

Report on the
LITERACY NEEDS
Of Women in Conflict With The Law



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF
ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES

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Barbara MacDonald,
Researcher

A WORD ABOUT THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (C.A.E.F.S.) is a federation of autonomous Societies which works with, and on behalf of women involved with the justice system, in particular women in conflict with the law. Its members are Elizabeth Fry Societies - community based agencies dedicated to offering services and programs to women in need, advocating for reforms, and offering a forum within which the public may be informed about and participate in, all aspects of the justice system as it affects women. Volunteerism is an essential part of Elizabeth Fry work and both volunteers and professional staff are involved in program and service delivery.

The first society was established in Vancouver in 1939. Today, there are 19 Elizabeth Fry Societies across Canada. C.A.E.F.S. was, originally conceived of in 1969 and was incorporated as a voluntary non-profit organization in 1975. Its Board of Directors meets three times a year (more frequently as funds permit) and is composed of one representative for each Society, a President and a past President. Major policy papers and resolutions are presented to the Association's membership at its Annual General Meeting, at which each Society has three votes.

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REPORT ON THE LITERACY NEEDS OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

1.0 Introduction

Early in 1989, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies initiated a research project aimed at determining the links between literacy and women in conflict with the law. While recent research indicates that as many as 20 to 25% of adult Canadians are functionally illiterate these figures jump to 60% when applied to prison inmates. Illiteracy has been the focus of increasing attention in recent years, but large gaps remain in the research pertaining to the links among illiteracy, poverty and crime among women. This study was undertaken in an attempt to explore those links, as well as the special needs of women in conflict with the law as regards literacy training.

1.1 The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (C.A.E.F.S.) is a federation of Elizabeth Fry Societies individual community-based agencies mandated to work with and on behalf of women involved with the criminal justice system. In particular, C.A.E.F.S. advocates for legislative reforms, offering a forum which enables members of the public to become informed about and participate in all aspects of the justice system as it affects women.

In recent years, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies has become increasingly concerned about the high levels of illiteracy among women in conflict with the law. Each year since 1986, resolutions concerning learning disabilities and illiteracy have been passed at C.A.E.F.S. Annual General Meetings:

May 31, 1986: Whereas there are approximately four million illiterate adults in Canada; and

Whereas the female offender often suffers from a lack of educational skills; and
Whereas the education system fails to prepare women for the job market which leaves them stranded in low-wage ghettos;

Therefore be it resolved that CAEFS support groups whose function it is to lobby the federal and provincial governments to develop and implement a national strategy to eradicate functional illiteracy among adult Canadians.

May 31, 1986: Whereas the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities has declared 1986-87 the Year of the Learning Disabled and the Law, therefore be it resolved that C.A.E.F.S. and member organizations recognize and support understanding of the issues involved.

May 31, 1986: Whereas it is now recognized that a high percentage of persons in the criminal justice system are learning disabled; and
Whereas this fact is only minimally recognized by criminal justice system voluntary sector agencies;
Therefore be it resolved that CAEFS and member organizations recognize the necessity to meet the needs of "learning disabled" persons in the criminal justice system and that CAEFS distribute information pertinent to the problem to member societies.

June 6, 1987: Whereas C.A.E.F.S. resolved at the 1986 AGM that we support groups whose function it is to lobby the federal and provincial governments to develop and implement a national strategy to eradicate illiteracy among adult Canadians, therefore be it resolved that C.A.E.F.S. endorse the Cedar Glen Declaration and that C.A.E.F.S. when the opportunity arises, stress to the Correctional Services of Canada that literacy training, to be successful, must be "learner centered" , that is, that a program of study is devised after consultation with the learner;

September, 1988: Whereas at least one-half of the Canadian prison population is illiterate and whereas many illiterate people have learning disabilities that, in many cases go undetected, be it resolved that C.A.E.F.S. lobby Correctional Services Canada to screen inmates for learning disabilities when admitting them to prison, or when assessing them for educational programs; and further, that specialists in the learning disabled field be hired to facilitate the education of the learning disabled inmate; that correctional staff be educated in learning disabilities; that inmates be trained as tutors; and that those inmates who wish to study be provided with sufficient resources and space to do so.

In addition, a representative of C.A.E.F.S. attended and reported on a conference sponsored by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, entitled "Harvesting Abilities".

At the local level, some Elizabeth Fry Societies have expanded their life skills programming to include literacy training programs, both within institutions and with aftercare clients. Individual societies have expressed interest in more effective access to local literacy training resources, and in matching clients to programs which would best meet their needs.

Initial exploration of the problem of illiteracy among women in conflict with the law reveals a dearth of scholarly research, and a concomitant lack of programming at the local level. This study was developed in an attempt to both reveal the gaps, and suggest appropriate remedies. The ultimate goals of the study were: to define the special literacy-training needs of women in conflict with the law; to identify current literacy programming, either within local Elizabeth Fry Societies or in the wider community; to develop a plan for future action regarding the literacy needs of women in conflict with the law; and to identify an effective mechanism for information exchange on literacy issues and resources among Elizabeth Fry Societies.

To this end, a number of activities were carried out over a four-month period. A limited selected literature review was conducted, based on information collected by national organizations such as the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women.

A questionnaire was developed and tested for the client group, and was administered on-site with both illiterate and newly-literate clients. The questionnaire was designed to explore clients' personal attitudes to illiteracy, their experience in trying to cope, and their evaluations of the effectiveness and relevance of existing programming.

On-site interviews were also conducted with local executive directors or their designates, to reflect the experiences of each Elizabeth Fry Society with regard to client illiteracy, staff perceptions of clients' attitudes, and the agency's involvement in client assessment, counselling, and program delivery.

2.0 Methodology: Action Research

Research is defined by the Women's Research centre in Vancouver as "the systematic collection and analysis of information on a particular topic." Within this definition, data collection can take place in a number of ways: through surveys, interviews questionnaires, controlled experiments using random samples and so on. In addition, data analysis can take a number of forms, and is commonly divided into two types -- quantitative, involving statistical information or numbers, and qualitative, involving detailed descriptions of particular circumstances or situations

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis can provide useful ways of looking at research material. For example, quantitative analysis can be helpful as a way of understanding or comparing social trends, such as the fact that more than 50% of women in penal institutions are illiterate. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, can provide a coherent, detailed picture of the lived experiences of the women themselves.

In many research projects, quantitative research is favoured, since the numbers quantitative research produces are seen as "objective" and without bias, and therefore somehow more "truthful". Such a preference reflects a common perception about research: that it must be "uncoloured by feelings or opinions". This implies that the people doing the research must have no inherent viewpoint, and no biases which could affect the outcome of the research.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is perceived as less rigorous, since it is based not on comparisons of numbers or so-called objective data, but on the lived experiences of the subjects involved. Clearly, such experiences are strongly coloured by subjective feelings and opinions on the part of the people being studied, and are presented to the researcher's audience through the subjective lens of the researcher.

The Women's Research Centre notes that "everyone -- even a researcher has a point of view, feelings and opinions that, are difficult, if not impossible to set aside....It follows

that if a researcher pretends to be distanced and does not declare her assumptions and opinions, she is more likely to produce biased research."

This means that the common idea that quantitative data is somehow more pure, and therefore more valid than qualitative data is not only false, but misleading. Rather, both types of research have important rules to ply in forming a complete picture of certain circumstances or situations.

Generally, researchers undertaking a particular study tend to have some vested interest in the area they wish to examine. This is true whether the analysis is performed from a qualitative or quantitative perspective. If researchers' assumptions are stated openly, as they generally are in qualitative research, they can be incorporated into the body of the research, and can then be tested and understood for what they are.

2.1 Action Research

Action research carries the experiential, subjective approach of qualitative research one step further: in action research, information, is gathered and analyzed for the expressed purpose of informing political action and social change. The focus in action research is on gathering information through "participant observation", a technique used in anthropological research, in which researchers interact in the community or situation they are studying, and piece together a coherent picture. The Women's Research Centre points out that this kind of research is a way of grounding our analysis (and the action strategies we develop from our analysis) in real life and ensuring that the theories we develop have a basis in reality.

