

*Women, Integration and Prison: An Analysis of the Processes of Socio-Labor Integration of Women After Prison in Europe*

WORK PACKAGE 8

**“National Report”**

**Hungarian Country Report**

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## Introduction

There are two important elements of the Hungarian context that have decisively shaped the MIP research on the reintegration of women prisoners after release: the lack of previous policy research on this topic, and the major and ongoing transformation of the institutional setting. Both enabled and encouraged the research.

The availability of relevant, policy-focused research both on reintegration after prison, as well as research on women prisoners was extremely limited. The few important studies on prisons and prisoners in the 1990-ies were sociologically focused and offered some data and insight into prison life, however, these were exclusively or largely based on men's prisons and did not address reintegration<sup>1</sup>.

Finally in 2001, the first study on women prisoners<sup>2</sup> was published, which offered basic data on women prisoners, and also on the three penitentiary facilities<sup>3</sup> for women inmates in Hungary – and drew attention for the first time to the relevance of domestic violence in the lives of women prisoners. The other important research that provided the basis for our research as a source of secondary data, was a major study accomplished by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee<sup>4</sup> during their Prison Monitoring Program. Their book was published in 2002 with rich survey data on legislation and aspects of prison life that featured as important for reintegration, e.g. on work and education in prisons.

Based on such previous research and statistical data we found the following:

-The ratio of recidivists among women inmates is about 25%-30%, significantly less than among men (47-50%)

-Women inmates as a group suffered from several deprivations, especially low level of education and lack of profession was very common among them. About 1/3 of women in the above-mentioned survey suffered from domestic violence.

-Overcrowding was found to be a problem in all penitentiaries, influencing living conditions and access to reintegration-related activities.

The MIP research was carried out at a time when the institutional setting was characterized by significant transformations, both within the penitentiary system and in its environment. The single most decisive institutional change was marked in July 2003 by the setup of the Probation Officers' Service. Formerly, probation officers (for adult

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<sup>1</sup>László Huszár: "...és bűnhődés: A magyar börtönlakók szociológiai vizsgálata", *Kandidátusi értekezés*, 1997.

Dr. Póczik Szilveszter: "Magyar és cigány bűnelkövetők a börtönben – egy kutatás tapasztalatai", *Kutatási beszámoló és munkaanyag*, Országos Kriminológiai Intézet, Budapest, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Lenke Fehér and Parti Katalin "Nők a börtönben", *Kriminológiai Tanulmányok* 39, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Our research included all three sites: Eger, Kalocsa and Mélykút. The report includes frequent references to all sites.

<sup>4</sup> András Kádár, Kőszeg Ferenc (eds.), *Double Standard: Prison Conditions in Hungary*, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest, 2002

convicts) worked at the County Courts, while probation officers for under-age convicts worked in yet another organizational arrangement. With the creation of a national organization, the institutionalization and professionalisation of their work, the importance of reintegration was emphasized. The institutional change followed and reflected a change in legislation: a gradual move towards alternative methods in legislation started to take shape, and manifested in e.g. giving more authority to probation officers already at the courtrooms.

Legislation concerning penitentiaries was also put on the agenda, since the Penitentiary Decree from 1979<sup>5</sup> became increasingly obsolete. The draft bill is currently being discussed by experts – many agents referred to the draft in the interviews as well. Since the draft law has not been finalized yet, and certainly has not been implemented yet, it will not be discussed in our report.

The internal changes in the National Penitentiary Administration (NPA) or in various penitentiary institutes received less attention and remained less visible. Our research noted a gradual opening up towards NGO-s, (also towards the media), cooperation with other European penitentiaries and internal differentiation between institutes started to emerge from the once homogenous image. Above all, reintegration – sometimes referred to as resocialization – became an often-emphasized priority for the penitentiary system. With Hungary's recent membership in the European Union, access to structural funds has opened up new resources. These resources are available above all for partnerships – another motivation for opening up and co-operation.

Both of the above factors made our research especially relevant. Both the NPA and the women's facilities we contacted were supportive of the research and expressed an interest in using its future results. The recently formed Probation Officers's Service was especially open to receive any research findings on reintegration of ex-inmates, since they lacked previous measurement or feedback. The few NGO-s active in reintegration were eager to share their experiences with us. However, the frequent changes and lack of institutionalized solutions also meant that state agencies had little ready data on the cost or efficiency of measures – as a matter of fact, were at best working towards setting up systems (e.g. centralized computer systems, registration systems, etc).

Given our national context, the Hungarian report relies largely on interview data both with the women<sup>6</sup> and with the agents<sup>7</sup>, as well as on other data collected during fieldwork<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout the report we will refer to the two decrees that constitute currently the basis of the operation of penitentiaries: 1979/11. Law-Level Decree (referred to as Penitentiary Code) and 1996/ 6. Regulation of the Minister of Justice (referred to as Penitentiary Rules).

<sup>6</sup> In the three women's facilities we interviewed 20 women prior to their release, and we managed to follow-up 17 of them 4-6 weeks later for a second interview, and about 4 months after release for a third interview. About 9 months after release we interviewed 15 of the women for the fourth time.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews were conducted with 27 agents (during 22 interviews) and included penitentiary wards, educators, a prison psychologist, managers of women's units, department leaders at the NPA, executives at NPA, a penitentiary judge, executives at the Probation Officers' Service, and several NGO-s.

<sup>8</sup> The appendix offers a summary of the MIP project, fieldwork methodology, and research hypothesis.

The MIP project was launched under a theoretical framework which built on a very complex understanding of social exclusion in regards to women ex-prisoners. This framework took into account economic, political, cultural characteristics as well as penal characteristics in its approach to social exclusion – while gender certainly was regarded as a key factor to understanding social exclusion of women (ex)prisoners. Even though the multiple dimensions of exclusionary processes are intertwined and mutually reinforced by each other, the MIP research aimed to improve our understanding as to the specific factors and patterns most characteristic to the primary exclusion of women prisoners in the given countries, as well as to the prison's contribution to furthering social exclusion or potentially, to the enabling of some women's integration. Throughout the research, the potential links between the various forms of exclusion were addressed as well. Thus instead of asking how the prison impacts women's opportunities for integration after release, the MIP research aimed at understanding how the prison impacts differently various groups of women, depending, especially on their primary level of exclusion.

Chapter one of the National Report introduces the patterns of primary exclusion identified among women prisoners in the Hungarian research, based on secondary data as well as data collected during the fieldwork. The research findings on prison's contribution to social exclusion/ integration are summarized in chapter two and three. Chapter two considers the general impact of imprisonment on women's life and focuses on the losses and ruptures women experience, while chapter three assesses the integration-oriented measures applied in prisons. Chapter four summarizes research findings regarding women's life after release. The various chapters start with the introduction of the corresponding research hypothesis developed on the basis of the theoretical framework of the MIP project.

## I. Primary exclusion

**Hypothesis 1. Many women in prison were already suffering a degree of social exclusion at the time of their imprisonment.**

**1.1. Sub-hypothesis: Women that are actually imprisoned are not the only ones committing crimes, but are those in an existing primary exclusion situation [...]**

**1.2. Sub-hypothesis<sup>9</sup>: The situation of exclusion and gender determine the type of crimes for which certain women are persecuted. [...] Women are not only punished for their crime but also for their failure to act according to their “proper role”.**

A look at the characteristics of Hungarian women prisoners immediately reveals that it is a group which suffers from severe disadvantages according to all conventional measures of primary social exclusion, including but not limited to their level of education, economic and employment data, number of children and ethnicity<sup>10</sup>. These factors taken together, are often referred to as 'multiple disadvantages' – a situation in which coping becomes especially difficult – and a realization long shared by social scientists and professionals who work in the penal justice system. However, this research aims to trace specific patterns in which the interconnectedness of these various factors reveals itself so that a better understanding of the complexity of how 'multiple disadvantages' produce social exclusion, becomes possible.

It is worth noting that compared to many other European countries, the role of drugs and drug addiction is marginal in these women's lives generally<sup>11</sup>, and also in our research sample, with one or two exceptions. The majority of women in our research have never tried drugs, the few who have, consumed light drugs occasionally. Only one person could be considered as a drug addict in whose life drug was an important element of her lifestyle that eventually got her into prison.

Prior to the introduction of the three patterns that we could establish, a comment has to be made related to the term 'primary' exclusion in the report. Even if in the current hypothesis the report addresses exclusion prior to imprisonment, interview data will be used from all interviews, and research situations. The nature of patterns necessitates a special consideration of the time dimension, and in many cases, insight into such patterns was achieved by attention to the developments and changes in the content, emphasis etc. of certain factors between the various interviews by the same person.

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<sup>9</sup> We will consider the two sub-hypotheses together in the following analysis, due to the strong relationship between the two phenomena: the form/ depth of social exclusion prior to prison and the committed crimes.

<sup>10</sup> Statistical data on these factors will be included in the footnotes, where the role of the specific factors is discussed.

<sup>11</sup> About 3.5% of the women in prison committed drug-related crimes according to statistics from the National Prison Administration, as of 07. 07. 2003. Research by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee among inmates (both women and men) reveals that 7.6% of the inmates admitted to having regularly used drugs prior to their imprisonment, while 92.4% said that they had not used drugs regularly. (in: *The Double Standard – Prison Conditions in Hungary*, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest 2002.)

Despite the fact that the group of women who participated in the research suffer from multiple disadvantages, just as the general population of women prisoners do<sup>12</sup>, there are important differences among certain groups of women in the degree and type of exclusion suffered prior to their imprisonment. We found that one group of women especially suffered from a combination of several exclusionary factors leading to a criminal career – to whose path we will refer to as **“excluded into crime”**. The second group of women had not led criminal careers, in fact, their lives were at least partly and often fully integrated into society’s several key social institutions. This is especially true for women who killed their partners as a result of years of domestic violence: these women have often led a ‘socially integrated’ life - which was interrupted gradually by the daily violence, the final violent act and the prison. To the pattern traceable in their lives, we refer to as **“interrupted by violence”**. And last, but not least, it is possible to identify a pattern among the women in whose case **“crime as ‘choice’”** appears, rather than an inescapable reality in the given life situations, due to a life more or less integrated into key social institutions.

The introduction of the patterns will show the ‘ideal types’ in each case, to which very few life histories could be fully matched, however, many of its characteristics are to be found in many women’s paths.

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<sup>12</sup> Our sample mirrors the characteristics of the women prisoners’ population, although it cannot be considered representative due to its size (20 women).

## 1. Excluded Into Crime The Criminal Careers of “Roma Mothers”

All recidivists in our research sample are Roma women and nearly all Roma women are recidivists, usually sentenced for theft – while all non-Roma women are first offenders in our sample. In other words, in our small sample there seems to be a rather straightforward relationship between having a criminal career as a woman and belonging to the Roma ethnicity.

Unfortunately we could not investigate in this particular research the selection mechanisms at work in various institutions and processes of the Hungarian criminal justice system<sup>13</sup>, thus we cannot factually establish how this result is produced. However, we have certainly no reason to think that it is only the Roma women who repeatedly commit thefts – yet according to the end result, it is the Roma women who repeatedly get back to prison for such crimes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A pioneering research was launched by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, which targeted the selective mechanisms of the Hungarian justice system against the Roma. Based on the study of court files, the pilot phase of the research concluded as a preliminary finding that, Roma convicts in certain parts of the procedure suffer disadvantages compared to non-Roma convicts. For example, court procedures tend to be significantly longer in case of Roma convicts and they spend longer time on remand. (In: József Csorba, Lilla Farkas, Sándor Loss, “A törvény előtti egyenlőség elve a büntetőeljárásban”, *Fundamentum* 2002/1. Pp. 125-139.) Following the pilot phase of the research, based on a massive sample, it was found that in certain parts of the police procedures, e.g. checking identity of people, the Roma “enjoy” more attention from the police than others. (In: Lilla Farkas, Gábor Kézdi, Sándor Loss, Zsolt Zádori, “A rendőrség etnikai profilalkotásának mai gyakorlata”, *Belügyi Szemle*, 2004./2-3, pp.30-50).

In our research several agents believed that in many cases women are judged more leniently than men for comparable crimes.

“It is quite obvious that the courts give more lenient sentences to members of the fairer sex for committing the same crimes. The court takes into consideration the fact that women handle incarceration with more difficulty, and that they need to return to their families, since it is still the woman who has to be the central figure of the family.” (A2)

Regarding selective mechanisms against the Roma, agents either denied the possibility of such discrimination in the Hungarian criminal justice or stated that it is not their job to assess that. Only a few of them accepted that ‘there may be something’, yet did not specify any institution or process that would be responsible for that. One agent noted that there is no selective mechanisms against the Roma, however, such processes work against people with poor educational backgrounds.

None of the women felt that they were discriminated against or suffered any disadvantages from being a Roma woman in any part of the judicial process.

“The perception prevalent among the Roma minority is that women and children are judged more leniently by the justice system, so they have them commit the actual crimes. Roma prisoners can sometimes feel disoriented in prison, because they do not comprehend why they are being punished. Roma offenders steal from whoever has more and on the one hand, according to distinctive Roma laws and customs these acts are not considered criminal, but on the other hand they are incompatible with Hungarian laws.” (A1)

<sup>14</sup> Even though our research sample is very small and thus does not allow for generalization, this phenomena is worth being noted for several reasons. First of all, due to the current regulation on data protection in Hungary and to its very strict interpretation currently applied by state authorities, institutions as prisons do not register the ethnicity of inmates. For this reason, quantitative research is not possible, and even qualitative research is very problematic due to excessive fears and a general climate of uncertainty as to what can be asked from inmates. In our research we relied both on the researcher’s statements and women’s self-definition. From the 20 women who participated in our research, 10 were Roma according to both criteria.

By following the critical moments and pinpointing to some crucial deprivations in the life of the eight Roma women in this ‘group’, the following section will highlight some patterns in the rather complex set of interrelationships produced by a very high number of exclusion-related factors present in their lives. We will argue that due to the multiple disadvantages present in their life on the one hand, and the role of responsible motherhood, these women were left with no alternatives to petty crime. Violent/irresponsible/missing partners and repeated imprisonment only further narrow their options.

Even though we certainly do not wish to suggest a general connection between Roma women in prison, criminal careers, and motherhood - for the purpose of the analysis, we will refer to this particular pattern as that of “Roma mothers”. Yet it must be noted that in reality there are non-Roma women whose life paths would belong to this pattern while other Roma women would have very different developments in their lives.

### **Childhood deprivations**

Lack of educational qualifications and lack of professional qualifications are a common problem among the Roma women in prison<sup>15</sup>. As we learnt, this goes back to limited access to school or other serious barriers to schooling in early childhood, often influenced by the family environment or by the break in family ties and the move to state care:

*I ended up in state care when I was eight. Both my father and my mother were in prison, there were six children in our family. So I didn't really have a childhood. I finished four years of elementary school, but after that my studies were discontinued, I kept running away from the state care facility. (K8)*

*I attended school until I was twelve, I had four years of schooling, then later on in prison I completed all eight years of elementary school. At that time, when I was young, Roma still did not have their children participate in formal education. And for example when it was cold, my parents wouldn't let me go to school, they loved me so much. When in fact, I liked going to school. (K2)*

In a number of accounts the role of gender is very explicitly stated in the early interruption of school: at worst, some girls could not attend school because their work was much needed at home, especially in looking after younger children. At ‘best’, girls

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Due to the above-mentioned regulations on data protection, there is no official data on the number of Roma inmates in Hungarian prisons. Surveys based on self-definition of inmates found that about 40% of the prison population are Roma, prison directors give much higher estimates, on average 61%. Especially in the case of women, it is a broadly held opinion that the overwhelming majority of women inmates are Roma, while researchers found almost no difference between the ratio of Roma among men and women inmates based on self-identification. (in László Huszár, “Romák, börtönök, statisztikák”, Amaro Drom, 1997 August, pp. 9-11.)

<sup>15</sup> Even though many women prisoners have a poor educational background, (about 2/3 of them do not reach above the level of elementary school), our research seems to support the view that Roma women prisoners are especially disadvantaged. Only 2 of the 10 women had some vocational training, the majority had not completed elementary school.

were not encouraged to continue school and not given any attention and support when problems with school or temptations arose.

*“I did not attend school at all when I was young. This was because of the family; I had to look after the children, do the household chores, cook, wash and clean. I was at home with the kids while my parents were at work. I did what I could, and my mother finished everything at night that I couldn’t. Our parents were able to spend some time with us, they looked after us if they didn’t go to work. They didn’t place us into state care, we were loved, had everything we needed. The only thing is that I couldn’t go to school, unlike the others. I attended half a year of school once in prison, I am able to write my name, I am somewhat familiar with the letters of the alphabet, but I cannot read and write. (K1)*

*My mother died when I was thirteen years old. She hanged herself at home and I was the one who found her. I was raised by my grandmother until I was eight, then I was with my parents, afterwards I returned to my grandmother’s. At the age of fifteen I left for good. But until I left I had to help out with the laundry, cooking, cleaning. I never liked going to school. I was a poor student, because no one paid enough attention to me, neither at home nor at school. (M2)*

### **From childhood into motherhood**

Early pregnancies and looking after children certainly played an important role in most women’s life – in fact, all Roma women in our research had children, a few of them as many as 5 or 6 children. As we shall see throughout the report, the importance of motherhood has been a constantly recurring theme in the women’s accounts.

*I didn’t love my first husband, he was Hungarian but he had money. I just wanted to leave the state care facilities. I gave birth to my first child at the age of twelve. (E2)*

*My family didn’t encourage me to study either, then at seventeen I had a child. (M2)*

*I got married at fifteen, right after leaving the state care facilities, and had a baby when I was sixteen. (K8)*

Interrupting school not only means the start of motherhood, but also the start of not only domestic work in a separate household, but often paid working life outside the family – whether or not this early entry is registered in the official employment statistics or actually by the women themselves as ‘real work’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Hungarian research on poverty indicates that sustained, durable poverty especially threatens Roma families, as well as large families, also people who do not have elementary education, unemployed people and people who live on maternity benefits. (in Zsolt Spéder, *A szegénység változó arcai*, Századvég, Budapest, 2002.)

The official employment records of women in this group were often very modest, if not fully missing, while all of them worked either in unregistered seasonal/ temporary jobs or in the household, or most often, both at the same time. Many women said that they would not be able to get proper jobs without any qualifications.

*I was a day-laborer for years, whenever there was work available. In addition to that I also cleaned houses. There is nothing else I would be able to do. (K1)*

*I was a homemaker, I ran the household. There were times when I had a regular job as well, but I also sold things on the market. I did that regularly for years, about once or twice a week. I didn't have a regular workplace, I worked on the market, and this was enough, I had everything I needed. (K2)*

For many women, periods of employment alternated with periods of unemployment and often, with times of childbirth. Unemployment was not always registered. Apart from the income from the often insecure and temporary jobs or unemployment benefit, many women collected child benefit from the state, and some of them maternity benefits<sup>17</sup> as well. However, these benefits were hardly sufficient to cover for the family's needs – most often they were one of the several sources of income, in addition to income from work, from thefts and from family support. Welfare payments thus represented one type of income in a diversified range of sources, and these benefits by themselves would not have been sufficient for subsistence. Nevertheless, since maternity benefits and child benefits constituted a core income and meant some stability in most of the women's economic lives, we may certainly conclude, that despite their relatively low value, welfare payments formed an important basis in these households' economies. Yet at the same time, the great majority of women worked also - at least periodically - therefore, we have no reason to talk about welfare dependency in a sense that it would have encouraged women to stay away from the labor market.

### **Crime<sup>18</sup> as a necessity and a sign of responsible motherhood**

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<sup>17</sup> Since the transition, the Hungarian system of family benefits changed very frequently – in some periods, the maternity benefit was only available for those who had social security, which excluded many of the women who did not have regular employment.

<sup>18</sup> We refer here to economic crimes (mostly theft, robbery and fraud cases) committed by the women in this group. Theft and robbery were the charges against over 43% of imprisoned women in Hungary in 2003– if we take into account certain fraud cases etc, we can easily claim that over half of the women in prison are there due to cases related to economic crimes. Each of the 8 Roma women in this group was imprisoned for such crimes.

Agents in this research often referred to unspecified societal causes and complex factors leading to criminal careers, and listed several of these without any particular focus or emphasis. Despite the very many factors mentioned, economic crime driven by poverty was among the most often named reasons. Talking about women's crime, theft and robbery were the first to be mentioned by the agents – most often linked to Roma women. An awareness of the importance of class and race issues (and to some extent, the role of gender) was generally present in each account, however, at the same time, racial and gender stereotypes were abundant as well.

