

Why is orange the new black for female victims of trauma?

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How do pathways to jail vary for females who are victims of specific types of trauma? New research published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, a SAGE journal, pinpoints the types of trauma such as caregiver violence, witnessing violence, and intimate partner violence, that lead to specific types of offending later in life and offers explanations based on real experiences.

Researchers Dana DeHart, Shannon Lynch, Joanne Belknap, and Bonnie Green conducted life-history interviews with 115 female inmates from five U.S. states and found the following patterns:

- Intimate partner violence increased women's risks for property crimes, drug offending, and commercial sex work. These relationships often related to intimate involvement with violent men who fluctuated between roles as the women's co-offenders, drug dealers, and pimps.
- Witnessing violence increased risks for property crimes, fighting, and use of weapons. These relationships often stemmed from affiliation with criminal networks, and often women's use of weapons or aggression arose from efforts to protect themselves or others.
- Experiences of caregiver violence increased risk of running away as a teen. Runaway youth often enact this behavior as a means of escaping intolerable maltreatment at home.

The researchers wrote, "The research is critical to development of

gender-responsive programming, alternatives to incarceration, and problem-solving court initiatives that address girls' and women's specific needs."

The researchers also found that the women they interviewed had high rates of [mental health disorders](#), especially serious [mental illnesses](#) (50%) such as [major depression](#), bipolar disorders, or psychotic spectrum disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (51%), and/or substance use disorder (85%).

"Existing studies note that many offenders with serious mental illness are not identified as mentally ill upon entry into the system," the authors wrote. "Given that [mental health problems](#) in offenders are linked to greater likelihood of violent crimes, longer sentences, rule violations, and physical assaults in the corrections environment, greater knowledge and understanding of these offenders and their needs is critical for the success of behavioral health treatment programs, jail management, and correctional staff safety."

More information: "Life-History Models of Female Offending: The Roles of Serious Mental Illness and Trauma in Women's Pathways to Jail," in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2013.

Provided by SAGE Publications

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