Action research, then, is both qualitative and descriptive. While it makes use of numbers, or statistical data, it does not rely on traditional quantitative methods. The Women's Research Centre notes that "action research usually uses small scale intensive interviews which are always carried out systematically. As in all research, all stages of the action research process are rationalized, justified and documented."

Research can play an important role in developing analyses of specific problems; it can provide documentation to use in lobbying, advocacy or education; it can help organizations decide what strategies or courses of action might best address problems; and it can strengthen or validate the positions of people who are affected by problems. What it cannot do, however, is solve problems or produce social action. Rather, it must take its place as one tool for social change, along with organizing, lobbying, advocacy and education.

Finally, action research asserts that the real expertise in any area lies with those who experience it. This differs from the traditional approach, which presumes that "experts" must have official credentials and documentation from institutes of higher learning, in order to profess knowledge of a subject. Action research moves away from this hierarchical approach, validating the lived realities of those it studies, and incorporating their perceptions and accrued insights into the body of knowledge.

2.2 Using Action Research Methods in This Project

When this research project was developed, it became apparent that there were large gaps in information about literacy programs for women in conflict with the law. Not only was it unclear exactly what programs are currently available, but there was no real sense of what kinds of programming would be most effective in reaching and holding this population in literacy programs.

To assess the extent of the problem of illiteracy, workers' perceptions of how clients feel about their illiteracy, and each Elizabeth Fry Society's involvement in assessment, counselling and program delivery, it was decided that the first step in project design would consist of on-site interviews with local executive directors or their designates. The following Elizabeth Fry Societies were consulted:

- Elizabeth Fry Society of Halifax, 1657 Barrington St., Ste. #320, Halifax NS;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto, 215 Wellesley St. E., Toronto, ON;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel, 134 Queen Street E., Suits 401, Brampton, ON;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan, 4307 - 135 21st St. E., Saskatoon, SK;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton, 702 McLeod Bldg, 10136 - 100 St., Edmonton, AB;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, 18 Botsford St., Moncton, NB;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary, 4204, 1000 - 7th Ave. S.W., Calgary, AB;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Hamilton, 627 Main St. E., 2nd Floor, Hamilton, ON;
- Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society, #201 - 156 Victoria St., Kamloops, BC;
- Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society, 202 - 1610 Bertram St., Kelowna, BC;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Kingston, #501 - 837 Princess St., Kingston, ON;
- Société Elizabeth Fry de Montréal, Métropolitaine, 1000 Sherbrooke Est, Montréal, PQ;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa, 195A Bank St., Ottawa, ON;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of B.C., Prince George Branch, #204, 2666 S. Queensway, Prince George, BC;
- South Cariboo Elizabeth Fry Society, P.O. Box 603, Ashcroft, BC;
- Elizabeth Fry Society, Sudbury Branch, 204 Elm St. W., Sudbury, ON;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, 106 Townsend St., Sydney, NS;

- 10) How could your Elizabeth Fry Society worker support you in your efforts around your literacy needs?
- 11) Is there anything else you would like to add or tell me about your experience?
- 12) Would you like a copy of the report when it is done?

In addition, an interview schedule was developed for use in Interviewing staff at local Elizabeth Fry Societies. This interview schedule read as follows:

STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name: Elizabeth Fry Society:

Date: Contact Person:

- 1) How are women referred to your Elizabeth Fry Society?
- 2) When a woman comes to your agency, describe her initial contact with a staff person.
- 3) Is a literacy assessment done when a woman first comes to an agency?
- 4) If not, when would the literacy needs of a client be identified?
- 5) Describe the usual procedure that is followed when literacy needs are identified with an individual client.
- 6) What resources do you have at hand to respond to the literacy needs of the client?
- 7) Do you feel that these resources are adequate to allow you to respond to the client's need?
- 8) If not, what resources would you want to have to better respond to the client's need?
- 9) Does your agency provide direct literacy services or programs?
(if yes) Could you describe them?
(if no) Does your agency refer clients to other agencies?
Could you list these agencies?
- 10) Are the agencies' responses to referrals satisfactory? If not, why?
- 11) Do you have a follow-up procedure for a literacy referral?
(if yes) Could you describe it?
- 12) Does the agency have a list of services or programs offered by literacy groups?
(if no) Would that be of assistance to you?
- 13) What percentage of the women who come through the agency would you estimate have literacy needs?

The open-ended nature of these questions is in keeping with a qualitative approach to information-gathering. Rather than presenting respondents with a pre-set number of response choices, and asking them to choose the one which most closely resembled her experience, the researcher chose to allow a more free-flowing exchange of information. In addition, some of the questions, particularly in the staff interviews, were geared specifically toward initiating future action in the area of improving literacy programming for women in conflict with the law.

These interview schedules were administered to a total of 48 respondents at Elizabeth Fry Societies across Canada. The pattern of consultation varied from location to location, depending on who was identified within each local Elizabeth Fry Society as having the most information regarding client literacy needs, as well as the availability and willingness of clients to speak on a potentially sensitive subject.

During the time spent interviewing clients and staff, the researcher also began to develop profiles of literacy programs which are currently offered in provincial correctional institutions. A summary of these profiles is included in the documentation. As with the interview summaries, names and locations of programs were omitted to preserve confidentiality.

3.0 Women in Conflict with the Law: A Profile

In order to understand the literacy needs of women who come into conflict with the law, it is first important to understand the women themselves; who are they, where do they come from, and what motivates them? Traditionally, women have been under-represented in criminological studies. The typical justification of this oversight has been that women represent only a small minority of the people charged with criminal offences, and rarely pose a major threat to public safety. Despite these rationalizations, the fact remains that thousands of Canadian women are charged with Criminal Code offenses each year, and thousands more are at risk for developing criminal careers.

It is impossible to fully grasp the problems experienced by women in conflict with the law, without understanding the social context experienced by all women in Canada in the late twentieth century. While the feminist movement has enabled women to participate more fully in the traditionally male-dominated areas of education, the labour force and the political arena, the benefits of these advances are still not shared equally among all women.

Nor have women as a group achieved economic, educational or social parity with men. Holly Johnson (in Adelberg 1987) estimates that "one in ten women who lives with a man is abused by him, and one in two females will be the victim of unwanted sexual acts at some point in their lives.... ninety-eight out of every one hundred women will marry during their lifetime, and sixty-eight will end up living alone....upon divorce the average woman's income goes down forty per cent, while the average man's disposable income goes up seventy per cent The average income of families headed by women is half the

average income of families headed by men. Fully forty-five per cent of female-headed families live below the poverty line compared to ten per cent a male-headed families."

In addition, women remain concentrated in part-time or low-paying jobs, making up 76% of all minimum-wage earners in 1981. This ghettoization of women's work means, in real terms, that the average woman in Canada still only earns 64 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Johnson states, "For the most disadvantaged women, those who comprise the majority of women who come into conflict with the law, equal opportunity remains a distant reality Women continue to be socialized to expect a limited range of functions in life which for the most part preclude economic independence and foster low expectations and low self-esteem."

It is from this milieu that women come into conflict with the law. While early theorists on the subject of the "female criminal" hypothesized that these women were morally deficient, devious, or maladjusted to their natural role as women, more recent theorists have blamed the feminist movement for the rising numbers of women in conflict with the law. This latter school of thought posits that crimes carried out by women are caused by women abandoning their natural passivity and emulating men (who are presumably more criminally inclined).

When women in conflict with the law are examined as a group, however, a more complex picture emerges. These women tend to be young, poor, under-educated and unskilled. Native women are over-represented, as are those addicted to alcohol, drugs or both. Many have been physically or sexually abused either as children or as adults, and many are emotionally or financially dependent on abusive male partners.

In 1985, 60% of crimes committed by women were property-related; over 50% were theft or fraud. This represents more than twice the proportion of men charged with these offenses. "Women's participation in property offenses is consistent with their traditional roles as consumers and, increasingly, as low income, semi-skilled, sole support providers for their families. In keeping with the rapid increase in female-headed households and the stresses associated with poverty, greater numbers of women are being charged with shoplifting, cheque forging and welfare fraud," writes Johnson.