In their narratives committing crime often emerges as a rather natural and factual necessity if one has to feed the family. In fact, stealing in order to feed the children is proof of good motherhood insofar children are thus not taken into state care:

*I took up cleaning houses, picking fruit, doing seasonal work. For a long time I worked at the sugar refinery and at the shoe factory in Hatvan. I was unemployed after giving birth, and received unemployment benefits and an income supplement. But not for long, I couldn't get a job. Afterwards I lived from shoplifting. (E2)*

*I was on parental welfare, I was getting child benefits and child-raising supplements, and I earned some money cleaning houses. I also cleaned for the prosecutor of my earlier criminal case. When I ran out of money I went to steal for the children. I took care of my kids, that's why they were not placed into state care. (K6)*

Stealing in order to ensure the families' needs was not condemned in the families or communities they lived in.<sup>19</sup> The women were not concerned about any negative impact or stigma they may receive due to their imprisonment in their immediate family and community. If, very surprisingly, some children were not pleased with their mother's stay in prison, they did not understand that it was done for them:

*The children are upset with me, angry at the fact that I am in prison, but a mother should not be cast aside like this. (E2)*

The key measure of social integration/ success in their lives seems to be associated most strongly in their narratives with motherhood and family ties. Memories of their own mothers were often recalled with affection, always presented as the most important people in their lives and always in a tone of pride, respect and admiration<sup>20</sup>. State care as a result of a missing mother was presented as the ultimate evil:

*I feel really emotionally troubled, I don't have a mother. I mean I do, but she cast me aside. I was raised in state care ever since I was born. (E2)*

*It has been my experience both here and in Eger that those who spent some time in state care end up here sooner or later. I don't quite understand how, but these are the facts. I have siblings, but it is as if I didn't know them, there is no family unity. It's been like this ever since my mother died. (K8)*

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<sup>19</sup> The only exception to this was a young woman who married an older Hungarian man from a middle class family. She had to steal because of her husband's financial problems, yet she hid her criminal career as long as she could. "My mother-in-law will never speak to me. It was bad enough that I am young, I am pretty, and I am Roma too, but now on top of all came the prison! But my father-in-law really loves me, it's like in a fairy tale. He keeps sneaking up to our place, sometimes even several times a day."

<sup>20</sup> Fathers were sometimes recalled with similar warmth but often memories of drinking, desertion and violence disturbed the picture. Domestic violence will be addressed in the next section of the paper.

While in prison, the family was expected to take care of the children – which indeed happened in most cases. If it was not the case, relationships were threatened with sisters and brothers, since the ultimate evil and failure, state care, entered the life of these women and children.

*My children are in state care. I haven't kept in touch with my siblings since I have been in prison, because they didn't look after my kids. I couldn't count on them when I was imprisoned. (M2)*

The family environment may have played a part in the emerging criminal careers of the women. For many of the women, several family members and spouses have been to prison. The role of spouses/ partners in the crime was sometimes explicitly stated, either referring to the men's failure to bring home income, or to him being responsible for the design of the criminal act<sup>21</sup>.

*Yes, my husband did play a role in this crime. My husband did not bring home any money. He was working for a year, but he had to pay child support to his other family, so his whole salary was taken, plus he spent it on playing video-games/slot machines. I stole because of him. (K6)*

*My husband had problems. Earlier he had been a manager at a bank, but he was laid off and this ruined him. He had worked there for fifteen years, he got his severance pay, but all he did with it is just drink a lot and gamble it away in the casino. Our electricity was also cut off. I stole because we had nothing to live on. I lived from stealing for three years. (K7)*

Just as importantly, in some cases the spouse's role was emphasized not in regards to the given criminal act, but in the launch of a prison career. All of these experiences are linked to severe cases of domestic violence and will be further discussed in the next section of the paper.

*My first partner is still in prison, and he is almost always in prison, he keeps coming out and going back in. It is thanks to him that I got into prison the first time, prison was the place where I escaped to get away from him. (K7)*

*I got together with him when I left state care, I was very young, only fifteen. I had my daughter when I was sixteen year old. We lived together for twelve years. The first time I ended up in prison was because of him, it was attempted murder out of self-defense. He turned on the gas tap and locked me in, then came with matches and wanted to light everything on fire. So I stabbed him with a knife. He was always jealous and he also beat me. It was considered self-defense so I only served a one-year sentence. (K8)*

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<sup>21</sup> Especially in the case of robbery, women are often seen as 'implementers', instructed by the men. (in László Huszár, "Első lépés", Börtönügyi Szemle, 1997/3., p. 21.)

Also among the expert agents interviewed for our research, there was widespread agreement that, in cases of theft and robbery, women tend to be either the 'bait' or are there to be imprisoned instead of the men.

These mothers were incarcerated for theft in the overwhelming majority of cases, and as mentioned earlier, most of them were recidivists and had been to prison before. Earlier prison sentences in some cases contributed to further splits in their lives and resulted in further exclusion.

*I got married at a young age and we started having children who are now 16, 14, 13 and 12 years old. It was getting more and more difficult to support the family, I did not get a job, and my husband was working on and off. Then I was arrested for stealing, I was sentenced to four years and ten months in prison. Once I was imprisoned, my partner started slipping, going downhill. My husband often played slot machines and video-games and lost a lot of money. Then we had two more children who are now five and four years old. When I was released from prison, things were still very difficult. I haven't even finished elementary school, so it was really difficult for me to find a job. And my husband... For instance, when we were saving up for a house and wanted to buy some furniture, my husband took the money and simply spent it. There was never enough money for everything, since he kept spending it. Now I am imprisoned for theft again, and my husband was the one who was at home with the six children, but he was murdered a few months ago. Now the children are staying with my brother-in-law and they can't wait for me to finally return home. (K6)*

## **2. Interrupted by Violence The Path of Domestic Violence Victims to Prison.**

The only recent research in Hungary that targeted women inmates indicated the massive role of domestic violence in the lives of the 100 interviewed women.<sup>22</sup> A topic, which until a few years ago was considered to be a taboo in Hungary, is now increasingly present both in public discourse and also in the discourse of policy-making in certain fields. In line with the entry of the topic into such discourses, we found that most of the agents interviewed – especially those at higher levels in the penitentiary hierarchy – showed some awareness about the frequency of domestic violence victims among the women convicted for homicide and manslaughter<sup>23</sup>. This fact is worth mentioning, even if such discursive awareness is not necessarily translated into practice currently in the institutions of Hungarian criminal justice – an issue to be addressed in Hypotheses 3 of the paper.

We will now focus on the potential links between domestic violence and social exclusion – this will necessitate a slightly different conceptual approach to social exclusion than used so far. We will argue that even if these women led socially rather integrated lives prior to the start of the often daily violence in their lives, domestic violence in itself became a factor that led to several forms of exclusion – already prior to the criminal incident. We will also argue that analyzing the impact of domestic violence on the lives of women both prior to the crime, in the criminal procedure, inside prison and after release, will reveal that being convicted and imprisoned for them causes an ‘interruption’ of all prior integration in their lives, and a loss of social status hardly recoverable.

It is a well-known fact from the literature on domestic violence that it cuts across social classes, status groups, etc. and may appear in families with very different social backgrounds and positions<sup>24</sup>. In our research we found that the three women imprisoned because of homicide related to domestic violence, had led more or less socially integrated lives prior to the occurrence of domestic violence. That is, they had a sufficient educational background, permanent employment for a significant part of their lives, good relationships with their families of origin (including their children) and communities. However, we will argue that due to the appearance of domestic violence, their lives have

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<sup>22</sup> Researchers found that about 1/3 of the interviewed women imprisoned for homicide or severe physical abuse, suffered regular abuse as a child. About 1/3 of the abuse was physical and in about 50% of the cases, sexual. In 60% of the cases the target of the crime (homicide or severe physical abuse) was their husband or partner. About 50% of these women described regular physical abuse by their partner during the year or years prior to the crime. Conflicts, humiliation and emotional terror were very often mentioned by the women, only in 1/6 of the cases was emotional or physical abuse absent in the relationship. About 20% of the women were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, while in more than 50% of the cases their partners suffered from alcohol consumption, many of them were addicted. (In: Dr. Lenke Fehér, dr. Parti Katalin, “Nők a börtönben”, in *Kriminológiai Tanulmányok*, 2002.)

<sup>23</sup> About 18% of the women prisoners (2003.07.07), that is, 190 women were in prison due to homicide in Hungary. Three of the four women who were imprisoned for homicide in our sample, were imprisoned due to murdering (or attempting to murder) a violent man in their family, in two cases their husband and in one case, her father. Another woman imprisoned currently for robbery had been in prison already, for attempted murder against her partner about 10 years ago.

<sup>24</sup> Krisztina Morvai, *Terror a családban*, Kossuth Kiadó, 1998.

changed which led to isolation and losses that can be linked to the concept of social exclusion. Illustrating these effects is not only helpful for their cases, but also applies to the several other women's experiences, who were imprisoned for other crimes (theft, robbery) and yet had been victims of domestic violence by their partners previously. Therefore, where appropriate, in addition to the 3 women imprisoned for homicide due to domestic violence, we will also build on the experiences of the other 3 women who were battered by their partners. Also, it must be noted, that quite a few of the interviewed women described the presence of domestic violence during their childhood in their families, usually in the form of a drinking father and occasional or regular violence against their mother. We will consider these as various yet similar forms of male violence, in extreme cases leading to homicide of either the batterer or the victim<sup>25</sup> – yet in all cases, causing different forms of social exclusion in the life of the victims of the violence.

### **Damage done by years of abuse**

The battering in all cases lasted for years, with various but escalating intensity and included – as usual - physical, sexual, verbal and emotional terror and often targeted several family members:

*We got married in 1984 when Julia, my daughter from my first marriage, started going to school. Everything was all right in the beginning, although after the first year he started beating me for no reason. After a while there were instances when he locked Julia out of the house and wouldn't let her in. Even my mother-in-law was really against Julia, according to her she wasn't 'her son's blood.' My husband beat Julia as well, which I just couldn't stand. He constantly threatened me, there were times when he held a gun to my head. (K10)*

*This relationship with my partner was the biggest mistake of my life, the worst decision I ever made. We met and had two children, and then all hell broke loose: he constantly pounded on me. That's how I got this scar on my lips. I suffered a great deal. (K7)*

Isolation of the woman from her friends, her family members and other social contacts is very common by the batterer. Also her forced withdrawal from the workplace referring to her maternal responsibilities or to jealousy, is also frequent. These acts contribute to her loss of social contacts, independent income, sense of achievement and autonomy.

*My mother was a nurse and she loved her job. She did not want to go to work in short sleeves so that the bruises wouldn't show, but once they noticed that she was covered in bruises. She kept changing jobs, she was terrified that her co-workers would find out. (E1)*

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<sup>25</sup> 54% of homicide cases processed in Hungarian courts in 1995, was related to domestic matters, most of them, to domestic violence. There are three times more women victims of domestic violence related suicides than men victims. (in Krisztina Morvai, *Terror a családban*, Kossuth Kiadó, 1998.)

*My husband completely isolated me, we did not have friends at all. I had several jobs after finishing college, I was a pay-roll division supervisor at a company and I also worked at the college. Later on my husband did not want me to work, as he would provide for us. Then for a while I worked at my husband's gas station and his car shop, but I couldn't stand that. After my daughter was born I stayed at home as a real sacrificing mother would. (K10)*

*He wanted to own me, I was not allowed to go anywhere. (K9)*

The combined effects of isolation, various forms of abuse, loss of self-esteem and sometimes income, often result in a situation which can be interpreted as a form of dependence on the batterer. Yet, the once powerful concept of “learned helplessness”<sup>26</sup> can be challenged, since many of the women victims actually sought support and tried to leave their batterers.

### **Ambiguous authorities**

The fact that domestic violence has been a taboo until recently, with which neither authorities, nor the public wanted to deal with, contributed to the women's isolation and helplessness as well as their narrowing options. The responsibility of the police and other agents in not acting on the calls – as long as there is “no blood” - is especially striking, knowing that one of the cases ended in murder attempt, and two of them, in actual homicide.

*When I called the police that my father was beating my mother and intimidating the whole family and that I was there with my one-year old daughter, the response of the police officer was that, 'When there is trouble at home I don't call the Nők Lapja [a women's weekly], deal with it yourself'! (E1)*

*I didn't dare report him to the police, the family didn't even know and they wouldn't have been able to help either. This is all so personal that one doesn't want to make it public. But I just couldn't handle it any longer and I shared everything with a psychologist. I also told the psychologist that I wasn't able to stand it anymore, so I was told to take sedatives. (K9)*

The fact that domestic violence is a taboo, also influenced the criminal proceedings and the court decision in several, often ambiguous ways. The women admitted the homicide of their father and husband respectively and were released immediately after their police testimonies for the entire court procedure – a sign that the cases were considered straightforward and the women representing no threat to society. However, according to the women, domestic violence was not taken into consideration.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Krisztina Morvai, *Terror a családban*, Kossuth Kiadó, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Since this research did not address the judicial procedure, we cannot evaluate this claim. However, the women who suffered domestic violence, expressed more dissatisfaction or feelings of injustice with court procedure than other women in the research.

*They didn't take domestic violence into consideration. I got eight years for instigating attempted murder. Later on the newspapers said that the judge wanted to set an example with this severe sentence. (K10)*

*I got three years of imprisonment at the court of first instance and I would have had to serve only a year and a half. This was increased to four years at the court of second instance. It wasn't fair that they said I should have gotten used to abuse, the younger ones must always get out of their elders' way. They could have considered that I wasn't even twenty at the time and it wasn't pre-mediated but they even explicitly stated that, had they taken these two facts into consideration, they would not have been able to convict me at all. They always thought it a bad reflection on my mother that she was able to live with someone who bathed only twice a year, etc. They were only interested in the five minutes prior to and after the incident, they didn't ask my siblings how we had lived for years. They were only interested in the neighbors' views. I have great reservations concerning this legal system. (E1)*

### **And more special losses**

The stigma of being a murderer of one's father or husband is especially powerful and led to further losses caused by domestic violence:

*I ended up in prison to escape my husband's abuse, to get away from him. I took the blame in a robbery and I served two and a half years, but I felt safe in prison. They took everything, I had to give up custody of my children so that they wouldn't end up in state care. Then my ex-husband and mother-in-law forgot to return them to me. (K7)*

*This was a small town, word got around really fast despite us having moved to another house. My child was not accepted to kindergarten even though there were four different ones around. They asked her where her mother was. They wanted to take out their need for revenge on the children even though they had nothing to do with it. The whole family moved to another town. But people might also find out there so we would like to move further away. (E1)*

Very important special losses and threats influence the victims of domestic violence include homelessness or renewed physical danger after prison<sup>28</sup>:

*My husband and I owned a house together, half was on his name and half on mine. My husband's younger brother sued me while I was in prison, saying that I killed my husband and I therefore couldn't inherit his share. He [the younger brother] also demanded my half of the house since that had been given to me*

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<sup>28</sup> Prison programs and the effect of imprisonment will be addressed in hypotheses 2 and 3, however, it must be noted that there is no help for the victims of domestic violence currently in Hungarian prisons, while many of them have minimum contacts and visitors and suffer from law suits, complicated if not lost family relationship and especially their children's reactions to their mother's crime.

*previously as a present. All this lasted for three years, I lost the house and now I have nowhere to go. I dealt with this three-year lawsuit from within the prison via correspondence. I got the paperwork for the last court appearance one day in advance and I was unable to attend. What's more, I have to pay for the value estimation of the house and for the trial's expenses, but how? (K9)*

*I have not seen him for years, but it is still not over. He is in a Budapest prison and last month he sent me a message through a television show, saying that I should get ready because he will find me and we will see each other in hell. He said he would kill my mother, my younger sister, my husband, my daughter and me as well. The problem is that if he finds us, he will. His brothers/sisters were there in the studio, and they said that Bela is the type of person who would actually do all these things. He will be released 2-3 weeks after me. I am sure he will look for us and the problem is he doesn't think at all before acting. He kicked me and beat me up in the subway when I was eight months pregnant. How will I ever go for a walk with my child after this? (K7)*

*My older brother is abusing my mother. It is terrible that I, the other battered one in the family, am serving time because of killing my father, while my mother is being abused again by somebody. (E1)*

*I can't go back to the house, regardless of the fact that half of it is mine, because I know that since he had abused me so much I couldn't live with him any longer. I am afraid that he will blackmail me with the children, that I will be able to see them only if I comply – he never once let them visit me in prison. And I am afraid he wants to start over, even after the attempted murder! (K10)*

In summary, when comparing the situation of these women after prison compared with the relative certainty and social position they enjoyed prior to the start of the domestic violence, the relative change in it is very significant and influences all key social institutions including work and housing, family and the community – from a partly or fully integrated position into homelessness, propertylessness and joblessness<sup>29</sup>. One particular dimension of this loss, the (potential) loss of children, is especially dramatic if we consider that these women in many ways continued to comply with gender roles regarding marriage, heterosexuality and maternity.

The women were fully aware that it was the years of battering that led to the fatal events. Quite a few of them, however, did not use or know the term 'domestic violence'. They all said that they had to come to terms with it by themselves and did not receive much help from anyone, even though several of them sought out the prison psychologists. They were not aware that many other women in prison had similar experiences or that anything could have been done (e.g. therapy) to help the process. Most women felt very guilty, took full responsibility for their crimes and did not position themselves as victims.

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<sup>29</sup> These crimes result in entries into the criminal record for several years. And the text of the criminal record – homicide – does not particularly attract employers. Actual evaluation of job integration will take place in hypothesis 4.

*The whole thing still bothers me, it should have happened differently, he shouldn't have died. This whole thing is horrible. I still cannot fully comprehend what happened exactly. (K9)*

Their sense of guilt, the power of gender roles and the lack of professional support in facing domestic violence may explain why some women were still very controversial in talking about their partners. The husbands were portrayed as batterers on the one hand, and loving husbands/ fathers on the other hand. Wedding photos with the deceased husband were shown with enthusiasm and the few moments of happiness were recalled. At the same time, many expressed a sense of injustice and felt that the court did not take into consideration the issue of domestic violence appropriately, as it was referred to in the above section on 'ambiguous authorities'.

Some agents were basically unaware of the role of domestic violence in the life of many imprisoned women. A few agents expressed awareness about the role and frequency of domestic violence among the women imprisoned for homicide and talked about this in a tone of empathy. Especially prison administrators who worked more or less directly with the women described the difficult lives of these women to the point where some referred to them as "victims". Yet this empathy has not been translated into either challenging the legitimacy of their imprisonment at least in certain cases, or into recognizing their needs and thus a call for special programs for the women while in prison (e.g. therapy, counseling, help in arranging lawsuits from prison, solving problems in contacting children etc.) or after release (e.g. if homeless, arranging place in women's shelters).

### **3. Crime as ‘choice’**

#### **Independent and subversive women**

The few women in this pattern<sup>30</sup> exhibited a degree of autonomy and independence in their lives including their criminal career – which often led to rather ‘subversive’ behaviors, behaviors that ran counter to accepted social norms, especially, gender-related norms in contemporary Hungarian society.

#### **Not excluded**

The women in this pattern, even if some of them suffered from poverty, did not come from marginalized families – many grew up in two-parent families and described a happy childhood. In fact, the two women whose life is perhaps the closest to the ideal type of this pattern, came from middle class families and had educated parents, a fashion designer, university teacher, or public prosecutor. Most of the women themselves had acquired middle level educational qualifications, that is, secondary school or vocational training certificates and some aspired for university education. Regardless of their age, they all believed that they should continue studying:

*I have completed a secondary school specializing in commerce (5 years). I had a child in the meantime, but I was able to finish as a regular full-time student. I would really like to attend university, I would like to study much more, perhaps even teach children. (K12)*

*I have completed my grammar school education, I also have an intermediate level certificate in storage management, as well as basic education in library science and a certificate in office management and computer operations. I studied playing the piano for eight years, which later on I taught as a second job. I was not accepted to university, to the faculty of mechanical engineering, but I don't mind that. I am still interested in new things. Acquiring a little knowledge never hurts anybody. (K4)*

#### **Independence through jobs and criminal careers**

They all had a series of jobs from an early age and put an emphasis on making their own lives.

*I started my own small business ventures in 1984. First I had a little green-grocery shop, then a children's store, after which I owned a pub. I also had coin-operated game machines. (K12)*

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<sup>30</sup> Six of the 20 women in the research were considered to belong to this pattern. Despite some significant differences among the six of them, they all came from a ‘not excluded’ social position, independence seemed to be a central value, they shared a criminal career, and subversive attitudes were present in their lives. None of the six women are Roma. In terms of age, the group is very varied (19-57 years), also in terms of crimes committed (theft, fraud, embezzlement, attempted murder) and length of their prison sentence (from 9 months to over 10 years).

*I was trained to work in the knitwear industry, but I have hardly worked in my profession, since the political transition put a stop to this industry. I started working at the age of seventeen in a state-owned bottling plant. After that I worked as a cashier. Then there were a lot of opportunities at AFESZ [a state agency for the protection of consumers], they were hiring. I only worked there for half a year, because unfortunately I didn't finish the course. At nineteen I worked with a hairdresser, and I was also employed in a café for a few months. I worked for a funeral home before having a child. It was a full-time job which lasted for a year and a half, I was cleaning and dealing with wreaths. (E4)*

Experimenting sometimes included travelling abroad (sometimes for years) at a young age to work or with no particular plans.

