in church. Every one of them has had a very bad experience at home (Quinlan, 2011:153). Even women who are committed to prison for non-addiction related crimes end up entangled in the drug culture in prison “I ended up taking drugs in prison. I started addiction in prison...Took drugs for the first time in my life here” (Doyle, 2017:48). Though prison centred avenues for addiction such as interventions and counselling are available to prisoners, there is a fear that women would be sent to the padded room for disclosing their struggles similar to the codes found in the previous theme; “Everyone thinks if you’re feeling down or you don’t want to live anymore. You’d be thrown in the pad like. They might call the counsellor, an addict counsellor. She’s good now I will say it...” (Doyle et. al, 2017:52).

5.5. Minorities: Double Deviance and Differential Treatment

Theme 4

The fourth and final theme identified through healthcare experiences in prison were the identities of women, particularly those classified as ethnic minorities or foreign national prisoners. These intersectional identities are often exemplified or made a spectacle of through discursive practises within prison settings (Quinlan, 2006;225). As women from the Travelling community represent a significant percentage of the female prisoner population, qualitative research has achieved delving into their worlds. The woman understands the stigmatisation against them as women, being an ethnic minority as well as being a prisoner. “It’s hard for traveller girls being in jail. We’re used to men going to jail. They tell us you’re worse than men going to jail” (Doyle, 2017:35).

Research within Irish prisons tell the story that it is mostly Irish women engaging in addictive behaviours. This juxtaposes FNPs committals where often it is these cohorts of women who are caught in drug trafficking, often in desperation to support their families overseas. One woman who was committed to the Dochas Centre from Trinidad & Tobago, feels sorry for those women caught up in addiction; “I saw the devastation of these girls here that take drugs, the way they look... I was very sorry...I felt compassion for the girls in here” (RTE, 2014). FNP’s bring committed to prison for Drug offences has not gone unnoticed in research. Amongst traffickers, couriers are most visible and because of this visibility, often criminal activities such as these are easily prosecuted and those seeking money for their troubles are exploited (Quinlan, 2006:197).

Financial worries and caring for family were priorities for those who were identified as ethnic minorities or FNPs. The woman from Trinidad & Tobago reflects on what landed her here in Ireland; I am a single mother of three and have a sick son with cerebral palsy...My son needed surgery...I took the offer [to smuggle drugs] because I needed money...I needed money desperately” (RTE, 2014). Due to these sequences of criminality and the intersectional barriers she faces, there are many feelings of disconnect from the outside world and in addition, the woman once released and deported fears that the people who asked her to traffic the drugs will find her and her family. A Black South African woman also faced similar circumstances and worries for her family abroad. “I am closest with my boyfriend in Nigeria, he helps my baby

and my mum. My mum is not okay...she had AIDS. People are just dying of AIDS and there is no treatment at all if you have no money” (Quinlan, 2011:160).

These worries are echoed in England & Wales; “Because I don’t have the right to be in the country, they put me to prison. They don’t care about your life, your children, (PRT, 2023:11). Most of these women serve long sentences for these crimes and this adds to the barriers they face in learning a new way of life, language and coping skills in a place such as prison (Quinlan, 2006:194). They also are likely to wait many years before being prioritised (PRT, 2023:4). This is emphasised by the differential treatment given to prisoners, sometimes by prison officers and healthcare staff. “Why they do not treat all the same? Because we are prisoners why they treat differently like this? All of us at the same time you have to treat us all the same” (Doyle et. al, 2024 148). Staff can also dehumanise prisoners and their language can enforce labels and ‘othering’. “You should hear the way they talk to us. One day I heard one say, ‘oh let’s give the monkeys their medication, it will keep them quiet’. I told the nurse I had my period three times this month. She replied, ‘lucky you’” (Quinlan, 2006:213).

For the woman from Trinidad & Tobago, she is released from prison after her lengthy stay in prison to return home; “for me it wasn’t prison it was like a home”. Even through the suffering and experiences within prison, she feels Ireland provides so much more than her home; “The way how your government care for people like at least they help you get a home... But in my country, you don’t have the money, that’s it...but I came [to Ireland] the wrong way so I cannot stay” (RTE, 2014).