Another crime typically associated with women in conflict with the law is prostitution, which thrives in a society which values women more for their sexuality than for their labour. The commodification of women is fuelled by the economic stresses experienced most acutely by young, poorly educated women who are unable to find other employment. In addition, prostitution among teenagers is associated with high rates of physical and/or sexual abuse in the family of origin. Young girls who run away from intolerably abusive fathers often find themselves in even more abusive situations on the street, and are at higher risk for identification and eventual arrest.

A great deal of media attention has been paid recently to statistics indicating that crimes of violence among women are on the upswing. Indeed, almost 7,000 charges were laid against women in 1985 for crimes involving violence, up from less than 1,200 in 1965.

Research in this area indicates that these crimes consist for the most part of acts of retaliation or rebellion against abusive or exploitative relationships. Over 60% of homicides committed by women in 1985 occurred in cases in which the offender was related to the victim, either by marriage or in a common-law relationship.

Crimes committed by women may be seen as symptoms of the sense of futility and desperation which accompany a desperate life situation, whether it stems from poverty, homelessness, or physical, emotional or sexual abuse. This is borne out by the available information regarding incarcerated women; for many, alcohol has played a part in their imprisonment; and 34% of women admitted to provincial institutions are there because they are poor -- they defaulted on fine payments. Johnson notes that "for some, life is a revolving door of theft or alcoholism and jail."

3.1 Native women

Native men and women are over-represented among Canadians who are arrested; and Native women are even more over-represented than Native men. Like women in general, Native people, and Native women in particular, live in deprived conditions, with a lack of social and economic opportunities compared with non-Native men. Native women not only suffer from gender-based discrimination, but also from racial discrimination and laws that, until 1986, deprived them of their Indian status, forced them off the reserves where they lived, and denied them certain rights.

A study by the Ontario Native Women's Association revealed some disturbing statistics:

- 37% of Native women incarcerated in Ontario were 20 years of age or younger;
- 52% of these women were first arrested between the ages of 14 and 17;
- 18% were younger than 14 when they were first arrested;
- 40% had been arrested 15 times or more;
- 55% had been incarcerated one to three times previously;
- 21% had 17 prior incarcerations.

Once again, it is crucial to consider the overall system of structural inequality in Canada, as well as the sociocultural milieu from which Native women come into conflict with the law. The last century has seen a breakdown of traditional Native roles and values, and a loss of power and personal status among Native people. The residential school system, which removed Native children from their communities, resulted in a denigration of parents' values and options. The welfare system, which served to "pick up the pieces" of Native culture following increasing industrialization and urbanization of Canadian society, assisted in the breakdown of traditional Native families.

Carol LaPrairie (in Adelberg, 1987) notes that Native women may come into contact with the law in a variety of ways: they may retaliate in kind against abusive partners; they may escape from an abusive home situation and migrate to an urban area where discrimination by the larger society, combined with a usually low level of skills and education, may

relegate them to the ranks of the unemployed or unemployable." This ghettoization, like the ghettoization of non-Native women, increases the probability of alcohol or drug abuse, prostitution and property crimes. In addition, says LaPrairie, "even without engaging in any of these activities, being in an urban area increases their exposure to the police, some of whom may be biased in the way they exercise their discretionary judgment when deciding whether or not to arrest a Native person."

Both Native and non-Native women face economic, sociocultural and legal factors which, to a large extent, determine whether they will come into conflict with the law. Both groups are subject to poverty, sexual and physical violence, a lack of educational and occupational opportunity, and gender- and/or racially-based discrimination.

These descriptions of women offenders offer a microcosm of women in society at large. As Johnson points out, "their offenses are concentrated in the types of property crimes that could well be considered means of survival in a time when employment options for unskilled women are becoming increasingly restricted....Statistics suggest that offenders, like a great many Canadian women, need greater opportunities for advancement, job retraining and economic independence."

Women in conflict with the law, then, may have needs which differ considerably from male offenders'. The challenge is to provide programming which meets these needs, helping to break the cycle of poverty, abuse, alcoholism and despair which has been the lot of so many women who come up against the legal system.

4.0 Women, Poverty and Literacy

In grappling with the interface between literacy and women in conflict with the law, it is important to understand what is commonly meant by "literacy". In September, 1987, the Southam Literacy Survey was released, revealing that a shocking five million Canadians were "functionally illiterate." In the course of this study, 25 "representative" Canadians were chosen to act as jurors. They were presented with a list of 38 questions compiled by Southam, and asked to indicate the 10 which they felt "ordinary adults should be able to answer correctly just to get by in today's society." (Southam, 1987) When respondents were actually tested, they were deemed "literate" if they were able to answer eight of the 10 questions correctly.

This testing illustrates an important problem in the field of literacy; it is very difficult to determine who is, and who is not, literate. Literacy itself has been defined as "educated", "schooled", "able to read and write", and "well-instructed" -- each of these definitions having a slightly different connotation, and each carrying an implied negative value judgment about people who do not live up to their criteria.

Increasingly, there has been a movement among literacy teachers away from attempts to define and measure literacy. No internationally-recognized inventory of skills exists, and even if such a scale were in use, literacy needs vary from place to place, culture to culture, and circumstance to circumstance. Literacy needs depend on technological,

economic and cultural development, since different levels of proficiency are required to fulfill both social and individual needs.

Carmen St. John Hunter describes some of the difficulty in determining literacy levels:

"When adults are given passages to read in order to test their literacy level, what is actually revealed is their ability or inability to read the particular material provided. They are judged to be at a certain age or grade level on the basis of research done with children or on the basis of tasks considered important by literate test-makers. How these adults perform has little to do with their ability to carry out activities that are central to their lives. Nothing is learned about what they need or want to do with linguistic skills, not whether they can function in the concrete settings of their own, everyday lives." (WEI Reports)

As Tiki Mercury-Clarke puts it, "Is this shampoo for oily hair?/Do I add water to this milk?/How often must I take this pill?/I didn't know that it was made of silk What's the matter can't you read?/What's the matter can't you read?" (Canadian Woman Studies, Fall/Winter 1988) Illiteracy, the inability to perform tasks which "educated" people take for granted, is presented in documents such as the Southam survey as a threat to productivity and to Canada's national (financial) interests. Illiterate people are seen as "a problem", rather than a symptom of a diseased society.

Where does women's experience fit into the experience of illiteracy? First, literacy, like women's realities of poverty, physical and sexual abuse, and occupational limitation, cannot be separated from the social, political and economic milieu which creates it.

St. John Hunter notes that, worldwide, illiterate people "include the poorest of the poor in every nation. In rural areas, they are the landless peasants, virtually enslaved by systems of production that deny them a just economic return for their labor (sic). In urban centers (sic) they are the unemployed and the underemployed, marginal and often transient populations, excluded from the mainstream of the societies in which they live.... They have only minimal power over their environment -- physical, political and economic."

This lack of power echoes the lack of self-determination experienced by women, most particularly women in conflict with the law. During the course of this project, the Canadian Council on Learning Opportunities for Women was consulted, and noted that:

- Only 25% of functionally illiterate women are in the paid labour force compared with 60% of women as a whole;
- Half of all female-headed families live below the poverty line. The rate of illiteracy in this group is much higher than the national average;
- Jobs available to women with poor reading and writing skills are traditionally the lowest-paid jobs -- such as domestic work, sewing and machine operation;

- The average woman of any educational status who works full time makes only 68% of what the average man makes. Women with less than grade 8 make an average only 69% of what men earn.

Women, poverty, illiteracy, crime -- the links become clear when one realizes that crime, particularly property-related crime, and a lack of literacy skills, are common among people who are socially and economically disenfranchised.

4.1 Literacy Programming for Women

Until very recently, "literacy programming was literacy programming" that is, no differentiation was made between the needs of male and female adult learners. Few scholars have seriously looked into the relationships between gender differences in learning styles and needs, and existing adult education programming. During the past decade, female psychologists have posited that women tend to define themselves in terms of connections, relatedness, and how they respond to others (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Males, on the other hand, are socialized to see themselves in terms of separation autonomy and adherence to abstract standards of justice and reciprocity. These individualistic, male-identified values are reflected in much of the traditional "one-on-one" learning which takes place in adult education today.