*I wandered around here and there, I spent some time in Budapest for instance, but there were also times when I left for Spain on the spur of the moment, I was a lot of trouble. I worked abroad for two years as a waitress while my mother was looking after the kids. (K3)*

*I lived in Frankfurt for a year and a half and also spent some time in Marseilles. I wanted to settle down in Sweden but I ran out of luck, I was expelled from the country. I must note that Hungarian prisons are in no way comparable to Swedish ones! (K12)*

Most women for most of their lives held jobs, however, still many encountered financial problems. This was named as the main reason for the thefts or intellectual crimes they got involved in. However, it must be noted that these women had experienced a significantly lesser degree of poverty and exclusion than the 'Roma mothers', but potentially had different expectations due to their middle class family environments.

Their criminal careers either included a range of various criminal offences, (including but not limited to theft and forgery), or white-collar crime (computer fraud or embezzlement) committed over a lengthy period of time. They all expressed full responsibility for their crime, which they committed by themselves – thus financial or emotional dependence on a man has not been an issue in their crime case, and neither has domestic violence. They all served their first prison sentences.

*I worked as an assistant catering manager for this company from 1996 to 2002. The money would have been enough but I just couldn't appreciate it and that's why I am here now. I took some of the company's money every month so I could lead a better life. I was convicted for embezzlement and forgery. (K4)*

*I lived with my parents while I worked as a bank clerk and I liked my job. I lived on my own income as well as on money I got from continuously committing fraud. I was charged with and convicted for causing significant damage by continuous computer fraud. My income was not sufficient, this is why I was 'committing a crime,' but I still did not spend any money on luxury items. (M22)*

Many talked about their motivation and regret, but were also very critical about the injustice suffered during the criminal procedure, as well as about prison conditions and possible violation of rights. Several women considered the idea of launching a NGO in order to support women ex-prisoners.

*My business ventures were doing well. Then I was constantly high, I was being very rebellious. In the last year and a half I completely turned away from my family, I was losing touch with reality. When I was using drugs sometimes I left for weeks at a time and my parents were looking after the children. I was mixed up in the wrong crowd and this is how it turned out. (K12)*

*Yes, I have been treated unjustly, but I don't wish to talk about that. I am not the type to always emphasize my side of the story. (K3)*

*I cannot accept the verdict, I don't believe it's fair. I have accepted the consequences but I think it is unfair that I have acted irresponsibly once and I received such a sentence. (M22)*

### **Excitement and needs**

A few women explicitly referred to the importance of excitement that was linked to their earlier life-style – and explained their concern regarding the future.

*This is an average, mundane life, nothing special, it is boring and monotonous. We get up, we wash, cook and clean. I can't wait for summer so I can go places, to the beach for example. I used to live a high-society life, I miss that. Not that I am tempted but I still miss it. But I'll get used to this, this is good, this is the way it has to be done. (K3)*

*I am earning some money but I still cannot provide for all my needs. I couldn't buy a monthly pass to the swimming pool, I cannot go to the solarium and I can't afford any new clothes. I didn't use to live like this, I used to just throw money right and left and didn't need to keep track of how much I spent. Cars, trips, I could afford everything I laid my eyes on. Now I would like to have a little plastic surgery done, for instance on my belly, my butt and my tits – now this would cost me a million. (K12)*

In her case, the earlier lifestyle actually included dependence on drugs, which also played a role in the crime committed by her. She was particularly thankful for the time in prison which resulted in a full transformation of her thoughts, expectations and lifestyle, yet her worries about the fulfillment of her needs still continued.

## Gender: Subversive women?

The lifestyle and behaviors of many of these women did not conform to the gender-roles and behaviors expected from women. Travelling and working alone abroad for years has not been in line with the ideal of womanhood – and, pursuing a criminal career is certainly not among the socially accepted options for women. As we saw, these women designed and performed their criminal acts by themselves, neither indirectly (through domestic violence) or directly under the influence of men, and often not due to the lack of other options either. Therefore, the term 'crime by choice' can be applied, even though it does not indicate that all of their actions were fully conscious and calculated based on rational choice. This alone is rather subversive, however, considering their relationship to topics rather central to 'conventional' values as marriage, children and heterosexuality, further evidence support their subversiveness.

Some women openly criticized the idea of being a housewife, or the expectation of getting married. In general, the importance attributed to men, was not so central even for the many who lived in marriages and partnerships.

*The children were staying with my mother while I was abroad, she is their legal guardian. I love my mother but I cannot talk to her and she misses our conversations. My mother is a typical homemaker, she cares about what to cook and what is going on with the kids, I am not so interested in all that. (K3)*

*I am happy about how my life turned out – with no husband. I had a schedule and a lifestyle that suited me and I lived my own life. Then I realized that years had passed and I didn't even want to get married any longer. I would also like to keep my independence in my current relationship, though I have been together with my partner for nine years now. I only dropped him a note saying that I would be away for a while, he didn't even know I had been convicted. He was not aware of the crime I had committed, that was all done by me. (K4)*

*When I was imprisoned for such a long time, I told my husband to go and live his own life, that he was not obliged to wait for me and suffer because of what I had done. But he waited for me. He was aware that I had had lesbian relationships even before prison and that I had girlfriends while inside. I am not sure whether I can return to having a heterosexual relationship but I don't want to desert the man who raised my children. (K12)*

Yet, even in their case, their children came to play a central importance in their concerns for the future. The few women who left their children in the care of their mothers while they went on trips, talked at length about their guilt and drew up plans for becoming decent mothers – yet in other cases felt that motherhood perhaps was not their call in life. This often produced controversial messages about motherhood.

*In spite of the fact that I suffered a lot in here, it was my parents (who died in the meantime) and my children who suffered the most. The thought of my children is*

*what kept me going. The most important for me is to re-build my relationship with them. I actually realized after they were born that I wasn't meant to live like this, having children and all that goes along with it. (K12)*

*I don't have any children of my own. I would have had twins but I had an abortion because I didn't want to shame my parents. I wasn't even in love with their father, a married man. Perhaps it's for the best. I wouldn't have married him even if I had had the twins. Maybe now I would do things differently. There is no way of knowing how things would have turned out if I had given birth to those children. I don't think I would have committed this crime. Things are all right the way they are. (K4)*

Just as much agents were very aware of the role of 'ethnicity' and some of them addressed issues specific to victims of domestic violence, they did not consider/ address any such group of women as discussed above. Yet, a few agents talked about their expectations that white-collar crime will increase and many agents expect to see a significant and perhaps fast rise in drug-related crime among women as well.

Most women in this pattern managed the time in prison<sup>31</sup> rather well, however, this will be addressed in more detail in hypotheses 2 and 3.

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<sup>31</sup> It is perhaps indicative of prison relationships the way in which some of the more subversive women in this pattern were noticed by prison personnel. Independent, often non-conform thinking and acting is not exactly the ideally expected behavior in prisons – thus some of these women were known as 'problematic' for prison personnel. However, they are often informal opinion leaders and thus have significant power among inmates – a power worth taking into account by prison personnel as well. Also, many of these women were considered 'intelligent' and enjoyed some respect both from personnel and inmates, due to the intellectual nature of their crime or their level of education and middle class background (and possibly also because they are not Roma.). Thus, on the whole, some of these 'problematic' women often managed to exert some power over prison authorities and certainly over fellow inmates.

## II. The prison's contribution to exclusion

**Hypothesis 2. Imprisonment excludes women who were not socially excluded before their imprisonment and excludes already-excluded women still further.**

**2.1. Sub-hypothesis: In the case of women, multiple effects of exclusion are at work due to their imprisonment. Women suffer an irrecoverable loss of roots, due to the separation from the children and violation of their gender role as mothers and wives, among others.**

Based on the analysis presented in hypothesis 1., it can be concluded that motherhood has been repeatedly stressed as a dominant life theme by the great majority of the women, regardless of age, educational background, ethnicity, or crime committed. Even some of the women whose lives can be considered as 'subversive' in gender terms, have exhibited a desire to be proper mothers – or have regretted if they failed to do so. In fact, we have seen that regretting the earlier lifestyle was in some cases directly linked to the damage caused to the children – thus leading a proper life was immediately linked to being a good mother. In other cases, we have seen that putting children to state care has been defined as the ultimate failure as mother. The power of avoiding state care as the test of motherhood is so strong that it has legitimated every action, including crime. In either case: motherhood occupied a central place in many women's narratives about the successes and failures of their life.

Motherhood emerged as one of the central issues of concern in the women's narratives about prison life and its consequences. However, in terms of the strategies developed, we found very significant variations. On the one hand, some women very consciously tried to maintain contact with their children in all available forms, kept track of the developments in the children's lives and tried to maintain an active presence in their lives overall.

*I talk to my children on the phone every day for 15 minutes. The family has also visited me, the children, my husband, my brother-in-law as well as our best man. (K6)*

*My children are 18, 15 and 12 years old. They'll be getting married soon. I can't wait to see my son. There are three children: I have two girls but I love the boy more since he's the only male. All three of them are staying at my sisters'. They come for regular visits every month and they look forward to it more than I do. We have a great relationship. (E3)*

Yet, many other women developed distancing strategies through which they believed it would be easier for the children to put up with the sudden absence of their mothers, or because it was simply too much pain to listen to them on the phone or meet them in person. Some women tried to hide from the children that they are in prison.

*To me family means only my child, not even my husband. This word to me means nothing but my child. Yet being in prison puts a distance between my daughter*

*and I. During the first couple of months I didn't even call her so she would be able to forget me a little. When she first came for a visit she didn't even touch me, she just stayed with her father. I am not sure whether she recognized me. (K7)*

*I wouldn't really like my children to find out what is happening so that they would not be humiliated or hurt. My husband visits me and there are times when my little daughter comes with my mother and my mother-in-law. But I didn't want my two sons to visit me. They are too smart not to figure out what this place really is. (E4)*

Special difficulties emerged concerning what to tell the children of those mothers who were imprisoned due to homicide of a family member or murder attempt. In some cases, the surviving batterer punished the mother by not allowing any contact with her children for years. Another kind of difficulty emerged for women serving long sentences in maintaining real communication instead of formal visits.

*When I found out I was going to prison, I really bound myself to my daughter. For a while I didn't even tell her I was in prison. Then a short while ago we told her about what had happened, and she asked why we hadn't let her know earlier. I was afraid she would not love me, but she felt hurt by this. She is aware of what her grandfather had been like and that I had something to do with his death. (E1)*

*My two children from my earlier relationship are with their grandmother, and my ex-partner is in prison. I haven't seen the children for two years, they won't pass either letters or the phone on to them. My ten-year-old daughter was shot in the head six months ago by a seven-year old, and I only found out about this on television. I went to the hospital and I was able to secretly visit her in the middle of the night with the help of a doctor. I have had no news about them ever since. (K7)*

*My family, the children included, regularly visited me for seven years. Afterwards they stopped visiting, which didn't bother me since the visits had become completely impersonal. Two hours is simply not enough to maintain a real relationship. We have all changed, I as well as the ones on the outside. They lie. The ones outside the prison walls don't tell the truth so as not to upset the one locked up. The one in prison doesn't complain either. So there is no honest communication. (K12)*

Being banned from children, or ignored by them is extremely painful for the few women in such a situation – and is surely the largest source of misery in their accounts. Suicide thoughts and nervous breakdowns are directly linked to this pain.

*My children don't usually visit me, they are angry that I am in prison. I really have no one [crying]. I was so bent out of shape two months ago, I almost committed suicide. (E2)*

*I was really shaken and undone when my daughter unexpectedly ended up in the same prison where I was. Before that I had been all right. Then I looked up and could not believe that she was there: one floor above me. I got into a fight with one of the guards because he wouldn't let me see her. I had a heart attack and I had to be re-animated. I kept watching over her, making sure she didn't get into fights or any sort of trouble. My daughter was in prison for thirteen months and she left a six-month-old baby at home. I feel that I couldn't give my daughter what she needed. I have been through a lot of bad things in my life, but nothing worse than this had ever happened to me. (K8)*

While the parents' support was perhaps the most stable support for the overwhelming majority of women, in some cases, by being imprisoned criminals, the women violated another gendered role, that of a daughter.

*My parents adopted me at a very young age. I loved them very much but I was rebellious, I refused to lead an honest, ordinary life. When I was off, wandering around, they looked after the children. My parents were highly educated and decent people, my mother taught at the Academy of Drama and Theatre. She passed away half a year after I was imprisoned and my father three months after her. I attended the funerals in handcuffs. I only found out later from a neighbor that my mother had committed suicide by swallowing hydrochloric acid. She was unable to come to terms with what had happened with her only daughter. And my father simply followed her. When I found out, I couldn't imagine how I was going to live after this. (K12)*

*My mother visits less often than the others. She still hasn't been able come to terms with this so it's better for her that we don't see each other that often. (M20)*

Most women were left without a partner's active support, due to a number of different reasons. While some women were without a partner at the time of imprisonment, a few relationships broke up due to the prison – either because the women decided it was better not to tell the partner, or because the men decided not to wait for them. In yet other cases, the men were formally there, however, the women did not expect much from their partners. A few women started new 'relationships' while in prison, based on one or two meetings with a man in prison and the correspondence that followed. Overall, only a few of the women enjoyed the continuing support of a partner.

Some agents pointed out that there is a difference between the endurance of relationships depending on whether the man or the woman is imprisoned and explained that generally, women tend to give more support to their imprisoned spouses than men give to women in prison. There were examples for men breaking up in case of very short sentences and others keeping in touch for long years. However, generally the stability and reliability of such support in most cases was not comparable to the support expected and received from parents, children or sisters (and brothers).

Similarly, while most women adopted a rather pragmatic view about husbands and spouses, all great losses, ruptures, guilt feelings and major emotional struggles were associated above all with worries about children. This certainly supports the hypothesis that imprisoned women are especially influenced by the potential rupture of ties with their children.

While some agents shared the view that women especially suffer from the separation from their children, others insisted that there is no such difference between women and men inmates: all of them suffer the same loss. However, all agents agreed that women are more emotional, thus express such feelings more readily.

**2.2. Sub-hypothesis: Prison frequently becomes a factor of secondary exclusion (adds new factors of exclusion to already excluded people). Very often it does not contribute to the elimination of exclusion processes and mechanisms, far from it, it aggravates them, by reproducing social and personal conditions that reproduce criminal conduct.**

**2.2.a. During the prison sentence, social contacts of inmates are negatively influenced.**

Many women stressed that family relationships were maintained in their original intensity or actually became stronger due to imprisonment. As noted in the above section however, women were concerned about their relationships with their children and often feared that time in prison has torn their children away from them or at least has weakened the ties. Women and agents agreed that the length of sentence markedly influences this issue, and long sentences especially threaten family relationships. Overall, an opinion shared by many women can be summarized as follows:

*I haven't felt any distance from my family members and friends. 'Those who love me, will love me no matter what.'* (M22)

Less than half of the women had regular visits<sup>32</sup>. A key reason for lack of visitors had been damaged family relationships or feelings of shame, addressed in the above section. Even though visits had been defined as important opportunities for family reunions by the women, many of them were very considerate in determining how often invitations for visits should be sent, as visits were often very burdensome for family members. In fact, quite a few women believed that visits required such a sacrifice from family members, that they would prefer not to have regular visits.

*My mother visited me once, while my son has been here several times, the last visit was about 1.5-2 years ago. It's too much of a strain on them, they have to leave from the other side of the country one day prior to the visit. My mother is a*

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<sup>32</sup> As stated in § 36. of the Prison Administration Law, prisoners are entitled to at least monthly visits. The same paragraph declares that prisoners are entitled to correspondence with their relatives and other specified persons to be approved by the prison director. The frequency and length of letters is not limited. Letters can be opened and checked for security reasons. Usage of the telephone is allowed in line with the actual conditions and facilities of the prison itself.

*diabetic, has high blood pressure and also struggles with heart problems. The visit turned out to be a disaster, she was completely worn out by the trip. She kept crying throughout the visit and I can't imagine what would have happened if she had really gotten ill somewhere along the way. So it's better for her not to come any more, I didn't even invite them for a visit after this. (K9)*

*My parents and son visit me every three months from Tiszaöldvár. The reason that they come so seldom is because of the lack of money and that there is no one to drive. (M15)*

Distance had caused such difficulties that in fact it was the first and foremost reason for request for transfer to another penitentiary. Due to permanent overcrowding, such requests were routinely refused, but when granted, meant a very tangible improvement in maintaining contact with family. The application of LER<sup>33</sup> also carried the same advantages and was very much appreciated by the few women who benefited from it.

*The reason I asked to be transferred here to Eger is so that my family can visit me. Everyone needs encouragement from the family. My husband visits me, and my daughter comes with my mother and mother-in-law, but I didn't want my two sons here. These visits are every month. I would also like to meet with my younger sister, but the visits are not enough, it would be nice to have more of those. (E4)*

*I am on LER and I have the prison to thank for this. This is designed to help find employment, to spend more time with family and not to lose touch with the outside world. So I can get hold of everything I need. This means 30 hours of leave every month including travel time. In addition, I can go into the city for four hours on Saturday once a month when my family members come for a visit. (E1)*

While visits were reserved for family members – and indeed, to the narrowly defined family - some women kept in touch with their friends through correspondence and in a few cases, by phone calls as well. Yet, very few women maintained contact with friends – only the young women. Some decided to stop the relationship with their friends, since they may have been involved together in the crime for which they were imprisoned.

Most women did not have any visits home during their time in prison, even those who were imprisoned for years. The only real exception to this were the women on LER, as mentioned above. Apart from these lucky few, short leaves for home were extremely rare and were limited to those cases where the law explicitly had to be applied. Funerals of family members were such exceptions, although not even these leaves were automatic.

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<sup>33</sup> LER (Lenient Executive Rule) is a progressive measure which allows for visits home and several other advantages. The so-called Lenient Executive Rules offer the biggest freedom and flexibility to those prisoners who have already served half of their sentence, behave well, thus it is believed that the objective of the penalty can be reached with lighter measures as well. (high-security prisons excluded). If on LER, the prisoner can leave the prison four times a month for short leaves, can work outside the prison without supervision and is entitled to get the earned money in cash.

*I got two days of leave twice, to attend the funerals of my husband and my mother-in-law. (K6)*

*I wasn't allowed to leave even for my brother's funeral, the security officer wouldn't let me. At times like these they ask for the police's opinion, whether me leaving the prison is a risk factor. So they check whether things are in order with the contact person – my daughter – but they said they couldn't find Piroska at her registered address. I checked on this afterwards, and they didn't even go to where she lives, or actually they went to the wrong address. Since they considered this conflicting information, the security officer would not grant me a leave. It didn't matter that I had been corresponding with her at that address for the last two years, they didn't consider this a valid explanation. (K10)*

Some women felt that access to leaves for home is only given to those who develop special relationships or deliver special services or information to prison personnel. Others were not that explicit, yet many hinted that leaves are privileges, and access to them is granted very subjectively and even discriminatively.

*They should have let me go home after I had served half of my sentence. But they didn't, because I am a lesbian and I am not devout. (K12)*

*I didn't get any leave, this is usually given to those who spy and report. This is very typical of this place, those few people can go home often, they are moved to lower security regimes, they have good jobs. Many people would do anything for these privileges. (K5)*

*Only those are allowed to go home who participate in organized extra activities and workshops and those – I'll dare say it in plain Hungarian – who suck up each and every way possible. It isn't good behavior that matters. (K9)*

People who serve long sentences, are especially at risk of losing or loosening family ties. These women are moved to a so-called transition group<sup>34</sup> a few years prior to the end of sentence – and are allowed for visits to ease the 'transition'. These first visits outside the prison and to the home indeed, were very dramatic to the women.

*The first time I was allowed to go home after so many years, the children and the family felt like strangers, it was bizarre, even though we were corresponding in the meantime. First I felt rejected by the children, their reactions to me were very negative. They unloaded everything on me about why I hadn't been with them. I didn't feel good at home at all, I greatly missed the prison and I couldn't wait to return. (K12)*

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<sup>34</sup> Those who serve long sentences and have already served 5 years, should be moved 2 years prior to their release to a so-called transition group. In a transition group – as defined by §. 29 of the Prison Administration Law - prisoners enjoy a higher degree of freedom in moving around the prison, may work outside the prison and meet the probation officer regularly.

