Trauma of Incarceration: Older Adults in Prison

Over two-thirds had no contact with their marital or life partner or parents. The majority reported no contact with their children or their grandchildren. Almost half reported they had no contact with siblings. The older adults who were close to the end of their prison terms reported feeling anticipatory stress about being released from prison. Despite past and current life adversity, many older adults also reported coping resilience using physical, cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and participatory (empowerment) strategies for survival in prison.

Please see Figure 1 and Table 2 in this document for other types of traumatic and stressful experiences in prison and sources of resilience.

For more information please see the following articles:


For copies of the articles, feel free to email your request to tmaschi@fordham.edu
Figure 1: Qualitative Findings of Sources of Trauma and Stress Reported by Older Adults in Prison

**HEALTH STATUS**
- Thrombosis in left leg, Antiembolism socks
- Pains in chest & diagnosed leakage in graph
- When I found out I had cancer and hepatitis C
- Stint in aorta
- Gender desphoric-Transgender
- Coming to prison all my life, while infected with HIV and dying in prison
- Have diabetes, lack of treatment
- Asthma attack
- Heart problems
- My health, my heart
- Raped, Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Strokes
- Going blind in prison
- Deaf
- Cancer
- Heart attacks
- HIV/AIDS, Pneumonia, Cancer
- Personal medical issues

**HEALTH CARE**
- Dying in prison from poor health care
- Diabetic treatment, lack of
- Poor health care
- Prison medicals failure to treat my heart problems
- Fear of dying in prison
- Left abandon by family, friends
- Failure of medical department to treat my injuries and illnesses
- Denial of health care
- “Getting my medication”
- 5 year hunger strike, 12 hosp

**PRISON ENVIRONMENT**
(Interpersonal, Structural, Cultural)
- Solitary Confinement
- Raped
- Killing in prison yard, messhall/
- Maleficence disciplinary charges used to lock me up in closed custody illegal
- Guards killing inmates-abuse, heart attack
- I was assaulted by a young mental patient
- Correction officers abusing their authority
- Beaten by corrections officers, Guards attacked & beat me unprovoked
- 5 year hunger strike, 12 hosp

(Maschi et al., 2012; 2103)
Table 2: Sources of Coping and Resilience Reported by Older Adults in Prison

- **ROOT** - Basic Needs (Survival & Foundation in Love and Family)
- **PHYSICAL** - Exercise (Yard, Run/Walk, Yoga, Sports), Medication
- **COGNITIVE** - Find Peace Within, Think Positive, Making Healthy Choices, Puzzles, Read
- **EMOTIONAL** - Counseling, Support Groups
- **SPIRITUAL** - Church, God, Pray, Service to Others
- **SOCIAL** - Family, Friends, Peers in Prison, Program Participation, Yoga
- **PARTICIPATORY** - (Leadership, Participation, and Empowerment): Teaching, Leading a Book Club, Being a Paralegal, Advocacy, Group and Workshop Facilitation, Advocacy

**Sample Quotes**

“I pray. I try to meditate and read a great deal to take my mind off worries”
“I do yoga, Dr. Tina Maschi, yoga”
“I participate every Monday in group therapy. Cage your rage program 10 weeks”
“I became a jogger & sprinter at 56 years old. I run 5 miles per day and sprint 105 yd sprints every other day”
“Prayed to God, got in touch with family members and did a whole lot of jogging exercise”
“I love to work”
“Programs, exercise, palliative care worker, working with at risk juveniles, etc...”
“Focus on victim program, exercise, computer workforce, community awareness day, HIV AIDS group”
“Read my Bible, I am a minister now. I do all things the word way”
“NA and AA”
“Exercise, work (strip/buff floors), write letters, talk on the phone”

(Maschi et al., 2012; 2013)