Francis E. Kazemek states that:

"Much in the form, structure and content of what Fingeret (1984) calls "individually oriented" adult literacy programs may be antagonistic to women's ways of knowing and defining themselves. Such individually-oriented programs are by far in the majority in the United States. They approach literacy from an individual standpoint, isolating literacy skill acquisition from other issues that clients may be facing.' (Fingeret, 1984) I may also add that they isolate literacy skill acquisition from differences in the ways men and women know and view the world." (Life Long Learning, Jan.1988)

In response to the deficiencies in this limited way of viewing adult learning, Kazemek suggests that adult learning take place in "learning circles". Within these groups, instructors and students work collaboratively as co-learners, building on each others' strengths, and empowering learners to begin to act collectively to change their worlds. An additional advantage to the learning circle model is that it is much less labour and time-intensive than traditional one-on-one models.

4.2 Barriers to Learning

"How can I go to school? I have kids to take care of."

"I haven't been inside a classroom in 39 years."

"I went to school in Alberta, you know; they weren't so particular in those days about how much Indian kids learned."

"I work all day and attend A.A. at night and I have a family to take care of."

"I need all my money for groceries. How can I take time off work?"

"My husband won't let me."

"I'm scared."

While many women feel that literacy will enrich or improve their lives, their desire to learn may be mediated by the circumstances of their lives. On a practical level, women experience barriers to attending adult education programs, stemming from their role within the family. Responsibility for child care may hinder a women's ability to participate in classes, and it may be either too difficult or too costly for her to arrange for childcare. She may find herself unable to attend classes if a child is ill or in need, and she may find that the distractions presented by children at home may prevent her from completing homework.

If she has a man in her life, he may feel threatened by her attempts to take action on her own behalf, and especially by the possibility that she will become better-educated. While some men may feel supportive, others will react by either not helping (by refusing to provide childcare or drive her to classes), or by becoming verbally, emotionally or physically abusive.

The isolation of women is another factor which must be dealt with in providing literacy training. Women become isolated in their homes for a variety of reasons: if they are sole-support mothers, they often feel unable to leave for any period of time; if they are abused wives, their spouses may threaten them with harm if they socialize with others; and if they are illiterate, they may feel ashamed and unable to cope in the outside world. Illiteracy presents women with a formidable barrier to even finding out about literacy programs.

In designing literacy programming, these circumstances must all be taken into account. Some solutions might include:

- Making childcare available to students. Sometimes this is not possible because of physical limitations of the learning space, but at the very least, childcare allowances must be provided;
- Scheduling classes at convenient times. Women with school-age children might find daytime classes most appropriate. Women who work outside the home may require more flexible hours. It may be necessary to offer the same class in different time slots to accommodate as many learners as possible;
- Creating women-only groups. Women are often uncomfortable speaking freely in front of men, and male socialization often leads men to discount, ignore or ridicule women's ideas and experiences. In addition, for many women, classes may be the only all-female environment to which they have access. Women who come from abusive home situations, may find refuge and emotional support in all-woman classes. All women may experience the classes as an important break from daily routine, and the support of other women can be invaluable in encouraging attendance, boosting learning capabilities, and improving self-esteem.

4.3 Making it Relevant: What Women Want to Learn

Once women have made the decision to enter a literacy program, it is crucial that the subject matter be relevant to their daily lives. One way to determine this is to listen to the learners, and reflect their concerns in class programming. For example, many women may wish to explore issues such as health care, birth control, childcare or female sexuality. Other areas of interest might include information about what jobs are available, or information on setting further training once the basic literacy course is completed.

While material must relate to women's lives, it should not portray women stereotypically. While it must be grounded in reality, it must also allow for the possibility of change. Women in literacy classes might be much less interested in the adventures of a female executive in a computer company than in the life of a working-class woman who is abused by her husband, leaves, and makes a new life for herself. Language used in literacy classes must be inclusive of women, and must not be sexist, racist or otherwise discriminatory.

5.0 Institutional Program Profiles

During the course of this research project, individual learners and women who were still illiterate were interviewed, along with staff members from a number of local Elizabeth Fry Societies. In addition, the literacy programs currently underway in several correctional institutions were profiled. These profiles are presented first, as a way of understanding the reactions and experiences of the women who were interviewed: for many women, these programs represent the context in which they view any and all literacy programming.

5.1 Profile 1

This literacy program produces a monthly newsletter for inmates at a provincial correctional institution. The program employs four women five days per week, and maintains a waiting list of women who would like to participate. In the course of literacy training, computer skills are also taught, and computer seminars and publishing workshops have been held. In addition, learners have produced handouts on health and childcare, written at a lower readability level in order to make them accessible to as many women as possible. Another project involved re-writing and simplifying the institution's official handbook, in order to make it more accessible.

At the time of the researcher's visit to this institution, there was no classroom instruction taking place. Previously, women had had access to Adult Basic Education courses. However, at this time, no tutors from the community were going into the institution to work with inmates.

Although a week-long peer tutor training workshop had been conducted, with 12 women participating, no peer tutoring relationships were currently in operation. According to the women who participated in the training, inmates who needed help with reading and

writing were too self-conscious to ask to help; the stigma, they felt, was too great, particularly in a closed system such as a penal institution. Another problem facing the peer tutoring program was the high turnover within the institution: most of the tutors who had been trained had already left.

Funding for this program is provided by the federal Secretary of State.

5.2 Profile 2

This provincial program only has room for six learners, since there is limited space available in the room designated for literacy training in the institution. The two-month old program, sponsored by the local Elizabeth Fry Society and the Secretary of State, is "learner-centered", utilizing individual and small-group learning. Participants receive \$3.90 per day to attend. This is the highest end of the pay scale within the institution, with some jobs paying as low as \$1.90 per day.

The program operates four days per week, and focuses on reading, writing and comprehension. Little emphasis is placed on developing mathematical skills. One half-day per week is spent on "life skills", and Friday afternoon is designated "free time", and is spent in whatever activities the group decides upon, such as films, group discussions, etc. The issue of self-image among the women is addressed by having one Native Teaching Day every two weeks. The issues discussed on this day are followed up and reinforced during subsequent life skills classes.

All classes are conducted in English, but women may utilize their first languages when doing so would assist in better comprehension of the English material. Participants write a monthly report on the program, as well as reports on various speakers and films presented. An important writing exercise is a three-stage life story, which enables participants to look at their own childhoods, teenage years and adult years.

Women who are released from the institution are referred to literacy programs on the outside. Motivation and attendance in this program are extremely high, probably due to a number of factors. The design is student-centered, with topics generated from learners' actual life experiences, and reflecting their needs, aspirations and realities. The relatively high pay scale makes it attractive to women, and provides a sense that they are accomplishing something important. In addition, the instructor for the program is a Native woman, whose own cultural background resonates with that of many inmates. As noted earlier, it is much easier for women to learn in environments which validate and support the realities of their own lives.

5.3 Profile 3

Another provincial institution provides a program with two full-time staff and 14 learners, resulting in a seven-to-one student-teacher ratio. This program offers Adult Basic Education, computer training, and life skills training. There is a writing group

which currently meets twice per week, and a book of women's writing has been published.

Like the first program profiled, this program suffers from a high rate of turnover, which hampers continuity and reduces group cohesion. Inmates who attend the literacy program are actually offered a financial disincentive, since attendance pays only \$3.00 per day, compared with \$6.00 per day for kitchen work. In addition, when women attending the program are released, no mechanisms for referral or appropriate follow-up are in place.

While the program appears to be adequately staffed, it can be seen that a number of factors discourage attendance. Inadequate pay scales seem to denigrate the importance of adult learning, and no specific efforts were detected to meet the women where they were at. This provides a useful example of the dangers of trying to impose one particular program model, without being sensitive to the needs and realities of the women who could benefit most from literacy training.

Funding for this program comes from a local community college and the Department of the Solicitor General.