Agents appraised both LER and transition groups very positively, and in general, were in favor of extending such measures to larger groups of inmates. Some agents were rather critical towards the move to stricter regulation of leaves after 1999, which resulted in dramatically cutting back leaves and access to LER. Further, specific aspects of legislation on LER were criticized for limiting its availability and hopes were expressed that the very recently supported broader application of LER continues. However, apparently a contradiction was tangible in the discourse of those agents who worked in prisons, since it is actually the prison who has the right to propose an inmate for LER – and in some prisons, such proposals are rather rare, as was explained by one of the agents:

*LER is of great significance, one can work outside the prison establishment and is not so detached from everyday life. Unfortunately in Kalocsa there are only a few people on this program. The Döner case hindered the workings of LER for years, prisons don't dare to implement it because they are afraid of taking any responsibility. Now the program seems to be taking off again, the National Prison Administration has also been encouraging it in the last few months. Earlier there had been such local orders given in prisons that if an educator recommended someone for LER and that someone did not return, then the counselor was held responsible. This fact obviously held them back. The other problem is that there are many long-term inmates in Kalocsa. In case of a 10-year high-security prison sentence, four years have to be served before the person can be considered for LER. And this is dangerous as well, since the person still has a six-year sentence remaining and they are afraid that the prisoner will not return. (A3)*

In summary, we may conclude that women prisoners' outside contacts in many cases were weak and weakened further during the imprisonment, for a variety of reasons. These reasons were often not directly linked to the negative influence of the prison itself, but to larger social phenomena often carrying a 'gendered' characteristics, e.g. women's feeling of shame due to crime, isolation and other consequences of domestic violence, or lack of work contacts. Yet, the prison itself contributed to these problems in at least two ways. Firstly, through the difficulties of physical access of visitors and refusal of requests for transfers, secondly, through the limited and presumably selective application of existing measures, such as leaves or LER. At the level of legislation, agent interviews point to regretful restrictions (and fear further potential restrictions) regarding LER and other progressive tools – even if all practicing professionals and women's experience support the positive value of such measures.

New contacts – even friendships - developed in the prisons were often regarded as markedly different from earlier friendships and contacts. Many women argued that there was an element of calculation and interest in the new contacts formed in prison. Many women described the difficulties of living together in large cells and the lack of privacy that this caused. Large cells and the overcrowded prison were especially problematic in Kalocsa, the largest of the three facilities. Cells with up to 20-24 inmates and no separate toilets, an overcrowded facility with no sport opportunities, no proper visiting room and

not even a courtyard – other than a symbolic one – such physical conditions certainly had a direct negative impact on inmates and their relationships.

Despite such conditions, women talked positively about their cellmates and asserted that with enough patience and empathy, they can work things out. A few women noted that they would prefer not to have such a heterogeneous group of women in their cells, and many showed an awareness of the presence of women with different social backgrounds and criminal records. Some talked about the lessons learnt from each other's criminal experiences and contacts. However, in most accounts the single most important dimension of relationships in prison was defined around sexuality: lesbian inmates and heterosexual inmates were mutually regarded with a significant degree of suspicion and reservation. Many women declared in the interviews to which 'camp' they belonged – even if we did not ask such questions. A few of the women entered lesbian relationships in the prison, and relied on their partners while in prison – however, they did not consider that these relationships would replace their family ties, even though some expressed uncertainty whether they would be able to return to the heterosexual contract. Agents had a rather controversial attitude towards lesbian relationships: they considered it as a sad reality and tried to accommodate requests e.g. for moving in the same cell, however, constantly reminded women not to damage their responsibilities as mothers and wives. All agents considered lesbian relationships as temporary phenomena, linked to women's need for emotional relationships and intimacy. Some asserted that inmates' sexual rights are violated by having no access to heterosexual relationship and supported the idea of establishing 'intimate visiting rooms' – which is now being considered in some prisons.

### **2.2.b.: Prisons do not strengthen skills that are vital for reintegration.**

Even though the research did not allow for a full analysis of changes in women's skills and competencies due to imprisonment, it was possible to identify remarkably different survival strategies developed by the women. These various patterns of survival strategies may indicate skills and competencies that were reinforced or suppressed by the prison. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the patterns here were linked to the patterns of primary exclusion discussed in hypothesis 1 – and as we will see, very often the relative advantages and disadvantages that stem from patterns of primary exclusion, are reinforced by the prison. Such survival strategies are most tangible in case of women with long sentences, thus the patterns build primarily on the few women with several years of sentences.

### **Rewards Through Hard Work**

Collecting rewards – and avoiding penalties - was important for everyone, since it was only through rewards that both major and minor improvements (early release, transfer to lighter regime, LER, short leaves home, extra visits etc.) were granted. In case of a lengthy sentence, it makes all the difference whether one has to stay for years in a high security regime in a tightly controlled environment or is moved to a mid-security prison cell. Cutting the sentence by several months or years through early release is also a remarkable motivation for collecting rewards. Yet, minor improvements like an extra

visit might feature as highly lucrative if one has children. Thus, most women were very aware of the economies of rewards and penalties and their direct impact upon short-term of long-term advantages in prison.

A few women formulated a very conscious surviving strategy based on collecting as many rewards as possible through hard work, and avoiding penalties at all costs and turned this into the organizing principle of their life in prison. Nóra always had a specific target in mind that she wanted to achieve through the rewards – in fact, she turned down all other possibilities and focused single-mindedly on her ultimate objective.

*Rewards, rewards, reward points are all I wanted. I got so many that after 4 years I also received the prison director's reward as well, which is extremely rare. My goal was to get transferred (from high-security to medium-level security), and through this, to return home as soon as possible. That's why I was not given leave at all for years – only now towards the end, because everyone receives these 10 days in the transition group – and I had never asked for any leave either. I didn't want to get 'no' for an answer and use up my reward points, and I preferred to concentrate on getting transferred to a lighter security regime and having my sentence reduced. It worked, I was transferred to medium-level security and I was released two years before my sentence was up.*

'Hard work' in her case literally meant work from early morning until late night. Nóra volunteered in the mornings to carry the medical box for the nurse, worked 8 hours as a line leader and thus supervised 30 other inmates at work. In the afternoons she joined special workshops and collected rewards for it, in the evenings she did the administrative part of her work, while at weekends she played the organ and volunteered for the priest. She went to work even if she was sick, never took her deserved holidays and missed out on all courses that she would have liked to participate in and instead attended the pet workshop of the educator, if that was the price of more rewards:

*I didn't attend any courses, I feel sorry about the computer one but I simply couldn't find the time for it. I also regret not attending the course on lace making, but I had no time for that either. Anyway, only one reward is given to each course, while you can earn 4-5 rewards by attending the special creative workshops which are held by the educator.*

However, the biggest price for rewards was that she sacrificed her only friendship developed through the years, because the other woman was a subversive lesbian troublemaker and she feared that her image as a perfect inmate would be damaged by a too close association with her friend. She asked to be moved to a different cell.

Nóra avoided confrontation with staff and inmates and remained cooperative with everyone, yet also kept her distance. This way she was never approached to spy, she was simply the immaculately perfect inmate, volunteering and helping everyone – who deserved respect from both inmates and staff.

Her college degree certainly helped her to get the position of line leader at work, and her educated, smooth and polite behavior certainly helped her walk the narrow path she developed and apply delicate balancing strategies. She indeed worked hard and did not abuse her (fragile) power among inmates – yet, again her case seems to support that it helps prison survival if one has skills, education and social prestige to rely on. (Even after release: the priest organized accommodation for her and kept on supporting her.)

### **Tough Girl Does It Her Way?**

Petra's survival strategy was based on self-assertion and autonomy - a highly unusual strategy in a high-security prison – however, she simply decided to continue her entrepreneurial life as much as possible.

At first she attracted a lot of trouble. First of all, because of drugs – it took her about a year of experimenting with various pills, materials, coffee and a near-fatal overdose, that she actually quit drugs. Secondly, she had trouble because of her sexuality – although she was the lover of a prison official, she also had lesbian relationships, because of which she was discriminated against by her educator, and thus went to the general attorney. Thirdly, she decided that she was not going to work in prison – another source of trouble. Not surprisingly, she attracted a lot of attention from educators and wards in the first years:

*I was a tough case and there were some people who disliked me. There are a couple of all right people in there who don't get personal, but I managed to irritate many around me. They also disliked the fact that I was living with a woman and I wasn't having any flings with them. There were some who just couldn't stand my manners and they threatened to beat me up. I didn't report those people but I protected myself. In the first three to five years you could hear my name all around the dining hall, I am not sure why this was the case. Then I had a nervous breakdown. Afterwards I also changed my strategy and everything changed around me as well.*

*I was locked up in a cell numerous times, I was their scapegoat, everything was blamed on me. I was locked up because I had knocked somebody out who kept spying on me and reporting me. I got five days for that and a bunch of my rewards were also taken away from me. It would have been better if they hadn't punished me. I am not the type of person who gives in to that.*

After her nervous-breakdown the shift in her strategy included less direct confrontation with wards, partial adjustment to prison rules, e.g. taking up (well paid) work, starting to read Buddhism and starting a course, and most importantly, looking for someone who could be her counselor, supporter while in prison. She actually started to talk regularly to a high-ranking prison official and developed a trusting relationship with her.

*I owe a lot to the head of unit. She helped me out and treated me as a human being. It was possible to talk to her when I was having a terrible time, I could also tell her about my family and she shared her thoughts with me. I am going to miss her very much, I'd like to simply take her with me. I didn't want to be placed*

*in this transition group, she is the one who convinced me so I owe this to her as well.*

Petra overall maintained a strong leadership position among inmates, continued her business deals and developed various lesbian relationships – while her number one ‘confidante’ became one of the top administrators of the prison, at otherwise unreachable levels of the hierarchy. Her other tutor became her teacher at the course she finally decided to attend – a person who continued to be a source of inspiration and support after her release as well.

Petra remained rather visible and rebelled if she believed someone was trying to talk her into reporting about others. Despite partial consolidation, she was kept throughout her entire sentence in the high-security regime – a sure sign of penalty – yet she was given early release, and in the last years, she was moved to a transition group and was allowed even for visits home.

One may argue that despite her nervous breakdown, several visits to the solitary confinement cell, and her prolonged stay in the high-security regime – she had it her way in many respects. She was undoubtedly a leader among the inmates, had one of the best jobs in prison, found her way to be practically friends with a top administrator and with her teacher, without being considered a spy. And, most of all, she left prison after 8.5 years in good spirits and full of energy.

Petra happened to come from a middle-class family and had a secondary school education and an entrepreneurial career, considered herself to be very intelligent, proactive and very social. Her social skills were certainly to her advantage, however, ultimately it was probably her self-confidence and entrepreneurial spirit that saved her from giving in to the prison.

### **Just OK: Not Good Enough**

The pattern that Dalma represents is by far the most common among women inmates. The strategy aims pragmatically at a ‘good enough’ survival of the time in prison, by doing what is required and trying to remain oneself at the same time.

Dalma worked throughout her years of imprisonment as well, yet she did not volunteer to do extra jobs. Her manager was so satisfied with her work that she would not let Dalma change after two years of embroidery, when her backache started. Thus, she stayed on and visited the doctor regularly – and she continues to do so after her release since her backpain would not go away ever since. She got very little money, it was one of the worst paying jobs in prison. Dalma did not take part in education or training programs, since none of those on offer matched her interests. She spent most of her time reading – she made good use of the prison library.

For the most of her imprisonment, Dalma lived in a cell for 19 inmates – when we met her, 15 women shared the cell. Since she was released just a few months prior to 5 years

– transition groups are reserved for people after 5 years of imprisonment – she did not enjoy the benefits of transition groups, e.g. gradual readjustment, smaller cells and better conditions. She was suffering from the overcrowding and lack of privacy so much that she kept her ears plugged in for much of the time. About a year ago she was so desperate about lack of privacy that she decided to act. Her educator suggested a cell that Dalma believed was actually worse than her current cell – so she decided not to move. She asked for an appointment with the psychologist – yet, could not open up to the psychologist immediately. He ended up giving her some medication so that she could sleep better.

Her relationship with the educator played a key role in other deprivations she suffered, so it is worth considering the development of their relationship. At first she trusted her educator and discussed everything with her. Yet, after a while she discovered that the educator was not really interested, so she too, limited their contact to the official minimum: thus, she met her educator once a week and usually talked only about letters.

She never had a leave during the 4.5 years she spent in prison. She asked for it once, to attend her son's wedding, but was refused by her educator:

*I have never had any disciplinary offences, I received 13 rewards and I have never been granted any leaves. I asked my educator last year to let me go home to my son's wedding, but the response was that I hadn't participated in any special workshops and I hadn't done anything 'additional.' So I said that I would sign up for anything because I would have liked to be allowed to go home, but the educator felt insulted and sent me over to another educator.*

Her family lives in the most faraway corner of the country, thus family visits were very rare and actually stopped 2 years prior to the end of her sentence.

*My mother and my son live close to the Romanian border. They have to leave from the other end of the country on the day prior to the visit and it's too much of a strain on them. My mother visited once, she felt terribly ill and I didn't want her to come again. The last time my son was here was about 1.5-2 years ago. I tried to get transferred to Eger, but the response was that Eger was overcrowded, that I had my job here and that this was the appropriate place for me to serve my sentence. I noted in my request that my mother was ill and that my son was attending school, but this had no effect whatsoever.*

Dalma asked her educator to recommend her for LER so that she can visit her family. The educator refused arguing that Dalma did not have enough money to travel home once a month.

Dalma's house was broken into, at which time she asked for the interruption of her sentence so that she could go and settle the issue. It was refused. Dalma's brother-in-law started a lawsuit to acquire the house. She did not have money for a lawyer and tried to manage the trial through correspondence. She could not attend a court trial because she

was in prison, and was notified too late about the date of the trial. She lost the trial and the house.

Even if we can not fully evaluate the role of the educator in many of the above examples, it can still be argued that none of her requests and initiatives were supported by her educator, although she worked and collected as many as 13 rewards and had no penalties. Her total list of deprivations potentially linked to the educator was rather significant by the end of her 4.5-year sentence. Her contact with her family was seriously damaged, due to lack of meetings for over two years. From her work in prison, she was not able to finance the monthly trips home because of which her LER request was turned down. She lost her house without having had the opportunity to attend a trial or get a lawyer. She suffered utterly from the lack of privacy since she spent her entire sentence in a large cell with at least 15 inmates in it.

Many of these major losses happened because she had an acceptable relationship with her educator, and not an excellent one. It is important to note that many women we interviewed had put forward much less assertiveness, and had an even looser or worse relationship with the educator.

In summary it can be argued that due to lack of individual attention to inmates and a potentially very subjective system of rewards and penalties, in the prison the 'fittest' are likely to be the ones who are able and willing to assert themselves. Those who choose not to do any conscious self-management and rather, trust the system and aim to survive by obedience and doing what is necessary, are very likely to be ignored and left alone. This may lead to serious losses and deprivations even in the case of inmates who do not lack social skills or assertiveness. Therefore, we may conclude that prison certainly does not consciously develop skills needed for the independence, assertiveness, resilience required after release – in fact, for many inmates, discourages such abilities.

**2.2.c: Inmates' health conditions often deteriorate both in terms of physical and psychological well being. Efforts to help inmates to come to terms with their crime/guilt / etc. are not systematic and successful enough.**

According to most of the interviewed women, medical care in prisons is adequate. Medical personnel are generally present at suitable times, and inmates take part in regular screenings. For some inmates health care received in prison turned out to be more positive than what they had received previously. Especially in one of the three institutions, Eger, inmates found that access to a physician was unproblematic, acute health problems, e.g. kidney ailments, were treated adequately, inmates received medications promptly when they needed it, and the physician was informative towards patients.

Medical services in the other two prisons received criticism from some women, mainly because of the attitude of the medical personnel towards inmates. These institutions got mixed evaluations. Some of the women reported that they received the medication and treatment they needed, and even in serious cases, e.g. asthma or pancreas inflammation,

they were treated efficiently. Yet others asserted that they did not receive even basic medication, such as painkillers, on demand. They also criticized the neglectful attitude of the physician, who had made decisions on whether they needed medication without examining them.

*The doctor just glances at you from a distance and asks “well, what do you want?” This is the medical examination. A total waste.” (K9)*

The significant differences between opinions signal that physicians in those two institutions are likely not to handle every inmate with the same care, which may be explained only partly by their large workload<sup>35</sup>. Cases of medical malpractice were recalled in a few interviews, especially one woman was convinced that she suffered serious and permanent health damage due to the doctor’s fault, which malpractice, according to her, was admitted by the prison hospital where she was ultimately transported.

Most women claimed to have arrived to prison in good health – and many, especially people with lengthy sentences, developed illnesses while in prison. Some of these were linked to work in prison (e.g. backpains), others developed stress-related, psychosomatic diseases (e.g. ulcer). Significant changes in weight – weight losses most often - were experienced by several women at the start of imprisonment. One woman linked her heart attack directly to the unexpected appearance of her daughter as a newly arriving inmate to the prison. Many of the women needed tranquilizers, yet most of them only relied on medication temporarily.

Lack of sport facilities has been emphasized as a major problem by the great majority of the interviewed women. This was the most often mentioned deprivation, especially in Kalocsa. Considering that only a tiny, concrete courtyard was available for their daily walks, and many of the women refused to use even that opportunity due to the fact the overcrowded courtyard also served as a dating location for lesbian inmates, women in Kalocsa were left without any sport facilities and without access to fresh air. This is a critical and damaging deprivation especially for women imprisoned for lengthy sentences in a high-security regime.

The lack of appropriate mental hygiene services for inmates can clearly be concluded from interviews with women inmates and agents alike. The issue of overload is a very serious problem<sup>36</sup> in this field as well, and it results in a rather dangerous situation in which the availability of a psychologist is merely a theoretical category – yet in fact, inmates are left alone with minor or major psychological needs. As the psychologist explained, apart from a short, 10-minute quick appraisal of every incoming inmate, he focuses on two issues in his job. First and foremost, he wants to avoid or minimize suicide attempts<sup>37</sup> and thus focus on prevention or crisis intervention. Secondly, he works

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<sup>35</sup> In the Kalocsa prison with over 400 inmates a single doctor is employed and in addition, the prison also relies on specialists’ services.

<sup>36</sup> In Kalocsa, the only psychologist cannot realistically service more than 400 women inmates.

<sup>37</sup> This is driven by an objective set by the Minister of Justice to reduce suicide attempts.

with a relatively small number of inmates – either with those in the newly set-up drug section or in the therapy group for inmates with addictions, or with those who ask for a consultation with him. In this case, he tries targeted intervention, since there is no possibility for repeated therapy sessions. The psychologist does not address traumas related to domestic violence – an experience shared by many inmates in the Kalocsa prison. Due to such limits, most of the women who were imprisoned in Kalocsa, only met the psychologist once, at the time of their entry to prison.

Several of the interviewed women proactively sought professional help at various stages of coming to terms with either domestic violence, or with a lengthy prison sentence, or with their feelings of guilt related to their crime. (Other women, serving shorter sentences, did not mention such need or attempt.) Some of them received the requested counseling help while others did not. This surely supports the notion that especially in cases of women with long sentences and domestic violence related crimes, support would be much needed. The lack of available professional help is made even more serious by the lack of other individual attention to inmates by educators<sup>38</sup> or other agents or volunteer social workers.

In summary, while most women inmates have received basic healthcare services and attention, their access to and satisfaction with healthcare services has shown significant differences, including alarming examples of serious and permanent health damage. While most women leave prison without such damage, the general physical condition of inmates in many cases was negatively influenced during their imprisonment. In terms of mental hygiene, however, the majority of women inmates does not receive individual attention either from professional psychologists, or from other agents of volunteers, if they do not ask for it proactively. Awareness of the needs of domestic violence victims is hardly sufficient, and due to lack of therapy, they receive no support.

**2.3. Sub-hypothesis: Women’s prisons are in the position of remnants due to their small weight in the prison system. The conditions and consequences of imprisonment are influenced by this, e.g. due to material conditions (greater dispersion, less available resources for work, training, health, budgets etc.).**

A key problem which stems from the small number of women’s prisons and the fact that they basically have inmates from all around the country is that through the difficulties of access, it damages women’s contacts with family members and others. Some of these issues were addressed in hypothesis 2.2, however, due to the multitude of related problems and significant differences among facilities, we will now address the three facilities separately.

Kalocsa, the largest facility, and the only one which is an independent women’s prison, is the only high-security prison for women – yet it also accommodates women convicted to mid-security prison<sup>39</sup>. This means that many of the inmates serve relatively long

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<sup>38</sup> The report addresses the reasons for lack of individual attention by educators in hypothesis 3.

<sup>39</sup> From the approx. 400 women inmates in Kalocsa, about 155 are convicted for high-security prison (mainly for homicide or attempted homicide), all others in Kalocsa serve a sentence in a medium-security

sentences and may come from any part of Hungary. Through its unfavorable location in the South of the country and due to a Budapest-centred railway system, from many locations it is impossible to get to Kalocsa and home within a day – and it is also rather costly. No wonder that quite a few women did not want their families to undertake such excursions – and were left without visits. Ironically, their leaves for home were constrained by exactly the same problem, also for the financial means and the time it requires. This together with the perception that women serving longer sentences may be more risky to be allowed for a leave, dramatically limits their access to leaves. Thus, they are twice as disadvantaged and left alone.

Agents are aware of this issue. However, their argumentation remains contradictory and the proposed solution of transportation to another institute for the duration of the visit is administratively limited, burdensome, and subject to the discretion of the institute.<sup>40</sup>

The Kalocsa prison suffers heavily from overcrowding<sup>41</sup>, which according to the agents is the first and foremost reason for lack of sport activities, visiting room, and it limits possibilities for educational and free-time activities. Living conditions – particularly on one floor<sup>42</sup>- are inappropriate, and even maintaining the old building is a day to day fight due to tight budgets as described by the agents. Interviewed women were painfully aware<sup>43</sup> of the damage they suffered from the lack of such basic sport facilities, or actually, walking opportunities. (Many of them refused the daily one-hour walk in the overcrowded tiny courtyard which also served as a meeting point for lesbian inmates.) Many other problems related to overcrowding and overloaded staff, have been addressed in hypothesis 2.2.b – which result in lack of attention to the individual inmates. In its current form, conditions in the Kalocsa prison are hardly suitable for giving appropriate, reintegration-oriented support to women inmates.