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the four themes identified here brought together a story of barriers, accessibility and somewhat acceptance for their own individual situation, Women throughout the dataset had a great deal of self-awareness through their own hardships and although many turned to unhealthy coping skills, their desire to try their best in a system that is against them from the beginning, is admirable. Their communication of their own barriers displays the portions of encouragement that comes from being within prison. Ultimately, this chapter answered the question of how intersectional women experience different areas of health, drawing from datasets originating from England and Wales to seek comparative or similar codes. Some codes such as environment, levels of interaction with services and discrimination were identified and repeated throughout the themes, as intersectional barriers were not confined to just one aspect

of identify or prison experience, in keeping with the main objective of this study. This study continues this exploration proceeding with women's intersectional experiences of in-prison education.

Chapter Six: Learning to Live; Education and work in Women's Prisons

6.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter has identified, women often experience multiple forms of oppression from the committal process, to actively serving their sentences to preparations of release. Themes identified common aspects from the dataset that concur with the core objective of this research as well as the research questions outlined. In this chapter, the third question will be explored and answered, *What intersectional barriers are experienced for women accessing educational opportunities in prisons?*

Utilising sources that have identified education to be a topic of discussion within qualitative secondary sources through purposive sampling in both Ireland and England & Wales, the identities of women in prison will be looked at in addition to their spoken word to gain a more fulfilled and responsive approach to their needs and skills. Through the overview of internationally available literature in chapter two as well as the foundational exploration in chapter four of the Irish education system, it is already understood that women are misunderstood with respect to educational opportunities and their skills. This chapter aims to fill this gap with the hopes of informing the current educational experiences to embark on improving this area of penal policy.

6.2 Running Out of Time for First-Time Learners

Theme 1

As most women incarcerated in Ireland, this leaves little opportunity and priority for engagement with programmes both recreationally and in terms of healthcare. Sometimes it

takes much strength to participate in such programmes particularly those with literacy and numeracy difficulties for fear of further discrimination or bullying against them. Though particularly for minorities such as Travellers, education can be a golden opportunity for them to succeed and increase belief in their abilities (MacGabhann, 2015:12). One woman remarked on this from her experience in England;” The shorter length you’re in here, the less help you get... a lot of bad things can happen, and they haven’t got any time to address anything” (PRT, 2019).

For many women in Ireland, it’s their first time engaging with education programmes to acquire skillsets of their own choosing. “The only school I got is in prison” (Doyle, 2017:42). One woman featured in the documentary is featured in the prison school writing a newsletter for the women in the Dochas Centre, only learning how skills once she was enrolled in the prison school; “This is what you get when you’re only learning how to type”. She explains how she can engage much better within the provisions of the Dochas Centre compared to Limerick Prison; “In Limerick you could be the best in the world and still sent back” (RTE,2014). Limerick Prison, though newly refurbished now, was previously associated with the punishment approaches of confinement rather than rehabilitative. Quinlan makes the point of the very different educational and satisfactory learning experiences between the Dochas Centre and Limerick Prison (Quinlan, 2006:183) According to the women who spoke in the documentary; “Being up in this prison (The Dochas Centre) makes me feel like I really [want] to get out [of prison]...when your down in Limerick you just give up...here there’s hope for me (RTE,2014). The woman also spoke of the normality of being taught and learning skills by the volunteers who come in: “It’s like normality when the volunteer befrienders are here...like the outside coming in” (RTE, 2014). Those being committed to Limerick may be afforded less opportunities than being committed to Dublin, though all prisons should have equal opportunity and access if granted with good behaviour etc. To further evaluate this in Limerick’s new Female Wing though, further empirical research is needed to assess the differences from the ‘old’ Limerick Prison discussed here and the current wing.

Travellers are especially disadvantaged in educational opportunities and upskilling, with much research and dialogue with women showing how education has been a barrier for them in life, let alone trying to get involved within prison “Not knowing how to read or write and I’m coming in, I’d be ashamed” (Doyle, 2017:43). Women are aware of the reasons why there isn’t more

engagement for traveller women, particularly those on shorter sentences but acknowledge the positive effects once they do engage: “Travellers are in for shorter sentences... There is a lack of education and more of them wouldn’t have the confidence in their level of education [but] when they do start attending they get more confident very quickly” (Doyle, 2017:44). Another woman who identifies as a Traveller believes the reluctance is because of the lack of awareness of what they can achieve on the inside from their experiences of barriers on the outside: “I know there’s a reluctance of some Travellers to engage... a lot would not have been able to access services before. There’s definitely a lack of awareness around the services” (Doyle, 2017:44).