5.4 Profile 4

Frontier College has been operating literacy programs in prisons for the past five years. Only in the past two years has the college operated a literacy program in the Kingston Prison for Women (P4W). The program began by matching trained community tutors with students interested in working on reading and writing. The program was then enlarged to include peer tutor training workshops. Three such workshops have taken place, resulting in six current peer-tutor matches.

Women in P4W are referred to the program in a variety of ways. Word of mouth referrals are made by women in the program, as well as tutors, Telidon announcements, and Elizabeth Fry workers. These tutor/student sessions are based on a learner-centered model. The goals are set by both the student and the tutor. The tutoring is highly individualized, and begins at the student's highest level of ability. Some of the materials that are used to teach reading and writing come from the lives of the students: they write their own life stories, as well as poems and letters, which are used as tools for learning.

The formal education programming available to the women is in the prison school. There, two full-time teachers work on a 12 to one ratio with the women. Adult Basic Education is offered, as well as computer programs and word processing. Upon entering the prison, inmates receive a mandatory S.C.A.T. test; if they score below the Grade Eight level, upgrading becomes a requirement for employment in the institution, as well as part of their case management.

A review of the literacy services in place at P4W leads one to conclude that sufficient literacy services are in place for women to access them. This is the case for literacy, but not for Trades Training programs, which are virtually non-existent.

While literacy resources are present, there are many powerful obstacles preventing women from using them. In addition to the ever-present stigma of illiteracy is the institutional overlay of a woman making herself more vulnerable within the prison population at large. As one woman who had served time in P4W stated, "as a woman in jail, you're in a minority, but if you admit you can't read and write, you're more of a minority, and more vulnerable." She also reflected on the possibility of women being able to learn while incarcerated. Drawing on her personal experience, she questioned whether anyone could be interested in learning when "you come back from school to find the woman in the next cell had been stabbed." She described how most of women's energy at P4W goes into merely surviving.

An experienced literacy worker in the prison echoed these sentiments. She observed that women who do learn in prison have to have tremendous support, coupled with their own determination. Survival is the primary agenda. The environment is so debilitating in the short term that it is very difficult to plan for the long term.

It must be noted that despite the overwhelming odds, women are studying in the prison. Between 12 and 24 women are in school and 13 tutor/student matches operate through Frontier College. This total number of learners comes out of a population of 130 women. In addition to the school and the literacy program of Frontier College, women are involved in correspondence university courses, sign language, and a women's studies course in the prison.

During the course of this study, the researcher attempted to interview women in P4W. During early autumn of 1989, however, there have been several "incidents" within the institution. These have resulted in lockdowns and an overall unstable environment. While respecting the decision of the women not to be interviewed, this underscores the volatile environment that women must learn to cope with in prison.

6.0 Elizabeth Fry Society Executive Directors or Designates

This section will present a summary of the information received from Executive Directors or their designates at a number of local Elizabeth Fry Societies. The results have been tabulated for ease of reading, and have been grouped under the corresponding questions in the initial interview schedule. As in all other sections of this report, names and locations have been omitted to preserve confidentiality.

6.1 How are women referred to an Elizabeth Fry Society?

Executive Directors identified a number of ways in which women could be referred, including local court-watch programs, probation requirements stipulated by the courts, pre-release planning on the part of the correctional facility, social assistance, workers, John Howard Society workers, and friends or social networks of the client.

6.2 When a woman comes to the agency, describe her initial contact with a staff person.

Most Executive Directors agreed that initial contact could take place in a variety of ways. She could be referred to the agency by probation, she could meet her worker in court through a court-watch program, or she could be referred through community agencies. The worker could meet the woman while she was being held over before going to a correctional facility, or meet her in a detention centre. In addition, many women come to Elizabeth Fry halfway houses when they are released.

When women make initial contact with the Elizabeth Fry worker, they may be either in a state of shock in court, or feeling overwhelmed by the difficulties they experience on returning to the community upon release from an institution. Most agency staff interviewed for this project described the women as being in "survival mode" - that is, they were much more concerned with meeting their own daily needs than in pursuing literacy programs. These basic needs could include housing, employment, drug or alcohol rehabilitation to comply with parole requirements, or childcare. The Executive Directors stressed the need for women to be stabilized in the community before taking on the challenges of educational programming.

6.3 Is a literacy assessment done when a woman first comes to an agency? If not, when would the literacy needs of a client be identified?

Literacy assessments, as such, are seldom formalized within agencies. The need for literacy training often surfaces when it becomes apparent that clients are unable to fill out or sign forms, when they are unable to read the guidelines for halfway houses, when they are unable to write in workshops, or when they disclose to a worker.

6.4 Describe the usual procedure that is followed when literacy needs are identified with an individual client.

One Executive Director noted that "the woman's crisis must be attended to first", before any attempt is made to improve her literacy skills. This was echoed by many other E.D.s, who either said that no procedure currently existed, or that clients would eventually be matched with Laubach tutors of some other community resource. The general feeling was that literacy needs, while they are important, were less important than many of the other problem facing women when they are head-to-head with the criminal justice system.

6.5 What resources do you have at hand to respond to the literacy needs of the client? Do you feel that these resources are adequate to allow you to respond to the client's need?

While some Executive Directors stated that Laubach tutors are available in their communities, most were emphatic that there were not enough services in the community for clients with literacy needs. In particular, there is a huge gap in the services available for rural women.

6.6 What resources would you want to have to better respond to the client's need?

The resources needed varied from location to location, but Executive Directors agreed that in order to be successful, literacy programming needed above all to be flexible and sensitive to the needs of the women. Some comments included:

- Many clients start programs but few finish them. This is a comment on the relevance of the programs to the women's lives, and to the fact that few programs really reach women effectively;
- Many clients have been told all their lives that they are dumb. They need programs that help them to reverse this view of themselves;
- Many programs have little flexibility, such as job re-entry programs that disqualify learners if they miss days. A single mother with a sick child is at risk if she has no back-up childcare. "A literacy program would have to be extremely flexible, and integrate the issues of day-to-day life";
- What is needed is more non-classroom programs for students over the age of 18. These clients don't want to go back to school and fail again with their peers. The prospect of "education programs" terrifies some women because of past failures;
- Self-esteem must be built up before clients can begin to think about their literacy needs. Many clients are either too vocal or not vocal enough to make it in traditional programs, and many feel right from the start that they are second or third class citizens;
- A literacy component should be built into programs such as job orientation and youth employment, or alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs;
- "When you say the word 'program', right away you've lost them. They think that they are not going to succeed, or that there is something wrong with them";
- "People learn when they play, when it's not called learning. They have Friday afternoon drop-ins, and read each others' horoscopes. They work through words they don't know. They play word games as well, like 'Win, Lose or Draw', and it's not formalized learning---in addition, women must see tangible results in order to know that they're progressing, and to remain motivated;
- Literacy programs can represent a good start to re-entry into the community. For instance, rural women returning to their communities are that much more isolated, and lack services. A good literacy program could fill this gap;
- "Literacy programs are better operated out of the houses in the community. The more supports they can develop in the community the better, because they have to go back into the community. Also, in the (halfway) house if the counsellors tried to do literacy, there could be a conflict of roles between the enforcer of the rules and the teacher. Try to teach someone you have just grounded."

6.7 Does your agency provide direct literacy services or programs? Could you describe these?

The vast majority of Executive Directors stated that their agencies provided no direct literacy services, although some do incorporate literacy into lifeskills and employment preparedness training. The only exception was the program, outlined on page 18, which was co-sponsored by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba and the Secretary of State. Some societies are in the process of developing literacy programs (Kingston and Toronto), and those societies with young offender residences usually have teachers available to offer individual learning programs. It was repeatedly stated that societies are underfunded and understaffed, and while they recognize the importance of literacy training, their priorities must be to meet the more urgent needs of the women.

6.8 Does your agency refer clients to other agencies? Could you list these? Is the outside agency's response to the referral satisfactory? Could you explain why or why not? Do you have a follow-up procedure for a literacy referral? Could you describe this? Does the agency have a list of services or programs offered by literacy groups? If not, would that be of assistance?