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prison. However, one may argue that even if the high-security cells etc. are separate, since the entire facility is situated in the same building, many of the security etc. measures are defined by the needs of a high-security regime.

<sup>40</sup> “The visits in Kalocsa last for two hours, because the institution is aware of that fact that many people travel here from afar. There are some instances of short-term visits home, especially during the Christmas holidays but at other times as well. One can also be granted one-day leaves as rewards, but this is an option for only those who live close enough and can make the trip there and back in the same day. This should not be viewed as discrimination against those who live further away, since the prison cannot grant such a leave knowing in advance that the inmate will not be able to return in time and therefore, she will violate the rules.” (A1)

“The tight budgets of many families do not always allow for the whole family to regularly visit the inmate, so in order to maintain family ties, the inmates are often transferred to a facility closer to where the family lives. Many foster parents also bring the children for visits, or the mother is transferred to a nearby penitentiary. At times like this the visit itself does not necessarily take place at the usual time and location, so the surrounding crowd would not intimidate or negatively affect the children. If more than one family member is incarcerated and they are held at different penal institutions, there are possibilities for ‘family visits’, which can be arranged in Budapest by transporting both parties there. This is usually permitted in case of family members.” (A1)

<sup>41</sup> “The prison’s capacity is 240 people, however, our current roll is more than 400.” (A1)

<sup>42</sup> The so-called “row of cells”, sometimes referred to as “Jurassic Park” by some women referring to the large cells and general conditions, is hidden from visiting journalists and other outsiders according to the women interviewed.

<sup>43</sup> Lack of sport activities was mentioned as a major problem by each and every woman we interviewed.

The Mélykút facility which houses all under-age women imprisoned in Hungary and is also the only facility for adult women with a low-security sentence<sup>44</sup>, has also very significant access problems. While it is closer to Budapest, it also has very unfavorable conditions, since it is located in the middle of a field. Mélykút cannot be reached by public transportation, it requires kilometers of walking for the unfortunate visitors who do not own a car. Yet, even more importantly perhaps, its location entirely contradicts the objective of a low-security regime: more access to outside contacts, work outside the prison, altogether, less penalty and more integration. Ironically, the only work available apart from seasonal agricultural work and work in the facility, is at the 'neighbouring' men's facility a few kilometers away, where some of the women inmates are transported daily. Not only visitors and work, but also access for NGO-s is problematic.

The Mélykút prison belongs organizationally to the largest men's facility in the country, which certainly raises the usual problems of being attached to a much larger men's facility coupled with the issue of perfect invisibility in the middle of nowhere. The Mélykút facility is fully unsuitable for the purposes of both a low-security regime and that of a facility for young women. It must be noted however, that inmates enjoyed the benefits of a smaller facility, the freedom of access to garden, fresh air, outdoor sport facilities and supportive climate created by prison personnel despite the conditions.

The third facility, Eger is the only women's prison facility with favorable access conditions in general, and also for the women inmates in particular. It is situated in the center of Eger, a small town in NorthEast which can be reached by various means of public transport. Moreover, most inmates of the prison come from the NorthEast region of Hungary, and thus are the only women imprisoned who have actual access to family members. The active presence of students from the City College and various NGO-s in the prison is certainly proof that location makes a difference. Disadvantages from belonging to a men's facility were not tangible. Women's interviews revealed that prison management and educators had been open and supportive of their suggestions, and offered a variety of free-time activities. Eger has a reputation among women inmates in other prisons: the majority of the women we interviewed in other facilities asked for transfers to Eger, yet most were refused due to overcrowding<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> There are only about 5 under-age women imprisoned here. From the adult women in Mélykút, about 150 serve a medium-security sentence, and about 85 either a low-security sentence or an earlier, unpaid fee sentence turned into imprisonment. The Mélykút facility with about 260 women belongs organizationally to the Pálhalma prison with its 1580 men, totaling around 1840 inmates and is the largest facility in Hungary.

<sup>45</sup> Agents agreed that over the past few months, numbers went slightly down in the Hungarian prison system and also among women inmates which tendency, if continued, may gradually ease some overcrowding problems. Plans for building a new women's prison in the North-East of the country have been repeatedly aired by the prison administration and also postponed due to budget cuts. Concrete proposals for moving under-age women inmates away from Mélykút to a more suitable facility were also addressed in official talks. However, we would like to note that improvements in the overcrowding situation alone will not solve many of the issues addressed above, neither in Kalocsa nor in Mélykút. Issues influenced by physical conditions as access for visitors, NGO-s, volunteers, etc. to these locations will not improve for those who remain there. Furthermore, even if 'overcrowding' has become an important element of agents' discourse and attitude for good reasons, that will certainly not change quickly either and may in itself remain to be a barrier to change.

Unfortunately it must be noted that Eger is by far the smallest facility for women – thus the above-mentioned relative benefits can be enjoyed by about 70 women, less than 10% of convicted women in Hungary.

A dedicated mother-child facility was created about two years ago which ensures a high-quality and in many ways almost luxurious treatment for women inmates who give birth to babies while in prison – and can stay here until 6 months or 1 year after the child's birth. The physical aspects and equipment of the facility are outstanding, offering separate rooms for each mother and child, but also having appropriate spaces for play, social time, medical care, kitchen, bathroom, washing machines, separate courtyard etc. Staff numbers are also exceptional, with an educator and nurse dedicated to the facility, which has rooms for 20 women with their children. However, the mother-child facility is located literally in the middle of a men's prison in Kecskemét. This has the disadvantage that the women can hardly participate in other activities, and also, the facility is certainly seen as a strange phenomena which requires continuous attention and thus means trouble for the men's prison, and negotiation for security checks of baby-food items for example. There are plans to extend the stay to two years if the mother's imprisonment would be over within the extra year.

Apart from the setup of the mother-child facility, which received attention and has been celebrated by authorities, inmates and the media alike – women inmates and women's prisons are very low on the agenda of prison authorities to a point of being practically invisible.

The Hungarian penitentiary system struggles to transform itself towards opening up and developing new ways of working – not last, to become more EU-conform. To do this with an underfinanced and overloaded system at a time of more budget cuts rather than new resources is a certainly a challenge. However, there are many signs of opening up, projects started with EU funds<sup>46</sup>, learning through an entwined relationship with the Dutch penitentiary practice, etc. In a hierarchical system which enters a stage of reforms, the ability of institutes and prison managers to attract projects, extra funds, new initiatives is often decisive – an ability which two of the three women's facilities hardly possess due to their organizational position as annexes. In the absence of a general discourse on women inmates and women's prisons, the danger is that, amidst the hundreds of issues to be reformed, improved and resolved, once again the least risky and least visible group of inmates goes unnoticed and stays where it is: annexed to the mounting and dangerous group of men's inmates, out in the field, or locked up for good down South.

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<sup>46</sup> The head of the EU-PHARE program on the reform of under-age penitentiaries in Hungary announced that the program was successfully launched in all three such penitentiaries in the country. The fact that all three are men's facilities and indeed, young women are held in Mélykút, went totally unnoticed. (Comment of Theo Van Maanen, pre-accession consultant, *BV. 2003-as Évkönyv*, pp. 111-112.)

**2.4. Sub-hypothesis: There is a contradiction between the principles and the practice of social and criminal justice, meaning that the penitentiary system and social integration can not be smoothly reconciled, reinforcing the social exclusion of some of society's vulnerable groups. Despite the emphasis in legislation on social integration, actual daily prison life does not reflect social integration as a priority. There is a difference between the level of discourse, and actual reality in prison life, in the extent to which social integration is actually addressed.**

The Minister of Justice, Péter Bórándy evaluated the work of the penitentiary system and closed the year 2003 by saying, that:

*While – I am convinced – police has to act very assertively and firmly against those who commit crime, in the penitentiary the primary objective, besides ensuring matters of security, is to work towards resocialization, towards the reintegration of people into society.<sup>47</sup>*

At the same time the minister defined the top ten priorities for the year 2004 for the penitentiary system, where security was marked as number 1 and 2 and reintegration of inmates was placed as number 10. This is on the one hand probably indicative of the relationship between the two often cited objectives of prison, however, reintegration actually emerged as a topic not just on the level of discourse in the past few months<sup>48</sup>. The Minister of Justice explained that the old regulations on the penitentiary system became rather obsolete and in fact, instead of new regulations, a law will be passed this year to enter into effect from January 2005.<sup>49</sup> The penitentiary system's modernization has started and actually features as number 3 on the list of top priorities.

A major institutional change took place from July 2003, when the national Probation Officers' Service was created instead of the earlier system in which probation officers worked for the county courts, and probation officers for under-aged belonged to yet another organization. The new national organization not only took over probation officers from all other organizations, but started the gradual recruitment and training of further officers and the major work of building institutional contacts with penitentiaries, social welfare agencies, NGO-s, etc. Its institutionalization certainly contributed to a renewed emphasis on the issue of reintegration across the criminal justice system. This is a key achievement, despite the fact that beneficial effects of such changes have not reached the ground yet, and will not necessarily be reflected in the analysis from our fieldwork.

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<sup>47</sup> The speech of Dr. Péter Bórándy, Minister of Justice, *BV. 2003-as Évkönyv*, p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> This report will not address in detail the changes in the criminal justice system over the past few years, however, it must be noted that from 1999 until about 2002 a rather restrictive practice was encouraged and resulted, among other things, in practically reducing leaves from prison to zero. Gradually after 2002, ultimately linked to the change in government to the leftist-liberal coalition, restrictive practices started to be counterbalanced, however, this process has not been as dramatic and full as the earlier conservative move.

<sup>49</sup> At the time of writing the report, the law is being drafted and debated by various institutions and agents we interviewed, so while there will be references to it, an evaluation of the law will not take place.

High-level decision-makers in the national penitentiary organization agreed that there is a contradiction between the expectations from prison ultimately rooted in the public's ambivalence rather than in the impossibility to reconcile the two.

*The ideological and political pendulum that swings between the need for severity in the penitentiary system and the importance of developmental supervision is not present only here but everywhere in the world as well. Punishment and assistance are the two existing ends of the spectrum. The Penitentiary Administration also wavers between safety and leniency, but these are somewhat compatible. This is what we call 'dynamic security,' something that can be achieved by humane implementation and by establishing a controlled environment. This method creates a safe environment for everyone while motivating inmates. The existing fundamental contradictions are rooted in society's expectations. The most important expectation that society has of prisons is that of punishment and retribution. Society demands a type of service in exchange for 'handing over' the perpetrator to the state instead of bringing him/her to justice on their own. Therefore, at the level where political decisions are made, it is quite difficult to justify any efforts at humanizing and improving prisons. Public opinion is still mostly centered on taking revenge by punishing these people, and they find it difficult to grasp the concept that, if imprisonment has damaging effects on inmates in terms of their philosophy, habits and lifestyles, then they will be even further removed from societal norms and will prove to be even more dangerous to society as a whole. Expectations by the general public, such as retribution and punishment, are restricting factors to all reintegration attempts. (A4)*

Agents also expressed their doubts whether the work on reintegration in prisons can take place with the resources currently available. In all agent interviews, the awareness that the prison should do more for reintegration, yet is constrained by the lack of resources, came across as one of the key messages.

*If the penitentiary system's objective is to deal with those deficits that other social sub-systems were unable to cope with (as previously mentioned: society, family, work, school), then more funding and infrastructure must be secured, and more energy is necessary for such work. Resources for meeting this objective are not available at present. (A4)*

*Prisons have the tasks of guarding as well as educating and training inmates. To some extent, prisons currently fulfill their role of providing some education to inmates. On the other hand, serious therapy, programs targeting personal development or other re-integration attempts can only be ensured where there is a very small number of inmates. (A5)*

Agents who directly work with the imprisoned women, among them, prison wards expressed very contradictory messages about the function of the prison and how they should work:

*The primary function of prisons is isolation, and they successfully serve this purpose of isolating prisoners from society. Prisons also have a re-educating role, but they do not fulfill this role to a large extent any longer. This is mostly due to the fact that circumstances in prisons have improved, and that rules and regulations are not as severely implemented as they used to be. We are all agreed that prisons should return to more severe forms of enforcement and that the use of punitive measures indicated in our rules and regulations should be allowed. With a small number of prisoners it was possible to work using the old harsh measures, but the number of imprisoned people has actually risen since we have adopted more humane attitudes and treatments. (A6)*

The very same guards turned out to be enthusiastic supporters of LER and what they said actually promoted the view that security concerns and reintegration could be achieved simultaneously:

*The LER group is really effective since it helps reintegration attempts, and prisoners really feel that their family needs them. There is a much more direct possibility to keep in touch, and they have a better grasp of how their family is doing on the outside. Working with this group is also easier for the prison guards, since this is such a great reward that prisoners do not want to squander it away, so they actually have something to lose. The problem with LER is that the system is extremely strict, there are multiple levels of scrutiny although these are, in fact, necessary. Ideally, however, it would be the best for everyone if they could just go home on a regular basis. It must also be noted that there haven't been any recidivists among those belonging to the LER group. Their local communities also get used to this type of gradual reintegration, and by the time the prisoners are free to go, they have already managed to establish some sort of relationships in their immediate surroundings. (A6)*

Women inmates readily accepted and asserted that imprisonment is about penalty – as most believed, a penalty that they deserved.

*One has to accept however things are within the prison's walls. We are not here to have a good time. (M8)*

*This is a prison and the reason we are here is to be punished and serve our time. We are ordered to go to bed, we are ordered to get up and we eat whenever we are told to do so, but this is our punishment. I have no problems with this. (K3)*

Many were rather skeptical generally about the transformative purpose of prison, or positive effects in general. (At the same time, many appreciated pragmatically the positive things, mainly the training/ education received – this will be addressed in hypothesis 3.)

*I have just told one of the guards that regardless of what they say – that prison tries to re-educate us – I see no attempts at developmental supervision*

*whatsoever. The educator might come into our cell and reprimand us, but other than that there is no developmental supervision. (K9)*

*Prison has had no positive effects on me. But it hasn't broken my spirits either – I consider the procedure itself unjust. (M22)*

In terms of the impact of prison, most women believed that the prison did not change them at all, in any direction. However, quite a few women mentioned that they became much more sensitive and vulnerable – some thought of it as a negative, others as a positive change.

*Prison has broken my spirits. I have become extremely sensitive, everything makes me cry really easily. (K8)*

*This is where I have come to realize what life had given me earlier and what I had lost. I have changed as I realized that I had never been considerate of others and that I have caused my family a great deal of grief and suffering. But this change I also owe mostly to myself. (K12)*

Most women expressed very strongly that they were not going to return, often in a language that does indicate the suffering they experienced in prison.

*There is no way I am coming back here, I couldn't handle even another minute spent in here. There are no criminal proceedings against me. I am absolutely convinced that I won't return. I'd rather not even get up so that I wouldn't fall. I am completely determined and convinced that I can stand my ground. I won't get mixed up in a crowd that would lead me back to prison. (K9)*

*Heaven forbid. I would hang myself if I were ever returned to prison. It will be difficult to think back to my time spent in here. I might go abroad, then I might be able to forget the things that had happened. (M8)*

In summary, one may note regarding the tension between the two functions of prison, that most agents were fully aware of the difficulties of reconciling reintegration and punishment, even if some pointed to society's expectations, others to financial constraints. Some agents who work in prisons were rather contradictory and even confused about the relationship between security and reintegration and the requirements of their job in this respect – a phenomena rather natural in times of change. However, the women themselves were very clear about being punished first and foremost. Some of them were aware about the partial and contradictory discourse that agents may use about reintegration, yet others did not expect much reintegration to take place from the start. Yet, as we shall see, many women very pragmatically tried to take advantage of the existing measures in the field of work and education – as it will be addressed in hypothesis 3.

### III. Measures and Programs in Prison

**Hypothesis 3. Present measures and programs for the social integration or reintegration of women ex-prisoners are inadequate.**

**3.a. Sub-hypothesis: Work within prisons fails to supply inmates with marketable occupational skills or other useful, convertible skills for other areas after release.**

Among the activities for inmates, work carries special significance, being the most important organized activity available in prisons. However, work in prison should be more than an activity to pass time: it is declared by legislation that prison work is supposed to enable inmates to develop skills for social integration<sup>50</sup>. We found in our research, that the present conditions of prison work do not adequately fulfil this aim.

Access to work in prison is defined as a right of prisoners, yet despite prisons' efforts, not all inmates can work from those who wish to work.<sup>51</sup> Penitentiary institutions can provide fewer workplaces than the number of employable inmates held in prison at one time. In addition, available work is limited to a few types of jobs only – which does not allow for matching inmates' skill level to available jobs appropriately. The limited selection of jobs does not allow for changing jobs, e.g. in case of health problems.

All of the women in our research wanted to work during their imprisonment – and the great majority of them actually managed to gain access to work at least for some part of their sentence. The very few who could not work<sup>52</sup>, indeed regretted it.

*I would've worked if it had been possible. I only participate in the cleaning of our prison section. I don't have a regular job, this was not made possible by my short sentence. (M8)*

*I worked in the sewing workshop for three weeks, then I asked to withdraw due to health problems – I have terrible back pain so I am unable to sit in one place for a long time. I got 1000 forints after they deducted some money as a cost of my imprisonment. Well, it wasn't a good job anyway, I am much more agile and lively than that. (...) I asked to be transferred somewhere where it would be possible to be in motion and I wouldn't have to sit stooped in one place, but there were no such options. The laundry and the sewing workshop were the only places. (M20)*

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<sup>50</sup> As it is stated by § 44 of the Penitentiary Code, the aim of prison work “is to help prisoners maintain their physical and spiritual strength, give them the opportunity to acquire and develop professional skills, thus facilitate, after being released, the reintegration process into society”.

<sup>51</sup> According to the data of the National Prison Administration, 432 of the 859 female inmates (50%) worked in prison in July 2003. In each women's prison, according to the data, about 45 to 60% of the inmates are employed. Our research found that the ratio of available workplaces and inmates is still unfavorable. More than half of those who did not work, were not able to work due to the lack of workplaces.

<sup>52</sup> Access to work seems to be especially an issue in the Mélykút prison, where apart from the kitchen and laundry, and some cleaning jobs, mainly seasonal agricultural work is only available. This is particularly problematic since Mélykút houses women with a low-security sentence, in whose case work even outside the prison, as well as the maintenance of social contacts should be especially enabled.

When it was made possible for inmates to carry out work, it was generally welcome by most women. Indeed we found that the women were typically highly motivated to take on work. One of the reasons why women agreed to pursue work in prison was to pass the time of their imprisonment with purposeful activity. If unemployed, women complained of the negative effects of inactivity. Apart from that, making money was found to be an important motivating factor, as it enabled women to purchase goods for themselves and even to support their families from the modest earnings.

*Manufacturing the upper-parts of shoes. My gross salary is 14 000, some of it is deducted as a cost of my imprisonment and I also buy things in the shop. (...) This is a good job. It's good that we can actually work, otherwise we'd go crazy. Even though it's work, it's still getting us away from it all since it helps pass the time. Our pay could be better. (E4)*

*I do agricultural work. I work in a field 4-8 hours a day, it depends on when we get done with the work. My hourly wage is 96 forints, I make about 12 000 a month. I would even work more if it were possible. I feel more liberated and less confined and it just gives me something to do. (M2)*

Available work opportunities partly served the maintenance of the institute, and were partly aimed at the production of goods. Among the maintenance jobs mainly laundry, kitchen work, cleaning and hairdressing were available. The majority of the jobs offered by the companies set in the penitentiaries involved clothes and leather shoe upper-part manufacturing, packaging or agricultural work. For many, the type of work done did not require skill development, however, a few, formerly unskilled women gained access to job skills that they previously did not possess. Unfortunately, the most important declared purpose of prison work, i.e. the provision of inmates with skills for later integration, did not rank high among the motivating forces for work, as the kind of work available, was not perceived to be potentially useful for them in the future.

*I would've liked to learn how to make clothes and sew, but I couldn't, I learned to manufacture shoe upper-parts instead. After work, I participated in a 10-month long course on leather shoe upper-part manufacturing, which was exhausting. (...) I got a C+ on my exam and I am very proud of this. I received a certificate at the end of the course. It's a pity that I won't be able to use it for anything after I leave prison. (K8)*

Failure to develop marketable skills is linked to the fact that the majority of jobs in prison are gendered, they are typically low-skilled, low-paid, traditionally 'women's' jobs. (Light industry, packaging of products or seasonal unskilled agricultural labor). This implies that female inmates leave the penitentiary with generally little or no experience in carrying out work that is valued on the labor market. This shortcoming, however, was not necessarily recognized by prison agents.