Although those who are in prison for shorter sentences seem to mostly bypass engagement with educational or upskilling programmes, those who do interact are “grateful for the educational opportunities that were given to them (Quinlan, 2011: 167). Education has given women a lift they did not know they needed: “I can see things clearly now”, “I have copped on” (RTE, 2014).

6.3 Reliance of Literacy to Make Complaints

Theme 2

Literacy appears a taken-for-granted element of life within prison, as some prisoners and ethnic minorities do not have the same standard of reading or writing as others. The IPRT spotlights data by English research investigating complaints made within prison to staff or prison authorities and the process of such made by prisoners. The data highlighted that literacy can be a barrier in communicating and expressing concerns, particularly when a prisoner is worried about in-complaints being reached by prison personnel (Von der Valk & Rogan 2023; IPRT, 2023) The research by IPRT also urged in its recommendations to the Department of Justice that the gaps identified in interpretational needs should be resourced and provided consistently (IPRT, 2023;6).

One of the Traveller identified women within the TIPI report when asked about making complaints she replied, “Complaint? I don’t know how to make a complaint” (SSGT, pg. 46). However, there is even more attentive attitudes for those who are FNPs “If you go against the prison system, you’re putting yourself in a very vulnerable position” (Doyle et. al, 2024:149). These insights reveal the need for assistance to be available if needed for women who need to make a complaint or recommendation for their voice to be heard.

6.4 “Men have it better” Gender Imbalances in Learning

Theme 3

Gender has repeatedly come up as a theme throughout this study’s dataset. In terms of education, gender was particularly highlighted as a fundamental disadvantage simply because of the lack of resources that are available in women’s prisons compared to men. This is shown particularly in the research carried out by Quinlan (2006;2011) where women know and understand the better range of skills that are offered to male prisoners. “[The women complain that] the men get more and better educational opportunities” (Quinlan, 2011:187). Another woman said in a separate study that, “The female prisoners don’t get as much opportunities as the males do. They really only get cleaning and the kitchen. The ones with great communication skills and more ability to get prioritised over the quieter prisoners for positions. The men go to Loughan House for farming and gardening and forestry, it gives them lots of skills” (Doyle, 2017:44). However, women, who are the highest rated out of both demographics to be committed to prison with addiction, seem to be improving themselves through education too: “I have made a lot of progression... I have faced barriers but now can face things without barriers

Physical Education and encouragement for such was slightly touched upon by staff and women. One woman from Limerick explained that “There is no chance at all for exercise, only in the gym. You can’t walk, not even up and down the stairs. You can ask to be allowed out into the yard when you are unlocked, but there’s nothing to do out there. There is nothing to do. There isn’t even a bench to sit on” (Quinlan, 2006:215). On the staff perspective, “The women don’t care for the gym, they’re not a sporty lot” (Quinlan, 2006:185).

The working skills that are available to women appear to operate on a basis of a pastime, where tokens or small gifts are given in exchange for their work. One woman in Limerick said that “...if you do jobs (chores) you get the extra phone call or some tobacco” (Quinlan, 2006:188). The rewards women receive for doing the work are treats rather than recompense (Quinlan, 2006:188).

6.5 Self Reflection and Achieving Educational Accessibility

Theme 4

Women are aware of their own strengths, and they are in the best position to recognise if education is something they can benefit from or would struggle engaging with. Some women spoke of why they cannot attend class and what happens during the time that they would be spending in the prison school; “People who sign up for classes and don’t attend are then ‘locked back’”. Another woman says that this opportunity to engage in educational opportunities helps her sobriety;” That’s why I go to school, I keep my mind on school and then I go back, and I clean, trying to keep my mind going... by being occupied in some way [to stay away from drugs in prison] (Doyle, 2017: 48). Another Traveller woman says her mental health, particularly anxiety prevents her from engaging:” I can’t [go to classes] because of my anxiety, yeah. I can’t go and be together with the women without medication...I would be offered drugs but no I wouldn’t do that like” (Doyle, 2017:42). Women from England & Wales research also mention how education may not be the answer to their problems: “Completing a program does not mean my risk suddenly disappears” (PRT,2019:4)