Most Executive Directors knew of referral agencies for literacy training in their communities, but these programs were not always suitable for clients of the agency. For example, in one community, literacy programming was available only through at local community college. This was not seen as the most appropriate setting for women coming out of prison. One Executive Director pointed out that effective referrals depended heavily upon the relationship a client developed with her worker while she was in residence. Another said that clients who are still in the community are less likely to be referred, and that on the whole, referrals were almost completely dependent on the client's desire for contact.

None of the agencies had yet developed follow-up procedures for women who had been referred to literacy programs.

In most communities, workers are provided with the local "Community Handbook of Services", which may or may not include referrals to literacy training programs. Others, mainly in small communities with fewer formal resources, know about programs by word of mouth.

One E.D., speaking of women who have recently been released from prison, said, "Literacy is on a par with providing counselling, but only after housing needs and income have been established, and after childcare needs have been met. The woman must be stable before learning can begin." Another pointed out that "literacy needs should be addressed within the institution, while there is time that is generally wasted. Even in a 30-day sentence, significant inroads could be made as the start of a positive experience. Women are open to learning at these times. They have nothing to lose, but lots to gain."

6.9 What percentage of women coming through the agency have literacy needs?

The estimates hazarded by the majority of Executive Directors ranged between 50% and 80%. This is congruent with current estimates that well over 50% of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Only one Executive Director felt that the number might be closer to 33%.

6.10 Discussion of Results

Overall, the profile of literacy programs and courses suitable for Elizabeth Fry clients looks pretty grim. The difficulties involved in stabilizing clients and assisting in meeting their basic needs can be overwhelming, without even beginning to consider literacy needs. Compounding that reality is the fact that clients themselves do not tend to see literacy as a priority: they would rather have jobs and stable lives. They tend not to see the connections between literacy and employment, since they view a job not as a career, but as a mechanism for earning money in the short term.

While the majority of Executive Directors felt there is a great need for literacy programming, agencies must deal with the immediate physical and financial needs of their clients first; literacy training comes a far second.

While there may be community resources offering literacy training, these programs seem to be under-utilized by the agencies, and the dropout rate is high. A number of reasons may come into play: the courses are designed for the community at large, and may have little to say to women in general, or women in conflict with the law in particular. These women have extremely poor self-esteem, and are used to considering themselves failures, so they may be reluctant to place themselves on the line yet again, risking failure and even greater self-hatred.

Working class, undereducated women have often been subjected to a wide variety of "programs", each purporting to "help them better themselves". These middle-class attempts to pathologize poverty and impose unfamiliar and irrelevant values upon the working class can leave their mark: after a while, the women simply refuse to participate.

Referrals tend to be haphazard and highly individualized. If a worker has a good relationship with her clients, she may be able to motivate the clients to participate in literacy programming. A word of caution may be advisable here, however: while it may appear that literacy programs can only have a beneficial effect on learners, workers must ensure that the specific programs to which they refer will indeed assure the clients some degree of success, and will nurture their self-esteem, rather than subjecting them to failure and humiliation.

According to recent studies on the needs of women in literacy training (Kazemek, 1988) the difficulties associated with literacy programming for women are magnified when programs are aimed at women in conflict with the law. Whereas most programs favour a masculinized, "left-brain approach which emphasizes linear, logical, individualized

thinking patterns, programs for women are more likely to succeed when they support and validate "women's ways of knowing". This approach focuses on holistic, group-oriented learning, and provides a better fit with the ways in which women are socialized in this culture. Literacy programming using such an approach relies heavily on a group learner-centered approach, in which relatedness among group members is stressed, and the experiences of the women are seen as important and valuable.

7.0 Client Interviews and Profiles

The client interviews presented an unanticipated challenge and reward to the researcher. The fact that interviewees were willing to come forward spoke highly for their interest in "making it better for others". It took a great deal of courage for many women to allow themselves to be singled out of a population where often it is safer not to draw attention to one's self. The researcher encountered a wide range of participants, from articulate, self-confident women to some whose self-concept appeared to be very low.

What was unexpected was how relatively quiet the voices of many women would be. In most cases, the local Elizabeth Fry Societies were not able to readily identify women who were in or had been in a literacy program. This more than underscored the nature of the problem; women in conflict with the law were not attending programs, for a variety of reasons. Some had attended sporadically, while others were not reachable, due to a high rate of transience.

A more poignant reason for some women not coming forward with their stories was a fear of how the information might be used. In an article on her experiences of teaching writing in a women's prison in Framingham, Massachusetts, Andrea Loewenstein states that the women "exist at a knife-edged concentration of American womanhood." This description is most appropriate to the women interviewed in the course of this study.

The researcher was keenly aware of the distances she had to attempt to overcome during the interviews. Distances of class, race, education and freedom itself came between the researcher and the interviewees. The profiles presented here were prepared in order to conform to a protocol of strict confidentiality. Names, places and identifying circumstances have been omitted for this reason.

7.1 Profile 1

This student was studying in a community-based literacy program. She had only completed Grade Seven, and had not attended school in about 30 years. She had felt hesitant, at first, about entering a structured learning situation.

Now, however, she speaks about her teachers in the literacy training course, characterizing them as "very approachable". She says her current teacher has a lot of patience. At present, she attends a group program once per week for three hours, and is anxious to chat with her tutor to try to extend her weekly hours. She has set herself a

short-term goal of attending twice per week, but her long-term goal is to become a journalist. She enjoys writing, and hopes to do it for a living someday.

One observation she shared about the program is that it took her three or four attempts before she found a teacher she felt comfortable with. She noted that other students who were not as motivated might have given up and decided it wasn't worth it. She spoke of the personalities of her earlier teachers as being "very hard to get along with sometimes", and observed that "once you get a good match, motivation is not a problem."

7.2 Profile 2

This woman was clear in her opinion that any training presented within correctional institutions would only prepare women for "pink collar ghettos". "A woman should have the skills to earn a living wage when she hits the street," she said, adding that this would help to break the cycle of repeat offenses and incarcerations. Without adequate skills and income, "you are condemning the woman to a life of poverty," she asserted. One solution to this problem, she felt, was that prisons ought to provide state of the art equipment such as computers, so that any skills that are acquired are immediately marketable.

Discussing Adult Basic Education or literacy programs is very threatening to women in prison, since it feeds into low self-esteem and serves as an unpleasant reminder of what they are not able to do. "Many of us have had real bad experiences in school," she said, "and to talk about school now is real bad."

She reinforced the opinions expressed by many Executive Directors, noting that woman in conflict with the law are in "survival mode" when they get out of prison, making long-term planning extremely difficult. Only when women are ready with community supports and good resources will they be able to consider upgrading their literacy skills.

7.3 Profile 3

This client spoke of serving close to 15 months in a provincial institution. She described a complete lack of programs in prison, which offered no skills training and no literacy programming. She reflected that there was absolutely no encouragement for inmates to study, and that even if there had been programs, there was no physical space available for studying. The library in this prison was open once per week for one hour only.

The only programs available to prisoners were Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, with occasional short-term courses such as pottery, knitting or sewing offered by various outside organizations. Women interested in attending these courses were charged \$2.00, as well as the cost of supplies.

The interviewee stressed that women should be paid to attend literacy or computer courses, not penalized for wanting to learn. The only way "women can make it on the outside is to develop marketable skills while they're doing time," she emphasized. The

system must be prepared to motivate women, so that after serving a two- or three-year sentence they will be prepared "to do something other than work in a kitchen".

She felt it was highly unlikely that women would enter literacy or upgrading courses once they had been released. The pressures on women who have just come out of prison are immense, and they have very few supports. Parole orders may state that women must work as a condition of parole, forcing women to take any jobs they can get in order not to have parole revoked.

Often, women coming out of prison have no families, and almost always they have no money. "It's a matter of survival, and literacy is at the bottom of the pile," the interviewee stated. Her view was that women must have ample opportunity to participate in literacy programming while they are serving time. She felt that participation while women are in prison will lead to participation outside the institution.