*There should be differentiated treatment of women, and not only in terms of their criminal record, their level of education and the type of crime they committed. This has already been put into practice, for example in the area of employment, where in female prisons there is clothing being manufactured instead of cement construction elements. So they have different jobs as well as creative workshops. Their programs and activities must be differentiated. (A4)*

Some women addressed problems related to poor working conditions and payment – while many others were actually satisfied despite the very low net salaries, ranging between 2000 forints (8 Euro) and about 15.000 forints (60 Euro)<sup>53</sup>. Many women addressed the paradoxical discrimination against working inmates as opposed to unemployed ones: a contribution to the cost of imprisonment is deducted from working inmates only (in the value of about 5000 forints, 20 Euro) - while non-working inmates enjoyed the same service without paying any contribution.

*I worked eight hours a day doing manual embroidery. We were embroidering table cloths, lots of them. My monthly earnings was 2000, or somewhere between 1800 and 2500 forints, this is how much I actually received (after having the costs of imprisonment deducted). It's not even worth it financially, compared to those who didn't work and were getting the food just the same and could just watch videos during the day and things like that. There was no contribution to imprisonment costs they had to pay, what's more, those who attended school were actually getting paid for that. I live on a tight budget, I spend money from my meager salary. (K9)*

*Three-quarters of inmates work for pennies in here, it's terrible, they work for 500 and 1000 forints, which is not enough for anything. They are in want for everything because of this. Working in prison is like working as robots do. They get punished if they are not done with the work, and everyone is required to work according to the house rules. (K12)*

Very significant differences were found in the remuneration between maintenance jobs done for the prison, and other type of work for the prison companies. In maintenance work (laundry, kitchen, etc.) the pay was generally much higher – and therefore, such work was in great demand among inmates.

*I am in the healthcare services unit. My salary is 19.200 forints, and they deduct 170 forints a day for my imprisonment costs (approx. 5000 HUF total). My*

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<sup>53</sup> It could be challenged whether inmates actually received the already very modest earning specified in the legislation as (at least) one-third of the minimum wage of the previous year. The above mentioned net earnings correspond to earnings ranging from approximately 6.000 to 19.000 HUF (between 24 and 77 Euro), prior to the deduction of cost of imprisonment. Currently the minimum wage is 53.000 HUF (214 Euro), a third of it amounts to 71 Euro. Even though our sample is statistically not representative, we must conclude that there are a number of women in prison who certainly do not earn one-third of the minimum wage.

*predecessor prepared me for cleaning in the healthcare unit. I am very happy with this job. (...) I had the best job available in prison. (K5)*

*I cooked for 6-7 years, but then I was barred from this, because I am a lesbian. Now I work in the laundry. Both were 8-hour jobs. I earned a set amount of 18.000 forints. The best pay was in the kitchen and in the laundry, and I put in quite a lot of work in the kitchen. I was also handling business deals there since I am rather resourceful. Cooking was all right, it was on quite a large-scale. I was stressing out about doing something wrong (this had serious consequences like punishment). (K12)*

We found that based on our small sample, predominantly women with better educational and social background were able to enter these jobs. Those women who are in the most disadvantaged social position were typically less able to negotiate their situation in the struggle for those better-paid and more prestigious jobs.

According to Hungarian legislation, inmates on LER and in low-security regimes may be employed outside the prison without supervision – this is certainly meant to enable the labor-market integration of these inmates. None of the women in our research worked for third-party employers in the full sense, however, one woman was actually closest to this by doing cleaning work in a section of the penitentiary rented by a company for office purposes.

*I clean the offices of a company in Palhalma, which is about 5 kilometers from here. There are 24 rooms and some hallways, it takes me at least 8 hours a day. I earn about 16.000 forints, then 30 % gets deducted for imprisonment costs and 10% is taken as a deposit. I received some training for this job. It's not even like being in prison. I am quite satisfied with this job, considering that it's prison employment. There are no bars, it doesn't have the atmosphere of a prison, since I am mostly in an office building. (M22)*

Agents shared the opinion that work was a necessary activity during imprisonment. Agents generally valued the ability of prison work to provide inmates with useful activities during imprisonment on the one hand and with skills for labor integration after release on the other. They stressed the significance of the fact that a great number of inmates had an opportunity to work during their imprisonment. Agents also appreciated the co-operation between the penitentiary institutions and the companies providing work for inmates, emphasizing that companies try to assign activities to inmates according to their skills and suitability. They also emphasized that training was linked to prison work, which, they argued, provided inmates with certain new skills, such that could assist them in carrying out similar work after release.

*(...) there are only 6-8 women who don't work, the others go through an 8-hour long full workday (...). In prison 'X' a training course for leather shoe upper-part manufacturing is organized every year, since women inmates are employed in this profession. (A11)*

*The employers really spend time with the inmates when they are hired, they are taught on an assembly line used only for trainees, and the kind of job they would be most suited for is also taken into consideration. There are also seasonal jobs available. In spite of the fact that this is quite an unskilled group of workers, they are able to produce quality goods that can hold their own on the market. (...) There are people who take on jobs so they can pass the time in prison more easily, and there are those who seriously wish to use the skills they acquire when they are released. (...) According to them [the central office responsible for prison employment] the employment of female inmates is satisfactory country-wide. (...) Taking advantage of the existing opportunities only depends on the individual. (A1)*

Nevertheless, agents also addressed problems and difficulties with regard to prison work's ability to improve women's chances for labor-market reintegration after release.

*If a workday remains to be 8 hours long, as it is now, then inmates often have to make a choice between learning and working. The current employment ratio of inmates is 50-60 per cent. Those who might want to study while working must also have a long enough prison sentence in order to be able to complete a certain course. As for employment in prison, it would be better to provide part-time work opportunities as well, since it would give more time to inmates for other things such as studying, consulting with their lawyers, spending time outdoors, etc. (A4)*

*The system lacks the hiring capability like we had back in the eighties, when we were able to provide jobs for everyone. The other drawback is that working in prison does not count as regular employment<sup>54</sup>, it does not contribute to their pension. (A1)*

In fact, both notions were reflected in women's experiences as well, several women argued that they had to choose between work and training – and a few simply dropped training in order to make a little money<sup>55</sup>. A few women also expressed the injustice in prison work not being acknowledged as real work since it does not contribute to the time recorded in the social security system. Some women actually experienced the negative consequences of this regulation after their release from prison, in not gaining access to services linked to the length of time spent in the social security insurance system<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup>During imprisonment inmates are not insured by the social security system. No social security payments are thus made from their earnings, and the time spent at work in prison does not contribute to their total social security insurance time. This causes significant disadvantages for them, since a number of allowances (both related to unemployment as well as family benefits) are linked to social security. Contribution to the pension funds is also linked to the number of years spent in the social security system. This problem had also been addressed in the report of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. (in: *The Double Standard – Prison Conditions in Hungary*, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest 2002.)

<sup>55</sup>The necessity to choose is also addressed in sub-hypothesis 3.b. below as one of the barriers to education and training.

<sup>56</sup>A 48-year old woman who suffered serious health damage in prison, applied for a pension for handicapped people after her release. The medical examination confirmed that she was eligible for the pension, due to irrecoverable and serious health damage. However, she did not fulfil the only other criteria

### **3.b. Training and education in prisons does not sufficiently contribute to the acquisition of education and skills needed after release.**

The educational background of women in our research reflected the alarmingly low level of education among female prisoners in Hungary<sup>57</sup>, in fact, our sample had a slightly more positive profile due to the relatively higher number of women with mid-level educational qualifications.

Among the reasons the women gave for not finishing elementary education or breaking off their secondary or vocational training, some were specifically gendered reasons. Although truancy, mainly triggered by peer pressure or difficulties caused by living in state care was among the explanations, the pressure to take on traditionally feminine roles also featured as a significant cause. Looking after younger siblings or the modest importance attached to education, probably particularly to girls' education, were among the sources of pressure that led to girls' dropping out of school. Further on, in the course of secondary education, the main reason for leaving school was early pregnancy and motherhood. However, the women reported that later they had regretted dropping out of school, yet felt that they mostly had no choice in the matter.<sup>58</sup>

An observable trend in penitentiaries is a focus on elementary education, which is partly a result of the previous system of compulsory elementary education in prisons.<sup>59</sup> Even so, elementary schooling is available only in two of the penitentiaries with female inmates, whereas Eger, the smallest unit does not offer such a program, only a basic course in reading and writing. The low level of schooling of the majority of women inmates certainly makes the emphasis on basic education necessary. Even though in our research not every inmate with an incomplete elementary education continued schooling in prison, many others, especially those with longer sentences, made use of it and left the institution with finished elementary certificates or a few more classes than they previously had.

*I attended school until I was 13 and I finished fourth grade. I flunked several times. (...) I continued elementary school here in prison, but I didn't quite finish eighth grade. I'll finish it up when I am released. (M15)*

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of 5 years of social security payments, despite the fact that in prison alone she worked for several years. Her case supports that such regulations are actually gendered, since the time she spent on maternity leave with her 5 children throughout the years, did not add up either. Thus the regulation which makes prison work invisible, hits women inmates especially hard, since they are likely to have had other periods of non-insured time due to childbirth. Most women in prison have children, thus they accumulate such disadvantages especially.

<sup>57</sup>The importance of both general education and vocational training for women in prisons is critical given the high ratio of women with no education (5%), incomplete elementary education (20%), or elementary education only (45%).(Data from the NPA, July 2003.) In our research half of the interviewed women had at best elementary education (several of them did not complete elementary school, one of them was illiterate) while others held vocational qualifications or a final examination from high school, and one woman had a college degree.

<sup>58</sup> The women's experiences on this were introduced under the section on 'Roma Mothers', in hypothesis 1.

<sup>59</sup> Elementary education used to be compulsory in prisons, even though from 1993 participation was made voluntary, prisons and educators continued to put an emphasis on it.

*I am attending the sixth year of elementary school and I'm doing quite well in History and Geography. I enjoy going to school, it's not that hard and the teachers are good. They come to teach every day. I don't take part in any training courses. (M8)*

While elementary education is certainly a precondition for any other type of training, it must be stressed that an elementary school qualification alone is not sufficient for an entry to the labor-market. Agents at the Labor Office in fact reinforced that unskilled women are especially in a bad position in the Hungarian labor market.<sup>60</sup> The importance of vocational training for the women in prison is critical due to the high number of women who do not possess any vocational or further training<sup>61</sup>. Although some type of vocational training is provided in most women's penitentiaries, the range and availability of courses was found to be highly problematic. Firstly, only a couple of such courses are started each year, thus they only reach a small portion of potential recruits. Secondly, the range of courses is very limited as well - while a training course in shoe manufacturing is held each year, other, less specific and more marketable courses, such as computer literacy, are rare. Most vocational training courses, e.g. in lace making and leather shoe upper-part manufacturing, prepare for gendered professions only. Training in feminized and low-paid jobs provides little improvement in their labor market position. While some women were aware of this problem, they generally valued the acquired vocational training qualification high.

*I am a hairdresser but I also started out down in the factory, manufacturing shoes. There is a training course for shoe upper part manufacturing every year, you can enroll in such a course and you get a certificate at the end. This opportunity provided by prison is a great help for those who have no skills and qualifications, since you can get a job if you have this certificate. (...) I wouldn't really want to work in this field though. But I don't regret learning how to work with leather, I wouldn't mind training further for making leather handicrafts and basket weaving. If I can't get a job then I'm sure I'll manufacture parts of shoes. (E1)*

*I completed a course in lace-making. The teacher and I became friends, we still keep in touch. I would like to continue doing this type of work, making lace. It was a one-year long course, quite a difficult one. I even earned a certificate at the end. (K12)*

Participation in secondary education, although theoretically encouraged, is almost entirely missing among women inmates<sup>62</sup>. Thus, not surprisingly, none of the women in

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<sup>60</sup> This is addressed in hypothesis 4.2.

<sup>61</sup> 75% of women inmates do not have vocational training or secondary/ higher qualification, thus such education should be certainly encouraged during imprisonment.

<sup>62</sup> In the largest women's facility with over 400 women, last year only 1 person attended secondary school, despite the very high ratio of women serving a long sentence in Kalocsa. According to NPA statistics, secondary school education is available in 7 prisons, 2 of which are women's institutions.

our research attended secondary school courses in prison, although a few believed it would be useful and planned to pursue secondary education after the prison.

*At least I learned some things and my time in prison was useful even though I didn't graduate (though I haven't given up on that yet). (...) I would like to continue my secondary school education. (E1)*

Given that there are almost no differentiated educational programs above elementary education (apart from the few vocational trainings mentioned above), women with finished elementary education receive little or no choice to join schooling and develop their knowledge and skill level.

While there is an evident shortage of available courses in elementary and secondary as well as vocational education, women's prison offer other unaccredited training courses. Many such activities are recreational, rather than educational. Yet, a few focus on improving self-perception, interactive skills or are targeted towards developing job-seeking skills, occasionally they include language training. The number of available extra courses differs significantly among the women's prisons. The smallest institute, Eger offers the broadest range of such courses, whereas the largest institution, Kalocsa has a relatively modest offering. Such additional activities, if available, were welcome by the interviewed women, since they were found to offer variety and distraction from other activities, were perceived as potentially useful, and occasionally even enabled them to leave the institution.

*The choir was the best, it was a good way to have some fun and our rehearsals were great as well. When we went to perform, the guards and other prison personnel treated us differently, we were treated more like human beings. In here they are in charge, but out there you could talk to them and for example we didn't have to form a line and walk in pairs either. (...) (E4)*

*There was a course in first-aid, about 10 lessons, we could participate in that. (...) Some college students used to come in for various activities such as group conversations, games, trainings aimed at getting to know yourself, how you react to certain things, how you can use your own facial expressions. I even attended more than one group at a time, they tried to organize activities for us mostly in the fall. It really was interesting, it helps pass the time, we meet people from the outside who treat us differently and we can develop good relationships with them after a while. You can even consider these activities entertainment. You can find out new things about yourself from these people. (...) (E1)*

Lack of meaningful educational or recreational activities was very much regretted in other institutions. Women who visited several of the women's prisons, found the differences striking in this respect.

*It would be great to have smaller activities we can focus on and it would help to pass the time better. I would've liked to attend even shorter courses, such as*

*learning how to make flower arrangements. Or in Eger there were some college girls who used to come in and we'd make wreaths together and some other handcrafts. This was considered a free time activity, it wasn't compulsory or anything but we still participated. (K7)*

*Sports, languages, they could start all types of groups that would focus on certain subjects such as History, Art History and other things, depending on their field of interest. Personal-growth and learning are a part of life, part of our basic education. (K12)*

Apart from the limited range of activities, the most often mentioned reasons for inmates not taking part in education or other training activities, were short prison sentences and the clash of such courses and activities with work. Agents emphasized that because financially it is more rewarding to choose work, many prefer work if a choice has to be made.

*I don't attend any sort of training. I signed up for a computer course, but my sentence will be up too soon and so I can't participate. I'm really sorry about missing out on this course, it would've give me an official certificate at the end. They said they had to take the length of our sentence into consideration, but I'm sure there were other aspects as well, since for instance Mrs. Ferenc Kiss is also going to be released soon, but she has been allowed to participate because of the media coverage she's been getting. (K5)*

*I am not taking part in any sort of educational programs because of my work schedule. As far as I know there is a choir, a poem recital group, cultural activities, a computer course, lace-making and elementary school education. The course in cooking and catering is only starting out now that I am being released, so I can't participate in any of these. (K6)*

*Those who work in prison have at least this to hold on to, this is their income, but unfortunately courses and trainings also take place during working hours. The stipend system that's in place is quite a motivating factor (only for those who don't work), which means that those who participate in courses receive a 5633 HUF monthly stipend. But the wage they get from working is still a bit more than this, so they'd rather keep the job and not attend school. (A10)*

Also, some women reported about the subjective assessments involved in granting rewards (and punishments) and thus a degree of personal favoritism is said to be in place, whereby the accessibility of such activities itself is influenced.

*The existing practice of selecting who can come to which program does not provide opportunities for everyone. The outspoken ones, the lesbians can't participate [she is referring to herself]. I wasn't allowed to participate in any cultural activities because I am a lesbian (I was kicked out in the last year). (K12)*

*I missed out on the lace-making course because I had so many other things to do. The courses will get you only 1 reward point anyway, while the special handcraft workshops will get you 4-5 points (I mean they are quite a bit of work, perhaps that's why the extra points are given). And reward points are vital for being allowed to go home and for getting an early release. (...) (K10)*

Members of the prison administration addressed some of the obstacles to offering more training programs (e.g. limited physical space, financial constraints or the design of a program for a certain group of inmates only). The perception of the interviewed agents and women differed mainly in the evaluation of the accessibility and relevance of education and training in prisons. Members of the prison administration were undoubtedly aware of the need to increase the range, number and thus the accessibility of educational and training courses.

*The penitentiary code requires the provision for educational and vocational training courses. On the one hand these are funded by the Ministry of Economy and on the other hand the state budget also provides funding for education. But usually funding for educational programs is scarce at best. (A11)*

*The biggest problem with organizing courses funded by the Ministry of Economy is that they require the inmates to start working in that particular profession within six months of passing their final examination. This means that inmates with a long-term sentence are not eligible, even though there are many women like this in Kalocsa. (...) Apart from such external funding opportunities, the penitentiary system itself has only a tight budget for such training courses. (A1)*

One of the ways to broaden the range of activities without the financial burden, is through the involvement of NGO-s in the field of education and training. The NGO-s reported increasing openness from the prisons, however also emphasized that their co-operation is still often charged with difficulties, especially with bureaucratic constraints, and obstacles that stem from the dominance of the security principle.

*In the first year our organization mostly just tried to arrange for the agreement of cooperation with the authorities to be finalized. This took us a whole year. (A12)*

*The penitentiary system allows for group activities but they are much more distrustful about providing individual attention and care to inmates. They are afraid of data-protection, afraid of what the civilian workers would find out, what information the inmates might share with them. (...) The law states that, possibilities for continuing any forms of previously started higher education must also be provided for those who are in medium-level security prisons. Well, this is quite exclusive. In addition, most prison personnel are not familiar with the legal provisions for higher education, they do not make access to this possible, they either give incorrect advice to inmates or they simply do not provide any information at all. (A13)*

*Yes, I do think that access to computers can be granted even by satisfying all safety regulations. You just have to want to do it. The system must really take steps in this direction. (A12)*

To sum up, although the characteristically low level of school education among women in prisons would make a wider availability of educational as well as training programs necessary, our research findings show that currently only certain aspects of education (elementary education) are easily accessible for women inmates, while both vocational programs and secondary or higher education has to be further developed. In its current form, despite the potential completion of a few more classes in elementary education, released women's labor-market reintegration chances are not improved significantly, due to the continuing lack of marketable job skills and knowledge.

### **3.c Women do not receive enough preparation and support for their smooth return to family (and other intimate ties) and integration into the community.**

A month prior to their release, most women in our research believed that measures to make their return to their family and social environment were insufficient – although most of them felt ready for the release. Even though prison rules make room for means of maintaining contact with family relations and friends from the prison, the very limited possibilities for leaving prison reduce the chances of maintaining close ties for the duration of the frequently long prison sentences. Furthermore, only a few measures were found to be in place that take into account inmates' special needs for assistance with reintegration into their social environment through seeking employment and housing, or by helping them through the necessary bureaucratic processes connected to their release.

Although women's family ties were frequently rather weak even before they got into prison, the importance they attached to them, especially to the relationship with their children, stands out from their accounts<sup>63</sup>. According to our research findings, women demonstrated different ways of dealing with a serious consequence of imprisonment. While for some women maintaining regular communication with their children was given high importance, others found it necessary to distance themselves from the children, thereby hoping to cause less difficulty for them in dealing with separation. The importance attached to the relationship with children was the most strikingly evident from the accounts of women who were banned from seeing their children altogether. The importance of maintaining emotional ties with children stands out all the more because other family relations often proved less reliable.

Although maintaining contact to relatives is evidently an important means for making the return to the family and the wider social environment smoother, the means for this end, as described in another section, are rather inconsistent with this aim<sup>64</sup>. Typically, only very few of the interviewed women had regular visits from family members, which was a result of various factors, e.g. damaged family relationships or the frequently expressed

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<sup>63</sup> See section 2.1 of Hypothesis 2 for a detailed description and analysis of the social and family relationships of women prisoners, from which here the most relevant findings are summarized.

<sup>64</sup> Section 2.2 of Hypothesis 2 provides the analysis of measures for maintaining relationships with the outside world, which are summarized briefly in the following three paragraphs.

feeling of shame in front of the family. Moreover, the long distance of the penitentiaries from home and the increasing travel costs involved in visits often had to be taken into account<sup>65</sup>, which led to women putting up with no visits from relatives even in the case of long prison sentences. Keeping in contact by telephone and letters is also possible, yet calls and both incoming and outgoing mail are monitored by supervisors. These measures, thus guarantee only very limited contact to relatives, as inmates have to interact with them in a constantly monitored environment.

As a measure aimed at encouraging reintegration, Lenient Executive Rules (LER) allows inmates who have served half of their prison sentence and have manifested good behavior, to visit their home regularly, and enjoy other benefits. In our research the few women who were granted LER, highly appreciated the opportunities to visit their homes and stated that it had helped them considerably in mending family ties and in preparing for living with the family again. Despite the positive attitude of agents towards the LER, and a modest increase in its application, it is still used rather rarely.