As stated in the last gender-based theme, women express concerns of not having enough resources compared to male counterparts they know who are getting better quality skills and attention to educational opportunities. Research has shown that men, who are less likely than women to have custody of their own children prior to incarceration, are not as dedicated as mothers in terms of being reunited with their children upon release (Wood & Grasmick, 1999). One Irish woman serving time at the Dochas Centre mentions that “For my children I want to show my children that no matter what I made a mistake, but it doesn’t mean my life is over and that I can succeed” (RTE,2014).

Traveller women, as over-represented in the female prison system in Ireland, know that more culturally diverse teaching and staff would help encourage more people to engage with the programs as it had been as beneficial to them: “We need to inspire young Travellers to get into courses and work” (Doyle, 2017:42). Another woman made the suggestion of more culturally diverse teachers, such as Traveller teachers. “It would be good if we had a Traveller teacher. It would be good because they’d be able to look up to her and know the teachers’ not making a laugh” (Doyle, 2017:43). This refers back to the importance of inclusivity and possible one to one learning so that women do not feel ashamed for engaging with education even if they have literacy or learning difficulties, these should be accommodated to everyone equally. These role models could be seen communicating and encouraging Traveller women as this woman

emphasised: “It’s important to look at Travellers employed in the Prison Service as grounds people, as kitchen staff, as probation officers, as teachers because what that does is if you have staff by having conversations with the other staff they learn because they don’t only see. They meet Travellers who are in employment” (Doyle, 2017:43). This would also aid in the treatment and labelling of prisoners contributing to the dehumanisation of women already struggling with their own identity in prison.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has delved into the educational experiences of women currently in prison. A substantial amount of intersection appears not only throughout this chapter but in both findings, as many women face the prospect of prison with nothing left, including literacy and writing skills. Those who choose to participate, can greatly benefit in not only the academic side of their lives but also to grow more confidence in themselves. The majority of the dataset were Traveller women who were open to discuss their own journeys with education and their views as to potential changes to encourage more engagement from the Travelling Community.

Gender was also a concern amongst prisoners as these perceptions can damage the credibility of the education/work opportunities provided in prison, therefore discouraging those who would already be at severe risk of non-engagement. FNPs whilst not hugely involved in this dataset, influenced the theme of struggles of literacy and language further discouraging them from applying themselves within prison, for example submitting complaints. Finally, this chapter aimed to bring the views of women currently in prison at the time they were interviewed and discuss influences and barriers that they face coming into contact with upskilling, work and educational programs and regimes. Within the discussions and recommendations, this dataset will be condensed into what Ireland could improve on, as well as how future research can encapsulate this in a more inclusive way.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This research has brought not only the Irish female Prisoner into a broader perspective but the current available sources, documents, media and reports that shape women's experiences too. Whilst the dataset was difficult to accumulate, the findings of this study still tell us of how we are responding to women in prison and whether it is a successful strategy. This study accumulated various themes across two pillars of prison life; healthcare and education. Here in this penultimate chapter, conclusions will be brought out regarding the main findings across both pillars as well as how intersectionality can inform penal policy in the future; answering the fourth and final research question guiding this research.

7.2 Environmental Importance

Whilst all data collected served purposes of informing people of the realities of life inside prison, the RTE documentary *Women on the Inside* (2014) spoke volumes for this research. It not only contextualised the situations and complex hardships that women go through, but also exposed the importance of 'keeping the peace', particularly with those who are pregnant. The Dochas Centre proved to be a place of rescue and relief amongst prisoners. Though some spoke about the 'padded room' as not only a form of punishment but a place to go when a woman needs to regain control following an outburst or is feeling suicidal (Quinlan, 2006;2011). This reiterated the deterioration of health intertwined with incarceration as explored by (Harner & Riley, 2013). Phoenix House acted as positive and supportive building for women who were expecting or with young baby's, though sometimes it can be a dangerous place whenever a row breaks out. Nevertheless, a substantial finding was that women do seek refuge in prisons (Gueta, 2020:8). Particularly in Ireland, women who have multiple complex needs see prison as a safer and a more positive way to live in all respects with addiction, healthcare and learning basic

skills like reading or writing. This is contrary to the arguments made by scholars that imprisonment should be first and foremost a 'last resort' response (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, & Owen, 1994, p.2). Particularly in the cases of pregnant prisoners, the point must be made that stresses and strains of a prison environment could lead to negative impacts on both mother and baby.