She expressed anger that correctional institutions "treat women like children". Women should be taken more seriously, and offered a variety of programs for literacy and skill development. In addition, she stressed the need for post-release follow-up, noting that women should be paid to continue studying and upgrading their skills while they are on parole.

7.4 Profile 4

As a participant in a prison literacy program, this woman felt that the greatest benefit of the program was the support she received from the other women. She is currently working on her reading and writing, and hopes to complete Grade Nine.

She has never participated in any kind of programming before, and greatly appreciates the encouragement she receives from her teacher. She spoke of the high level of trust between her and her teacher, stating she felt she could "tell her anything".

In addition, she liked the emphasis on group problem-solving, and felt good about being able to use her first language to understand difficult concepts. She plans to continue in an adult learning program once she is out on parole.

7.5 Institutional Client Profile

A worker at one provincial institution provided the researcher with a client profile of 110 inmates, as follows:

Age:

18 - 20 years	21%
21 - 26 years	32%

26 - 30 years	23%
31 - 35 years	16%
36 - 40 years	6%
41+	2%

Ethnic Origin:

Treaty Native	65%
Other Native	19%
Other	16%

Stated Level of Education:

Grade Level (It should be noted that grade level is not necessarily indicative of literacy level)

0 - Grade Four	1%
Grade Five	0%
Grade Six	5%
Grade Seven	14%
Grade Eight	21%
Grade Nine	15%
Grade Ten	24%
Grade Eleven	8%
Grade Twelve	12%
Not Given	1%

Stated Employment:

Employed Full Time	4.0%
Employed Part Time	0.9%
Unemployed	94.0%
Doesn't Say	1.8%
Babysitter	4.0%
Housewife	24.0%
Student	7.0%
Professional, Technical or Clerical Worker	4.0%
Other (understood to mean prostitution as a profession)	51.0%
Skilled Labourer	4.0%
Unskilled Labourer	5.0%
No answer	1.0%

7.6 Discussion of Results

While the statistical data provided at one correctional institution cannot be generalized across Canada, this information provides a glimpse into the lives of women in prison. The interviews fill out the picture, as respondents discussed their experiences of literacy training programs.

One theme which emerges is the need to provide adequate programming inside the prisons, where women have both the free time and the basic physical resources to use it. In addition, the women expressed a need for financial incentives to encourage participation on the "inside" -- and most were realistic about the minimal chances of participating in programs after release, without having had a chance to experience the positive changes which literacy can provide.

Learning in prisons-was problematic for other women, however. Some questioned whether learning could take place in an environment where issues of personal safety and survival dominate everyone's lives. In addition, the relationship of tutors to the prison

system was called into question by one woman, who asked, "How can you learn from someone who could punish you?"

Interviewees were split, too, on the issue of small groups versus one-to-one tutoring. Some learners felt most comfortable in learning circles, noting that the group support and validation they received from their teachers and co-learners was most helpful to the learning process and their own attempts to break out of the negative spiral of low self-esteem. Others felt that one-to-one learning was more appropriate, since they felt uncomfortable reading aloud in front of other learners. The issue of personal security, too, came into play here, since identifying one's self as "illiterate" within the small prison community could put potential learners in a precarious position.

Another important issue emerging from the interviews was that of reintegration into society. Clients were concerned with the difficulties involved in surviving outside prison, and noted that most prison programs do not adequately prepare inmates for life on the outside. Courses offered in prison must have immediate practical benefit, many participants said. In addition, once the woman is released from prison, her chances of beginning literacy training would seem to be quite minimal. Once again, some interviewees were adamant that programming must begin in prison, while others felt post-release learning was the only possible option.

8.0 Recommendations: Directions for Action

Based on the foregoing, it becomes possible to enumerate several areas in which C.A.E.F.S. and/or individual Elizabeth Fry Societies can take action. The research project did not reveal a consensus of opinion or experience, but the interviews with staff and clients provided a mosaic of insights which bring to light some of the issues of a formerly invisible group. Women in conflict with the law have literacy needs which are unique among the population of illiterates in Canada. These needs can be adequately met only through collaboration between service providers for women in conflict with the law, and service providers for people with literacy needs. Such a collaboration can only be beneficial for this hard-to-reach population.

Recommendation 1:

That the literacy needs of clients be informally assessed during the intake process into Elizabeth Fry Societies, and that appropriate referrals be made once immediate client needs have been addressed. In addition, local societies should draft protocols for adequate follow-up for clients who elect to participate in literacy programs, including assessments of the suitability of the program to the individual learner.

The researcher wishes to emphasize that this recommendation is based on an awareness of two conditions. First is the stressful, over-capacity workload of many Elizabeth Fry Societies, and second is the element of client initiative. It is recognized that frequently, a worker/client contact depends on the client making the first move. Despite these

impediments, however, the intent of this recommendation remains that of bringing to the forefront the literacy needs of women in conflict with the law.

Recommendation 2:

That local Elizabeth Fry Societies, as well as C.A.E.F.S., examine written materials used for client information and orientation, checking for levels of readability, and revise these materials to a more appropriate level of readability where necessary.

Most materials are written at a readability level between Grades 10 and 12. Having materials written at a Grade 5 - 6 readability level would provide clients with broader access to agency and program information.

While this recommendation does not address the remedial aspects of women's literacy needs, it does respond to short-term needs for more accessible materials. Such readability analyses might be done in conjunction with local community colleges' Adult Basic Education programs.

Recommendation 3:

That local Elizabeth Fry Societies examine their programs to take client illiteracy into account, and provide in-service training for staff at regular intervals, to ensure their sensitivity to literacy levels among women in conflict with the law. Short in-service presentations by literacy workers would help to maintain the visibility of the problem, as well as allowing an exchange of information and strategies among staff members.

Recommendation 4:

That C.A.E.F.S., in conjunction with local Elizabeth Fry Societies, lobby provincial correctional institutions to provide appropriate literacy programming for inmates. This programming should be carefully designed to ensure that they are learner-centred, and that they reflect the learning styles of the women they are aimed at. In addition, women in prisons should be encouraged to participate in such programs through financial incentives.

Recommendation 5:

That one Elizabeth Fry Society undertake a project involving client attitudinal training. One issue which emerged in the course of the study was that clients tend not to make connections between literacy and long-term employment. Rather, they see jobs as short-term sources of financial support. Once they are in a job, and have the income, it becomes more difficult for them to engage in a literacy program; thus, they tend to stay in dead-end jobs.

Attitudinal change should be encouraged among clients, in order to avoid such problems. Such change may best be encouraged by modeling behaviour. The most credible source

of information would be a client or former client who has taken part in a literacy program, and who could provide other clients with personal testimony about her experience.

Recommendation 6:

That C.A.E.F.S. initiate a liaison with an organization such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy, in order to increase the visibility of women in conflict with the law within the larger illiterate population. Literacy workers will confirm the isolation and invisibility which accompanies illiteracy; this sense of being out off from the world is compounded in women who have come into conflict with the law.

Recommendation 7:

That the feasibility of a pilot project be explored by at least one Elizabeth Fry Society, to provide literacy training based on the model of student-driven learning circles, to as many women as possible. This program would take place either within an institution or in a half-way house, based on the assessment of the local agency, and would be implemented on a trial basis. The program should emphasize work on improving self-image, an area in which most women in conflict with the law need a great deal of assistance.

Funding for this pilot project could be sought from a variety of private or corporate foundations, on the understanding that such programming fills an unmet need, and provides women in conflict with the law with an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, abuse, exploitation and crime.

It should be noted that the clients interviewed for this project were divided as to whether programs should take place within institutions, as well as whether classes should be run as small groups or on a one-to-one basis. With this in mind, it would be important to implement any programming on a trial basis, in order to determine its suitability as a model for future literacy training for women in conflict with the law. Funding for extended programs could be solicited from Secretary of State or the Department of the Solicitor General, as well as from provincial ministries of corrections.

Recommendation 8:

That a program of education be developed for use by the National Parole Board, with the objective of increasing Board members' awareness of the issue of illiteracy among women in conflict with the law. This program could be incorporated into the current "Women In Conflict with the Law" sessions which are conducted as part of Parole Board's standard orientation procedures.