In the case of inmates with longer sentences, participation in a transitional group before the release is granted, which also enables women to pay occasional visits home a few weeks or months prior to the end of their long sentences. According to the reports of women in this regime, the first visits home after long years were traumatic, yet these occasions certainly helped them in preparing for their ultimate return. Even though apart from the above regimes, inmates may be granted occasional leaves, the prison administration applies this measure only very rarely.

In addition, leaves are perceived by women to be privileges granted to those who are more willing to develop good personal relationships with their educators. It is the educator who is in charge of the so-called developmental supervision of inmates, and thus also their preparation for release - although some areas of development, care and aftercare specifically require the help of psychologists and probation officers. The educators' tasks include making a development plan as well supporting the inmate in maintaining connections, relationships to the outside world. The supervision of inmates should contribute to a better understanding of the social background, personality and needs of inmates as well as facilitate assistance with the development of skills necessary for better social reintegration. Nonetheless, women reporting on the issue expressed their doubts about the role and efficiency of individual supervision, which were partly confirmed by educators themselves.

The relationship of inmates with educators depended on the women's perception of how educators assisted or hindered them in having an acceptable life in prison. Every inmate was assigned to an educator, yet educators were responsible for 60 to 80 inmates on average. No wonder that most inmates considered educators to have a supervisory role in the management of their everyday lives - typically permissions and correspondence - rather, than in individual care. The high administrative load reported by educators themselves was perceived as a problem by most inmates, who assessed this as an obstacle

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<sup>65</sup> See section 2.2 on a detailed analysis of the difficulties related to the remnant position of women's prisons.

for making contact with educators more often and in a manner that would help them discuss problems in more depth. However, some women reported to have received personal attention from the educator if they required it.

*The educator has helped me a great deal and has given me advice as well, I am quite satisfied with him. The others say various things about him, but I had no problems and I was happy with him. (K8)*

*I was not in need of personal development. I had an educator who granted people leaves. He helped me get transferred to another cell, so I could be together with my friend. He also helped me fill out paperwork, change the set time of visits, and he allowed me to go home. (K10)*

Apart from the heavy and administrative workload, women found that educators' contradictory roles also affected their relationship. Educators on the hand, exercised their power to assign rewards as well as punishments – which in turn determined access to leaves, benefits, shorter sentences, internal moves etc. - yet educators were also in charge of assisting inmates' skills- and personal development. In fact, some women heavily criticized educators for not fulfilling their tasks or abusing their power.

*I'll only say this much about the educator: I got my letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> on the 17<sup>th</sup>... She is always on the run and can't stop and speak with anyone. My educator often comes in the evenings, there are times when she comes in to work at 5:15 in the afternoon. (...) You have to stand right in front of her and start screaming at her and calling her names, then she'll pay attention to you. The only thing she does is deliver our letters, and even these are a week late. She might listen to us once in a while, if she's in a good mood. If doing a perfect job can count as 100%, then the educator's work performance is about 38%. (K7)*

*Educators lord over us in here, many things depend on them. I feel that I didn't get anything from the educators. There was only one person who with whom I was able to establish some type of rapport. (...) An educator once told me, 'Dear, don't think. You are not here to think but to serve your sentence.' (...) This same educator also said that 'your kind must be eliminated not released.' There has only been one educator with whom I had a normal relationship, but this was because we hardly ever spoke. Somehow she realized that I'm better off left alone. (K12)*

Yet, women rarely dared to address the power abuse directly during their imprisonment – in most cases, they decided to comply with whatever was requested, without filing complaints.

*I don't consider him an educator, we don't have a good relationship. He has refused everything I had ever asked for. (...) I filed a complaint about how the educator was handling the contact and relationship I had with my child. I*

*addressed this complaint to the prosecutor. The case was resolved and I was able to meet with my child. (M2)*

*I don't have a good relationship with my educator, I can thank her for not being transferred to a lower security regime, where I could've been released 25 days earlier. I don't speak with her. (...) My educator says that I don't have enough humility in me. But I won't report to her and tell on the others, and I also don't like being ordered around. (K5)*

*Last time I had to keep telling her every single day for a whole week that I wanted to speak to her about my release. If the educator sees something in a letter that she doesn't like, then she tries to meddle in it but I didn't let her. (...) I would've liked to be placed on LER, but the only thing the educator said was that you need money for that in order to travel home. (...) I never filed a complaint, it wouldn't improve matters anyhow. Everything depends on them and we simply follow orders. (K9)*

Insufficient attention to inmates' individual needs causes particular problems in connection with the preparation for release. The preparation should start six months before the inmate is released from prison. Ideally, educators should prepare for the transition from prison to life in the outside world by assisting inmates not only in looking for jobs and housing but also in re-establishing contact with family members. Most of the interviewed inmates reported not to have received any preparation for release from prison, in fact, many had difficulties with understanding the question due to the absolute lack of help. As the present system does not clearly divide the roles of educators and probation officers in the tasks connected to preparation for release, neither of them appear to sufficiently deal with them<sup>66</sup>, however, recent changes in legislation are expected to improve this situation.

Preparation for release could be directly facilitated through targeted training and information sessions. However, only inmates in the smallest facility in Eger reported that courses in self-knowledge and communication were held by educators, while an NGO provided a course on job seeking techniques. Because LER offered a few inmates more opportunities to reunite with family members, women on LER reported to need less preparation from educators for release. Although more inmates received information on the services of probation officers<sup>67</sup> on a few occasions, inmates perceived them rather negatively, therefore rejected turning to them for help.

*If my memory serves me well, it was a conflict-management training which was held by the educator. It was all about how to handle situations when we have problems with others. We role-played some earlier problems and how to resolve them. This was good. (...) But in spite of having educators around, you always have to stand on your own two feet. Getting us used to this might actually be the*

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<sup>66</sup> Hypothesis 4.5 provides an account of probation officers' activities and the current cooperation between prisons and probation officers in connection with the preparation for release.

<sup>67</sup> Information sessions held by probation officers are addressed in hypothesis 4.5.

*point of prison. (...) About preparation for release? The attention the educator paid me can be considered such preparation. He asked whether I had a job, clothes or if I had problems with accommodation. I didn't ask for any other help. (E4)*

*Preparation for release: I did NOT get any help with this at all. (K5)*

*It would be great help if I knew where to turn to for assistance. To get some help after release is what would really be the most important. I have no knowledge of any assistance programs available after release. (K6)*

*I didn't receive any special preparation but LER helped me a great deal. On the one hand my relationship with family and friends remained intact throughout my sentence, and on the other hand it's much easier to make plans for the future while being on LER. (M22)*

In summary, according to our research findings, the assistance inmates receive in maintaining family and other social ties proved to be insufficient for several reasons. While opportunities for communication with family members from the penitentiaries were guaranteed, if only to a limited extent, for the women, such limited contact was certainly not sufficient to prepare them for their return to the family. Existing, progressive measures as LER were only scarcely applied. Thus it was possible that even in case of years of imprisonment, some inmates never actually visited home.

The inconsistencies in assistance with contacting family members partly resulted from the individual differences between educators' relationship with inmates. While the favorable opinion of educators could help inmates to be promoted into a more lenient regime, conflicts between them, and, importantly, the lack of educators' attention to less assertive inmates often resulted in the rejection of requests for leave. In terms of the quality of attention to inmates, several accounts confirm the insufficiency of individual care, which may fundamentally affect inmates' chances of reintegration into their social and family environment after release. All in all, the great deal of arbitrariness found in educators' work, significantly contributed to the differences in access to jobs, training, leaves, visits – and basically all aspects of prison life experienced by the women.

### **3.d. Programs in prisons are gendered, which often reflect and reinforce traditional gender roles.**

The gendered nature of work and training programs for women in prison has been addressed previously, referring in particular to the problematic feminine character of actual educational and training courses as well as employment opportunities in penitentiaries<sup>68</sup>. This certainly reinforces traditional gender roles by not allowing women to find better work than the generally low-paid, low-skilled, low-prestige, typically women-dominated jobs.

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<sup>68</sup> See Hypothesis 3.a and b. on the gendered characteristics of work and training programs in prison.

Agents actually believed that different programs have to be offered which adequately reflect the needs of women – yet unfortunately, such difference was based on the perception of traditional gendered differences. Even agents who were aware of the need to differentiate between target groups among women prisoners in order to better fulfil specific needs, actually relied on a traditional gendered split between men’s jobs and women’s jobs.

*The types of vocational training available are gender-specific. Women have had the following courses in the past: leather craftsmanship, making flower arrangements, foot massage, hairdressing. Men usually participate in courses such as painting, cooking and teaching them how to be stokers. (A11)*

*There should be differentiated treatment of women, and not only in terms of their criminal record, their level of education and the type of crime they committed. This has already been put into practice, for example in the area of employment, where in female prisons there is clothing being manufactured instead of cement construction elements. So they have different jobs as well as creative workshops. Their programs and activities must be differentiated. (A4)*

Yet, beyond that, it is particularly revealing to examine what perceptions members of penitentiary personnel develop about women prisoners, as it determines what kind of treatment women get and what types of programs are provided for them by prison. Also, women’s self-perceptions must be examined to see to what extent the two match. We will argue that based on such perceptions, a rather complicated mixture of messages and values emerges from elements such as motherhood, victimhood, self-reliance through work, and tolerated lesbianism – all in all in a seemingly gender-neutral framework. However, due to the all-powerful rigidity of prison regimes, actual measures remain either gender-insensitive or - where gender difference is actually introduced – they become gender-biased, despite the awareness and tolerance expressed by some agents in some issues.

As it was addressed earlier<sup>69</sup>, motherhood emerged as a main theme in women prisoners’ lives and became the central topic in their worries, guilt feelings, and very often, in their construction of their self-identities. It is probably symbolic, that the only group of women inmates who ‘enjoyed’ isolation and intensive hatred from the others, consisted of women who killed their babies/ children.<sup>70</sup>

However, it is also characteristic of a number of women inmates, even married ones, to be less anxious about their relationships to male partners, and come to terms more easily with the possibility of a broken relationship with their partner<sup>71</sup>. Several women, even some of the married ones, formulated the determination to live their lives less in dependence on men following their release. As their crime was often a result of

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<sup>69</sup> Hypothesis 2.1 discusses consequences of imprisonment in relation to the importance of motherhood for women in prisons.

<sup>70</sup> Confirmed by several women and agents as well.

<sup>71</sup> See section 3 of Hypothesis 1.2 on the perception of the relationship with men.

attempting to put an end to an abusive relationship, they made a connection between the need for a life free of violence and the importance of less dependence on men. Along with that, several of them asserted that their future relationships with men had to happen on their terms. Although there is naturally a range of different ways that women prisoners perceive their gender roles, the above trends were perceived as rather characteristic. The opinion that less dependence on men is an important life strategy, even for avoiding potential occurrences of crime as well, is certainly a strong message in opposition to more traditional gender ideologies.

*Mom always managed to resolve our financial difficulties. She is the head of the family, but this is obvious from the crime I committed [she stabbed her abusive father]. She never borrows money. The two of us together can solve all problems, I am the 'man' in the family, I was very happy when I got an electric drill. We were in the business of selling houses so we could make ends meet. We started out from a flat subsidized by the state, but now we have a house that will be worth even 20 million forints when it's finished. I am very fond of my mother, we had always slept in the same bed, and now my daughter sleeps between us. I am still just a kid, very young. (...) I am not much for marriage, but still, a marriage is not so easy to leave behind. I am now mature enough to be a mother but I don't want to raise my children alone. I don't desire a man but a companion, but this is quite hard. (E1)*

*I didn't love my first husband, he was Hungarian but he had money. I just wanted to get away from state care. I had my first child when I was twelve. My second husband was Gypsy, we had a daughter together who is now seven. My husband was an alcoholic, he constantly beat me so I divorced him. I've had no need for men since then. (...) The most important thing is for my children to be healthy. (E2)*

Agents, in their perception of the characteristics of women prisoners and their interactions, tended to make rather stereotypical remarks.

*As far as emotional needs are concerned, prison personnel must communicate with female inmates with more delicacy, using a different tone of voice. Women require different treatment, an attitude more focused on their emotional needs, and they also desire more communication and emotional care. They need people who can deal with them with greater sensitivity and empathy. (...) The issues we need to deal with concerning men are much more rational and serious, they throw less fits and temper-tantrums. Though the more serious problems of women must also be dealt with rationally and not just by evasive chatter. Men require few words to understand how things stand, but women often don't comprehend so easily. (A11)*

*The majority of female inmates finds it hard to adjust to this environment, to being so crowded. They had never had to live in a community where people must adapt to each other, since most of them are uneducated and had never lived in*

*student dormitories before. The most difficult for them is the break-up of family ties, since women lose their traditional roles of being the caretaker of the family when they are imprisoned, and they have no one to look after. Keeping in touch with family members can be considered ideal when there are meaningful visits in addition to phone calls and written correspondence, because then inmates don't feel so distanced from their family's everyday life. (...) It is also characteristic for female prisons that nothing can be kept a secret for long, everything comes to light in the course of a shouting match or a fight, since this is how most women deal with problems and conflicts. (A1)*

Many agents recognized that the overwhelming majority of women who served a sentence for homicide, committed their crime as a result of continual abuse by their partners. Even so, no programs existed that would address the issue of coming to terms with previous experience of domestic violence<sup>72</sup> or strategies for recognizing and avoiding abuse by a partner. No attention was given to help women overcome major difficulties that resulted from the previous domestic violence, e.g. lawsuits leading to lost houses, or denial of access to children by abusive partner. This also supports that while there has been a general appreciation of motherhood at the level of discourse, in many cases, even that perspective was ignored if it required personal attention.

*I wanted to go home last year for my son's wedding. I never had any penalties but I had 13 rewards so I asked the educator to grant me a leave. But she said I had never made any extra efforts, never participated in any workshops, so she wouldn't let me go home. (K9)*

Agents' adherence to more traditional gender roles, however, is particularly apparent in their attitude to intimate relationships between women inmates. Friendships between women were often taken into account, agents tended to allow close friends – or lovers - to be moved into the same cell. Even though they appeared to accept that several women formed more intimate relationships with a 'girlfriend', agents perceived that as a transitory need for gentleness for the period of imprisonment, and they still appeared to support traditional heterosexual behavior. One inmate who had children but pursued bisexual relationships in prison, experienced that returning to her family was supported by granting her leaves from the prisons before her release. Along with that, the possibility that a lesbian or bisexual identity may be a viable alternative for women did not appear in their discourse, while women considered that possibility.

*I had lesbian relationships even before prison. The children are not aware of this but my husband knew I had a girlfriend in prison. (...) I don't know whether I want to continue having this lesbian relationship, I will live a regular family life and we'll see how it goes. If such a relationship develops anyway, I won't advertise it for sure. I don't know if I can return to having a heterosexual relationship, but I won't leave the man who raised my children. Every time I talk to the lieutenant colonel [the head of unit], she keeps saying that I can't abandon*

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<sup>72</sup> The importance of domestic violence in women's life was addressed in hypothesis 1.

*my family. She thinks that being lesbian is just a temporary confusion with me.  
(K12)*

In summary, adherence to traditional gender roles in general and in particular, to motherhood, is the only strategy supported by the prison administration, at the level of discourse and programs. This is tangible in the educational and work programs provided by penitentiaries, which are characterized by preparing for feminine jobs mainly.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, from among other aspects of female prisoners' lives, family and relationships with children are given exclusive emphasis. However, not even motherhood was considered to be a strong enough value, if it required individual attention to e.g. women banned from children. The rigidity of prison regulations – which are indeed seemingly gender-neutral – and lack of individual attention to inmates' needs result in failing to appreciate women's needs even as mother's needs in actual practice. The power of a gender-neutral framework is certainly linked to the remnant status<sup>74</sup> of women's prisons and lack of general discourse about women's needs in prisons.

At the same time, other, less obvious aspects of women's identities or experiences, although recognized, are largely disregarded or not appreciated. The issue of lesbian relationships is not taken seriously, and is considered to be a transitory side effect of women's emotional neediness. Also, even though it is realized that the dependence on male partners is a salient cause of tragic crimes, the issue of domestic violence is not addressed in prisons. All in all, women's independence as a value is not reflected or supported neither in the programs, nor in the discourse of prisons and their agents.

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<sup>73</sup> Yet it must be stressed that prisons encourage women's involvement in work both during and after prison and stress the importance of (financial) self-reliance.

<sup>74</sup> The remnant position of women's prisons is addressed in hypothesis 2.4.

## IV. Life After Release

**Hypothesis 4: Several barriers to the social integration/ reintegration of women ex-prisoners remain.**

**4.1. Sub-hypothesis: The prison experience makes more difficult and is an obstacle against attempts to generate adaptive strategies and the acquisition of key capacities necessary for an effective insertion process. Skills that would be needed after release are not targeted or developed by prisons.**

Due to the lack of attention to and assistance in individual preparations<sup>75</sup> for the first steps after release, most inmates left the prison without adequate plans or arrangements for most spheres of life. In fact, most women could not imagine their life within one year's time – and plainly stated that they wanted to be happy. The desire for happiness – most often envisaged through happy family life – and a firm belief in not returning to prison were the most stable and often recurring elements of women's image about their future. Holding a job and thus having an income featured also among the most often mentioned objectives, yet, no concrete measures or plans were developed for the realization of such desires. Most women however, had a clear idea about where they are returning in terms of accommodation<sup>76</sup> – often this meant return to the family: predominantly to parents or to a partner.

As discussed previously, prisons may encourage or disable the development of plans and arrangements in several ways: e.g. through regulating leaves, providing pre-release services, information and training and through individual counseling. Practical arrangements can be facilitated by allowing women for short leaves a few weeks prior to their release – a practice currently confined to the women in transition groups or on LER. The few women who did have such opportunities, appreciated the leaves for their potential in making arrangements. Also, the few who had access to training on preparation for release, felt also more confident about their release. In terms of individual counseling support, examples are very rare and generally one may conclude that it is not available for inmates. The lack of support in these fields certainly is one of the reasons for the poorly developed plans and planning skills.

At yet another level however, prisons also influence the insertion process by encouraging certain survival strategies<sup>77</sup> during imprisonment – and punishing other behaviors. Even the few women who managed to assert themselves and gain access to relatively good jobs during their imprisonment, or achieved better classification or other benefits, did this by learning to focus on the collection of rewards, and apply careful balancing strategies with prison personnel. Most women however, did not manage to assert themselves and focused on survival, by using obedience as a strategy.

*They yell at me less, I stay out of their way. (K7)*

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<sup>75</sup> Preparation for release is discussed in hypothesis 3.c.

<sup>76</sup> Details about accommodation are covered in sub-hypothesis 4.3.

<sup>77</sup> Survival strategies among inmates with long sentences are discussed in hypothesis 2.2.b.

*You can't make suggestions in this place, that's not an option. We do as they say, our job is to follow orders. (K9)*

Another frequently emphasized aspect of prison life was the necessity to share a cell often with a large number of women – and to put up with the many demands resulting from this. Loss of privacy was a key problem, however, many women stated that they became more tolerant and emphatic towards others. Even though the prison certainly reinforced the need to adjust to the environment, this has been largely experienced as a one-way, full adjustment through obedience. Self-assertion is certainly not strengthened by such lessons – a skill which is presumably important for creating a new life after release.

In their dealings with authorities after release, in some cases the lack of self-assertion was an apparent problem. Refusal of granting a justified benefit or unjust refusal from a training program were accepted as a natural matter of life. This is certainly reinforced by women's experience with the probation service – an agency that can send the women back to prison - therefore it is fully understandable that women just tried to comply and survive. However, the limited self-assertion is also linked to the overly bureaucratic and uncoordinated operation of authorities,<sup>78</sup> which may result in lack of oversight and information on actual services and rights available.

Considering another practical skill needed after release, job search skills tended to be rather limited in most cases. Apart from a general desire to have a job – which the majority repeatedly stressed in the interviews following the release – very few actual job hunting steps were reported in most cases. Most women did talk to people they knew, primarily to friends and family – and possibly to former employees. Some women studied job advertisements in the local papers. Yet many in our research did not engage in job search practically at all, or gave up very quickly. This certainly had very tangible and significant reasons however: most of them knew that they hardly qualify for jobs, all of them anticipated the criminal record to form a strong barrier, some felt awkward about what to tell about the time in prison. Thus, many did not quite believe that they could actually get a job, or were easily turned down by initial refusal.

Yet, job search skills could have been developed while in prison or after release, e.g. focusing on the skills they have, preparing CV-s, learning various job-search strategies and resources, discussing how they should address the time in prison, experimenting with interview situations, etc. Even the woman with a college degree and a number of years of work experience did not believe that she could actually have a CV. And indeed, job search proved to be very important: the very few women who gained stable employment, all searched with resilience and often went through several jobs until an adequate job was found<sup>79</sup>. In the Hungarian labor market, job search skills are absolutely vital for accessing adequate jobs – in the absence of such skills, only black, unregistered jobs are available

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<sup>78</sup> This is addressed in detail in hypothesis 4.5.