7.3 Awareness of Disparities

Women talked both reflectively and honestly within both areas of education and health. Traveller women were largely forthcoming about their identities and how it has not only impacted their lives within prison but has also raised perceptions about how their close family view them differently, reinforcing their status as 'women behind bars' as something to be ashamed of. Women are also aware of their expectations as mothers, as daughters and as sisters. The findings of Travis & Wail (2003) were an important aspect to this as women did feel that their status as being a prisoner led them to feel inadequate, particularly those with young baby's who would have to come back to prison once born. Women also knew of how their lives have been negatively affected by drug and drink addiction which has led to women losing everything they have, in their words. Women would also speak about comparisons between men and women in terms of upskilling and the availability of educational opportunities. Though more research would be needed to clarify these claims, men are given more priority in Ireland, simply looking at the amount of prisons at different security levels and the potentially increased funding for the larger portion of people committed in Ireland.

7.4 Concern and Hope for Family

What was evident within the theme of 'Double Deviance and Differential Treatment' was the concern amongst minority prisoners for the safety and health of their family and children. Foreign National Prisoners told stories of getting caught up in drug trafficking for the desperation of money for sick family members. This reintroduced the victim/offender overlap where, though this can arguable be applied to lots of themes particularly stand out here as the act of good faith can ruin a family, particularly a family far away from home. Women also

highlighted their children as a motivator for their educational attainment and being on good behaviour for potential privileges such as early release.

7.5 Recommendations of Intersectional Discovery

This study ignites the intersectional exploration of female prisons in modern Ireland, however, due to the limitations and desk-based method of this study, there are many ways in which other forms of exploration can be applied.

Batastini, et, al (2022)'s guide to intersectional research was a hugely beneficial resource as to how this current study could approach imprisonment in Ireland. However, quantitative methodological approaches as mentioned here should not be ignored and could prove very insightful corresponding to the inherently statistical prison reports currently available. More insights into education are welcome, particularly with regard to women serving time in prison on shorter sentences. In addition, more studies into Foreign National Prisoner Women could add dimension onto the intersectional barriers that are faced in a foreign country.

The opportunity for exploration also expands with the opening of Limerick's Female Wing, which could be a positive opportunity to comparatively combine and analyse the present available findings from secondary sources present in this study and newly conducted interviews and reports also containing such.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In conclusion of this study, women are inherently affected by multiple forms of oppression at once. This was firstly explored through a review of international literature where although not comprehensively explored through the context of women in prison, gave an insight into the different needs of justice-involved women through different cultures and subcultures such as prison violence, disability and different health cohorts. This informed the more refined Irish Custodial Review which analysed the historical and present penal response for women in Ireland, looking at the attitudes and the key differences in Irish Prisons for women. In addition, the present landscape of healthcare and education was informed in order to move onto the experiences of women in prison and understand perspectives in relation to what is currently available in Irish Prisons respectively.

The findings from this research were relied upon to explore qualitative views and lived experiences from inside Irish Prisons, but paid particular attention to the bigger picture regarding inherent barriers such as race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, familial background and mental health. In this study, Irish women's voices were heard, though many more are currently in silence. More research looking into the depths of intersectionality is desperately needed to understand how women can reintegrate into society so that they do not have to find solace in a criminal institution. It is clear that many of the interventions and services available to prisoners can slowly encourage women to build their confidence, as mentioned by one woman. Outside supports and educational opportunities integrated will aid in bringing the outside world in, reinforcing that the 'outside' is supportive and can be safer than being confined.

This study aimed to take Crenshaw's (1989) foundational exploration into criminological contexts and through its repurposing and application to female prisoner experiences, this study

has helped widen the pathway for Irish women who experience oppression, even when it is not visible.

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