Recommendation 9:

That the information contained in this report be made available to educational programs for front-line workers, including university and college-level social work programs,

criminology programs, and women's studies programs. The objective of this initiative would be to raise the visibility of women in conflict with the law, specifically in regard to their literacy needs. Repeatedly during the course of this research, it became evident that one of the greatest obstacles facing women in conflict with the law is their invisibility.

The objective of such programs would be to increase awareness among front-line workers of the literacy needs of women in conflict with the law. Interventions, by front-line workers in the area of literacy may in some cases "turn off the tap", and allow women to avoid coming into conflict with the law.

Recommendation 10:

That each Elizabeth Fry Society, as well as C.A.E.F.S., include in their respective newsletters a section on "literacy information exchange". This section would provide a forum and an opportunity for information and resource exchange among the societies.

LITERATURE SEARCH

During the course of this project, an extensive literature search was carried out through Metroline, a computerized bibliographic search service at the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, on a number of on-line data systems, including:

- The Criminal Justice Periodical Index, 1975 - 89;
- The GPO Monthly Catalog, July 1976 - Nov. 1989;
- The GPO Publications Reference, to October 30, 1989;
- The Legal Resource Index, 1980 - 1989;
- The Conference Papers Index, 1973 - 1989;
- The Current Contents Search 1989, Weeks 1 - 44;
- Dissertation Abstracts Online, 1861 - November 1989;
- Psycalert, to October 30, 1989;
- Psycinfo, 1967 - 1989;
- Social SciSearch, 1972 - 1989, Week 44;
- Sociological Abstracts, 1963 - 1989;
- CODOC the Co-operative Documents Project of the University of Guelph;
- PAIS International, 1976 - 1989;
- NCJRS, 1972 - 1989.

Each of these indices was searched for references to literacy needs of women in conflict with the law. To say that references in this area were scarce would be a gross overstatement. In fact, the only relevant material uncovered by the search came from Dissertation Abstracts Online, in the form of an abstract entitled "Development of a Freire-based Literacy/Conscientization Program for Low-Literate Women in Prison", by Gillian Craig of Pennsylvania State University.

Since the mandate of this research project was to explore the literacy problems of women in Canadian prisons, it was felt that an American needs assessment would be only minimally relevant. This dearth of material highlights the invisibility of the problems of literacy among women in conflict with the law, a problem which evidenced itself over and over again during the course of this research project.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Melberg, Ellen, and Claudia Currie, eds.: Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law. Press Gang Publishers, Vancouver, B.C.: 1987.

A collection of articles by Canadian authors, documenting both qualitatively and quantitatively the experiences of women in conflict with the law. Presents a statistical and theoretical overview, and considers problems of Native women, young women, and front-line workers in coping with the Canadian women's prison system.

Ash, Sylvia, Helen King, Dorothy Robbins, Gladys Watson and WISE Participants: "Women Interested in Successful Employment: Perspectives on a Bridging Program". In *Women's Education des Femmes*.

Describes women's adult education initiative developed by C.C.L.O.W.-Newfoundland and the Association for Lifelong Learning. An innovative bridging program offering flexible learning, counselling, self-development, designed to assist women entering or re-entering the work force. Provides access to support services such as child care and transportation. Individualized approach to training, needs assessment, skill development, problem-solving and goal-setting. Incorporates learning modules, transferrable skills, computer-assisted learning, contract learning and small group learning, supplemented by support and advocacy.

Bunch, Charlotte, and Sandra Pollack, eds.: Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education. The Crossing Press Feminist Series, Trumansburg, New York, 1983.

A collection of articles by American authors, examining feminist education and women's ways of learning. Analyses, personal accounts, and documentation of women's experiences of learning, as well as the challenges of teaching feminist thought in traditional institutions. Article by Andrea Loewenstein documents the experience of a woman teaching writing classes in a women's prison.

Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme: Women and Literacy. Fall/Winter 1988 (Volume 9, Numbers 3 and 4),

Includes articles on: the politics of literacy; immigrant women workers and literacy; Native women's literacy issues; literacy and disabled women: personal experiences of learners; pioneer women literacy workers; programs and services across Canada; women, literacy and development; literacy in Eritrea, Nicaragua and India.

Cato, Jeremy: "SFU Prof Claims Illiteracy a Sociocultural Crisis", in Education Leader, Vol 2, No. 1.

The literacy crisis viewed as an entrenched sociocultural crisis which cannot be addressed by existing literacy reform movement. Illiteracy almost invariably found among members of underclasses which have never had a chance to develop skills with written words. Education system not designed to cope with needs of those who fail. Structure and goals of public education need to change to explicitly address multicultural and class-stratified nature of society, as well as cultural dimensions of illiteracy.

Chang, Kathryn L.: Observations on the Southam News Literacy Initiative, October 27, 1987.

Provides critique of Southam Literacy Survey, noting that while the authors exhorted readers to shun stereotyping, the survey engaged in blatant bias against illiterate people, professional educators, television and the federal government. It also favoured Frontier College, central Canadian perspective, and the United States. Critique points out that the study excluded some groups which the actual report focusses on; points out other discrepancies and contradictions in the report.

Fitzgerald, Gisela G.: Can the Hard-to-Reach Adults Become Literate? Journal of Reading. December, 1984.

Illustrates how "hard-core" illiterate Americans are not being reached by Adult Basic Education programming because of: unhappiness with existing programs; shame; lack of motivation; and substance abuse problems. Until this group's pressing social, economic and psychological needs are met, they will continue to be hard-to-reach.

Hunter, Carman St. John: "Literacy/Illiteracy in an International Perspective". W.E.I. Reports (1988).

Examines illiteracy as a product of social, political and economic issues, noting that the poorest people in the world are the least literate. Explodes myths of: Third World poverty as a result of illiteracy, the existence of scales to measure relative levels of literacy, the need for a reliable definition of literacy. Questions the validity of imposing values of privileged First World educators on Third World learners who may have their own ways of learning and understanding. Links rising literacy levels with commitment to goals of equity, justice and learner collaboration in literacy programming.

John Howard Society of Canada, Kimberly Pate, ed.: National Literacy Project Report. John Howard Society of Canada, Toronto, Ont.: 1989.

Documents available literacy programs for Canadian men in conflict with the law. Examines literacy programming offered within the John Howard Society, as well as community-based projects. Looks at levels of literacy among offenders, as well as educational experiences of clients.

Kazemek, Francis E.: "Women and Adult Literacy: Considering the other half of the house", in *Life Long Learning*, Journal of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, Washington, D.C., U.S.A. (January, 1988)

Literacy theoreticians, researchers and teachers have failed to understand and accommodate women's ways of learning in developing literacy programs. Outlines the work of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), as well as examining the epistemological theories of Belenky et al. (1986). Looks at ways in which these theoretical outlooks can be integrated into adult education, through collaborative models of teaching, learning circles, and viewing literacy as a collective process of shared knowledge.

Lewis, Diane F. (CAEFS): Report on the 6th National Conference of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada: Harvesting Abilities. Solicitor General of Canada, November, 1987.

Term "learning disability" is defined, and effects of the law on the learning disabled examined. Draws connections between learning disability and crime, although specifies that the nature of the relationship is unclear and its existence controversial. Relationship between learning disabilities and illiteracy also considered controversial. Includes a list of recommendations and strategies for dealing with the learning disabled in the justice system.

Marienau, Catherine, and Arthur W. Chickering: "Adult Development and Learning", in *Building on Experiences in Adult Development*, edited by Betty Menson, Jossey-Bass Inc., New York, N.Y.: 1982.

Illustrates how adult development and learning environment research and theory offer important clues for closing the gap between rhetoric and reality in how colleges and universities respond to adult learners in the 1980's. Emphasizes links between truly responsive learning environments and educators' understanding of the learners themselves. Stresses the role of experience, freedom to make judgments and responsibilities for the consequences of choice and action in adult education.

Solicitor General of Canada: "Notes for a Speech by the Honourable James Kelleher, P.C., M.P., Solicitor General of Canada, at Queen's University Law School, re: New Inmate Literacy Program". Delivered March 3, 1987.