<sup>79</sup> It must be noted that all of them possessed mid-level educational qualifications, thus their position was more favorable than many other women's.

for the women, which indeed further the insecurity and fragility of their position and their exclusion from e.g. social security benefits.

**4.2. Sub-hypothesis: [...] In regards to social-labor integration, women find themselves in difficult circumstances [..], and this can lead to the accumulation of situations of exclusion.**

While all women worked in the prison<sup>80</sup>, this work experience did not help them gain employment after prison. Many of the women worked in sewing workshops during their imprisonment and several of them gained vocational qualification in upper-part shoe manufacturing. Yet, these skills were not much demanded after their release: none of the women gained employment in this or any related field.

*In prison I worked in manufacturing the upper-parts of shoes, but I haven't seen such want ads in the paper yet. That would be nice though, it was a good job and I wouldn't mind giving it a try in civilian life. I am qualified for working in a sewing workshop as well, that type of job would suit me. But they pay so little, it is below minimum wage. Only those seamstresses earn more who have worked there for a long time. What's more, they are now in the process of shutting down sewing workshops and knit-wear factories because knitwear doesn't sell. (E4)*

Agents at the Labor Office reinforced that women with poor vocational qualifications are in a particularly difficult position in the labor market in Hungary.

*Everyone says that vocational jobs are needed, but female vocational workers don't have so many opportunities. Men have more possibilities for obtaining low-skilled positions, for instance they can find jobs in construction. For most people it is obvious that such jobs are secured only for men. (A7)*

Apart from the poor market value of these gendered and obsolete job skills, the criminal record<sup>81</sup> formed a practically total barrier to gaining employment for the women. All women who actively searched jobs anticipated that the criminal record would be a barrier and most of them actually encountered the expected difficulties. In some cases women were discouraged from active job search because of the expected difficulties presented by the criminal record.

*My biggest problem is unemployment. Yes, I keep searching for a job but I haven't found one yet. The main problem is that I don't have a certificate of no criminal record. (K3)*

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<sup>80</sup> Work in prison is addressed under hypothesis 3a.

<sup>81</sup> The “certificate of no criminal record”, or as called in Hungarian, the ‘ethical certificate’, is issued by the authorities, and it registers the key data about the crime committed, sentence served and is valid for several years after the crime, depending on its severity. It is customary in Hungary – and the Labor Code enables this practice – that employers require the certificate prior to signing the employment contract. Theoretically, it serves the right of employers to be informed about the criminal record – and it shall not mean automatic rejection of the potential employee.

*I am looking for a job but many places ask for a certificate of no criminal record. I haven't been rejected yet because of this, but I don't even go to places where I know they'll ask for it. (M2)*

*The biggest problem our family is facing is unemployment. I haven't got a job and I am not even looking now. A certificate of no criminal record is necessary for all types of official employment. (M8)*

However, a few women were able to gain employment because the employer did not ask for the certificate of no criminal record. Often the certificate has to be presented within a few weeks after the start of employment – in some cases, women were discovered and fired<sup>82</sup>, while a few lucky and tactful women got away without the certificate or manipulated the employer successfully.

*I found a job by looking through the want ads. I applied to five positions and I didn't return to the places where they asked for the certificate. (K5)*

*I finally found a job, then all of a sudden I got a new boss who asked for the certificate. So they found out that I had a criminal record and I was fired. (K3)*

*I work at the post office now, I process mail at night in twelve-hour shifts. The human resources office also asked for the certificate of no criminal record, but I managed to drag my feet, I told them that I had already asked for it but that it hadn't arrived yet. Afterwards, when I was on good terms with the human resources officer, I admitted that there was a slight problem with my certificate due to an earlier traffic accident<sup>83</sup>. I was told by the officer that they would deal with the problem. (K12)*

None of the women who had registered, paid employment could tell their employer about the prison record – in fact, even the agents at the Labor Office encourage their clients not to tell first. A social worker at an NGO active in reintegration, also admits the difficulties of being honest with employers.

*There are more and more positions where employment is subject to providing a certificate of no criminal record, and in such cases those with a criminal record don't even stand a chance. Most employers are not willing to hire anyone with a criminal record. A good relationship between the employers and the Labor Office can help deal with such prejudices. Revealing the fact that they have a criminal record isn't a motivating factor for the employers, thus there is no need for the ex-prisoners to admit everything right off the bat. (A7)*

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<sup>82</sup> In an exceptional case, upon discovering her prison record a few weeks after her recruitment to the shop as shop assistant, the Chinese employer actually decided in her favor: “There was a scandal today after my co-worker found out where I had been. We had to explain to the Chinese guy since he doesn't speak such good Hungarian. I had to explain to him what had happened, what I had done. But after finding out he didn't seem to care. He just asked whether I had any problems with the courts. I told him that I didn't, and he said the past didn't matter. In the end, it was my co-worker who was asked to leave.” (E1)

<sup>83</sup> She was actually imprisoned for attempt of homicide.

*Our organization is committed to assisting people in re-entering the labor force. We also help the people who live in our social home when they are looking for a job. We stand by them and try to 'convince' the employers. I always advise our clients to tell the supervisor the truth (but only to the supervisor). I promise them total support and that I am willing to keep in touch with their employer. If there is a problem then both parties can express this in time. Unfortunately it is quite rare that the employers are willing to cooperate in such a way. (A20)*

While many women registered at the Labor Office, none of them were given unemployment benefit, and none found employment or training courses through the Labor Office. Two women were offered 'public work', however they refused. Others gave up looking for a job after repeated refusals.

*I have been to the Labor Office where I was told that I could work as a street sweeper but I don't want to do that. I will not take on such an inferior job. (K3)*

*I am not looking for a job since I wouldn't find one anyway. (M8)*

A woman applied to a nursing training through the Labor Office, however, she was rejected due to her criminal record. Others were also rejected from e.g. a massage course due to lacking a clean criminal record. The agents at the Labor Office reinforced that in a number of training courses, the certificate of no criminal record is a precondition for enrollment.

*An advertisement for a social worker training was posted at the Labor Office. The officer there was quite nice and even helped me fill out the paperwork. But then my application to the training course wasn't accepted. The psychologist of the company organizing this training didn't recommend me because he said I was prone to aggressive behavior. I never even met the psychologist. (K9)*

*I applied to work as a masseuse, they would have provided training along with work, but then it turned out that the certificate of no criminal record is also required by the Association of Massage Therapists. (K12)*

*There are courses and professional trainings where it is necessary to have a certificate of no criminal record in order to participate. So far this has mostly happened with men, for example in cases of training security personnel. The participants finished the course but then they couldn't receive their certificates. (A7)*

The few women who ultimately succeeded in gaining registered employment, worked at the low end of job hierarchies, in low-skilled and low-wage jobs – most often, were

employed in factory jobs and worked in three shifts – despite their medium-level educational qualifications.<sup>84</sup>

Due to lack of registered employment, several other women took up very insecure small jobs, temporary or seasonal employment, most often cleaning and housekeeping work. In several cases women had very negative experiences with temporary/ black employers who took advantage of them, e.g. did not want to pay them or sexually harassed them. The women's ultimate strategy was to leave, even without getting paid in order to avoid trouble – since trouble meant return to prison. Some women whose family ties were disrupted, were forced to take up housekeeping jobs to secure accommodation and work. However, such housekeeping jobs in single man's houses led to exploitation and sexual harassment within weeks or days and the women had to run away.

*After my release I worked as a shop assistant in a store. I prefer working in commerce where it is possible to be in daily contact with people. Then supposedly two bags disappeared from the store. I was blamed for it and it was deducted from my salary. The price of both bags (their value was 20 000 forints) was taken from my pay, even though it could have happened during my coworker's shift. There was hardly anything left from my salary, I picket up the remaining 15 000 and I left. (K7)*

*First I worked as a cook and then I had a job in a bakery for a while. I also did some marketing work but I was ripped off. None of these places paid me but I wasn't going to insist for long. (K12)*

*I also looked into contracts of life-long support, but one of them turned out to be a personal ad although this wasn't stated specifically. I stayed with him for five days and I worked very hard. Finally, when I wanted to leave he hit me, I had to run away, I even left my phone there. He was yelling at me, he said he'd have me returned to prison, that he would take me to the police. Then I noticed that this ad kept appearing in the newspaper. I want to write to the mayor's office, I mean this person is a psychopath. (K10)*

In some cases prostitution was presented as an option for women released from prison:

*I was talking with two other girls about what to do. One of them attended college and the other one had gone to high school. We are so desperate that both girls were wondering whether we should try to work as hostesses or prostitutes. I really don't want to but I think everyone has the right to do what they wish with their bodies. Yet if such thoughts cross the mind of a sensible person who had held down jobs before, it is really distressing. (E1)*

*After having been released I was searching for a job and I told everyone that I was on the look-out. Then someone gave me a phone number and I made the call.*

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<sup>84</sup> It must be noted that only one of them was a Roma woman – and that she too had a medium-level educational qualification.

*I met a doctor in an apartment downtown. He said I would have to sleep with him and become a surrogate mother, and that I would also have to have sex with his cancer patients. Well, this was my first day out of prison. I have seen a lot of things but this was difficult to face, especially since that was my first day out. (K12)*

*I keep in touch with a woman who was in a cell next to mine, she has also been set free and now we correspond back and forth. She is not doing too well, she lives with her mother but she is suffering. I thought I'd get her together with 82-year old Uncle Jani, I mean this girl had made a living selling her body before, being with Uncle Jani couldn't possibly be a big problem for her. (K10)*

Most women who were not able (or, in fewer cases, did not want to) find work, were supported by their partners and families and/ or received (very modest) welfare payments.<sup>85</sup> Yet, in most cases, the first choice of women would have been to find some employment – which was clearly perceived as a source of income and independence.

In conclusion it must be stressed that the very few women who ultimately gained registered employment, all had medium-level qualifications and all were very persistent in the job search. Most of them actually moved to Budapest and took up relatively low skilled, low-paid factory jobs – however, were very pleased to have permanent employment. However, this was not an option for many others: those without any prior qualification / vocational skill or residence in a small village with poor job opportunities.

Once again, primary exclusion patterns were reinforced on the one hand, e.g. none of the "Roma Mothers" gained registered employment. Yet new factors of exclusion were added in some cases, due to the lack of registered employment and the need to take up temporary, black work or housekeeping work. The largest barrier to gaining registered employment proved to be the so-called ethical certificate – a clear push towards further labor-market exclusion.

**4.3. Sub-hypothesis: Upon leaving prison women often face a new "conviction" in that the effects of prison can lead to an increase in their rootlessness, or rupture, and thus they require new conditions in order to overcome the effects of "prisonization", as well as to reconstruct their lives.**

The first few weeks after release from prison proved to be a difficult time especially for the women who served long sentences. They experienced an unexpected restlessness, insomnia, depression and a desire to return to the routine of the prison<sup>86</sup>.

*When I left I actually missed prison even though I had a place to go. I wasn't happy with anything, I kept wondering how to return there. I missed everything I used to hate on the inside, such as the morning ritual of our cells being opened. I didn't eat anything at home, I even missed the crap they gave us to eat in prison. I*

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<sup>85</sup> To be addressed in more detail in hypotheses 4.4 and 4.5.

<sup>86</sup> This was not experienced by women who served short sentences.

*want to go to Kalocsa, I miss the prison and the lieutenant colonel [the head of unit] (K12)*

*I am starting to calm down now, I was restless and anxious for a long time. Everything was strange, even silence. Nights are especially distressing. I haven't slept at night for two weeks, even though there is nothing that would harm me. I am unable to stay in one place, I am always on the go. I used to be a homebody but now it's different. (K9)*

For them, their relationship with children and family members presented many challenges as well.

*My daughter Gina isn't doing very well, she is gravely ill and they didn't take good enough care of her. She cuddles up to me, which I find difficult to bear even though I love her very much. I've thought about this quite a bit, I think it is because of prison. I was so terrified of lesbians that I can't bear other women coming close to me. (K10)*

*Things are progressing with the children but it's not easy. Sometimes I feel that they don't love me, my son just lies low and my daughters keep their distance as well. They need time. I've had many fights with my husband recently. I can't live with him, he constantly questions me. He is very distrustful and he doesn't believe me. He even refuses to hear about prison at all. And I told him I won't apologize, won't explain myself. I am trying but I don't know if it will work. (K12)*

Agents also confirmed that people with long sentences need months to readjust and individual support to rely on.

*I am the one who provides stability for my wife who was released a few months ago. She has a job, everything is all right between us and with the children, but she still faces difficulties in communicating with people and struggles with her lack of self-confidence. (A12)*

*The first six months after release are the most critical ones. Organizing their own lives is the most difficult aspect for young people, considering that they were released from an extremely structured and regulated environment. They find it hard to get used to changes and flexibility. The values and norms they learned within their prison environment are difficult to alter. In addition, relationships with family members can also cause problems. All concerned parties must get used to a new situation. (A13)*

For the majority of women, return to the children and family was the strongest source of inspiration and support upon which their new life could rest. Many emphasized that their relationship with parents and children became even stronger.

However, the few women who experienced break-up of family ties, went through the most difficult times of their lives. Especially victims of domestic violence were trapped if access to their children was denied or if they abusive partners blackmailed them with the children. A woman had to leave her home and child on the second day after her release from prison, because her husband decided not to live with an ex-prisoner.

*The children really need me, someone has to raise them which my ex-husband was unable to do. Now he is trying to blackmail me with them but I won't let him. So he said I would have to get news about the kids the way I did before, only through others. He wants me to move back and raise the kids, especially the one who is ill. I would really love to stay close to the children, but I can't move back with them, I couldn't possibly handle this situation because of my ex-husband. (K12)*

*My husband asked me to move out two days after I was released. He has a problem with the fact that I still have to go back to prison, and that his family doesn't approve of me. When actually it was because of him that I started the whole shoplifting thing as he didn't have a job. I haven't seen my little daughter for weeks. I am completely broke financially and I feel defeated mentally as well as emotionally. I have lost my daughter, my family, my life and I have become homeless. There is nothing good going on in my life. (K7)*

In most cases children stayed with family members during the prison sentence of their mother, and thus state care was avoided. However, for the women who did loose their children either through state care or due to abusive partners denying access to children, gaining children back seemed hopeless in the first weeks and months after release.

*I know that I have the right to visit my daughter, but I don't want to get into an argument with my husband. I won't start something that I know I'll lose anyway, and I don't want it to affect my daughter. I can't fight for her, it's a lost cause since they would just tell me that I am going back to prison anyway. If I only knew that I still have at least half a year before I have to return, then I could turn to the courts – I mean they wouldn't give me custody of her anyway, but at least I could fight for visiting her. But this way I am unable to do that. (K7)*

*I said I didn't want to meet the kids as long as I am unable to provide them with any sort of continuity, as long as I can't say that I'm here for them, they can count on me. I realized that I have lost touch with their lives, I am not aware of what they like or anything. I don't even know how I have been portrayed to the kids, I have no idea what image they might have of me. At this point I can't get them back since I have no place for them. But eventually I would like to have them with me. (K12)*

*My kids were placed in state care when I was imprisoned. My elder son has unfortunately turned away from me. But I have a good relationship with my younger son, he comes to see us every weekend. I would like to have the younger*

*one with me, but I can't until we are bit more secure financially. We have moved several times already and I don't have a job. (M2)*

Agents also emphasized the importance of reunion with children for the women.

*Women prisoners are highly motivated by the thought of having their children returned to them, thus the process of granting them custody of children temporarily placed in state care should be made easier. Their successful reintegration into society is strongly linked with the motivation of getting their children back. (A11)*

The fear from stigma and its actual discriminatory impact was tangible in job search<sup>87</sup> both directly - not employing people released from prison - and indirectly - through the fear from the need to present the ethical certificate. Women's awareness of the stigma and its actual impact was also clearly present in their decisions in not fighting for their children, and women's ex-prisoner status was certainly used manipulatively by ex-partners in denying access to children or other basic rights (e.g. staying in their shared homes). In yet another example, stigmatization in the community led a woman to move to another town with her entire family.

*Life is made more difficult by prison, since news travels fast around town. News and gossip can leak quickly from the mayor's office just like from anywhere else. It's unnecessary for someone to ruin me like this. We have moved to another town, closer to Budapest, but we might even move further. (E1)*

Yet, apart from this clear example, we found little direct evidence in women's accounts on the workings of stigmatization in the community. In fact, the great majority of women did not have such explicitly negative experiences in the community – despite the fact that especially in villages people were aware of their past. Some women were convinced that they did not suffer any disadvantages in the community because of their background. However, in many cases disadvantages were indeed tangible in the communities, in the abusive behavior of neighbors, yet even relatives, who took advantage of the fact that women avoided confrontation with the law at all costs.<sup>88</sup>

In summary, the effects of prisonization presented serious difficulties in the lives of women released after lengthy sentences. Ruptures of family relationships and loss of children meant a real trauma for the few women concerned, especially because they had lost the critical, often only source of support and have experienced the collapse of their lives. These women did not realistically foresee how they would regain their children. While the majority of women did not experience such dramatic ruptures, they all were faced with stigmatization in the labor market – and many, in other spheres of life.

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<sup>87</sup> Labor market experiences are covered in hypothesis 4.2.

<sup>88</sup> Examples for sexual harassment of women taking up housekeeping jobs at single man's houses were presented in hypothesis 4.2 – with some men making explicit references for their ability to send the women back to prison if they fail to comply. In another case one of the cousins of a woman employed her at his local pub but failed to pay her, telling her that she did not bring any profits to him and also telling her that she could go back to prison if she disagrees with him.

**4.4. Sub-hypothesis: The necessities for social integration must be attended even before the need for job integration, although both levels of social integration are integrally related, neither of them can be contemplated as being independent of one another.**

The great majority of women knew where they would go after release from prison: to their families, most often, to their parents – only in a few cases to their partners. Return to parents often meant reunion with their children, since most often parents took care of the children during the women's imprisonment. Sometimes women returned to their parents together with their partners, however, the resulting overcrowding and poor living conditions in many cases caused everyday struggles.

*I live in the same place with my family, it's a flat subsidized by the state. I am not happy with the situation, there is no running water and it's in a lousy neighborhood. My mother is ill and bedridden, it's hard to care for her. (K3)*

*We moved here just two weeks ago, from my parents to my partner's parents' place, but I'm not sure if it was the right decision. It's a 2-room run-down house without any modern conveniences, and the parents, my partner's brother and the two of us are all staying here. We have our 'own' room. The biggest drawback is that the bathroom has no hot water and no floor tiles and we cook using a wooden stove. My parents' place would be better but we can't go there. Of course, renting our own place would be the best, just the two of us, the kid and the child we'd have together – the one who just might be on the way! (M15)*

Staying with parents was seen as an acceptable solution by many of the young and single women in the first few weeks and months – yet later many indicated that they wanted to live on their own. Many women perceived the situation of living with parents only as temporary. However, moving to a rented flat was almost impossible to be financed, and affordable places tended to be also very inadequate:

*We used to have everything in the past, but then we lived at my mother-in-law's place for a while together with the children. Then we managed to start renting our own flat. My husband would be ashamed to say it, but we wash ourselves in a washbasin. He is a plumber and a repairman of gas pipes, and he is always filthy when he comes home after work. He washes his hair kneeling down since we have nothing to put the washbasin on. I mean ... having to live like this in the 21st century! (E4)*

The few women who could not return to a family, faced the most serious difficulties. Two of them stayed with their best friends temporarily – often also in very difficult living conditions – and struggled to be able to rent a room.

*I live in a rental. It's small, there are many of us but at least there is peace and quiet. I am used to this so it doesn't bother me. It's a one-room place with a*

*kitchen and a bathroom and we heat using wood. There are six of us here, I live with my boyfriend, a friend of mine, her boyfriend and her two children. On weekends my son also stays with us. (M2)*

A few women lived in state-owned flats, which in contrast to the above examples, meant that renting costs were moderate compared to market prices. However, maintaining flats proved to be also very difficult for them:

*While I was in prison, the local government combined all sorts of state support and financial aid and had a house built for us and the six children. It's a 3-room house with a bathroom and a kitchen, and it's situated on a hill at the far end of the village, near the cemetery. My husband died while I was in prison. The house is only halfway finished, right now we can heat only one room and that's where we sleep. My youngest is ill so he is staying with some relatives, and the eldest one doesn't live here anymore either. Our electricity supply has been cut off because my child hadn't paid the bills. The power will be switched on again only if we manage pay all our overdue bills. My biggest concern at this point is getting back our power supply and figuring out how to heat the place. (K6)*

Even women who had nowhere to go, avoided temporary shelters at all costs. They refused to be identified as homeless – and did not perceive the homeless shelter to be a solution. Alternatives as taking up housekeeping jobs<sup>89</sup>, reproduced the vulnerable position of women and added new grievances. Housing needs of people released from prison are not recognized and addressed by state authorities, even though most of the agents in our research named housing needs as one of the most immediate difficulties after release.

While the majority of women lived in poor housing conditions, those few who enjoyed a relative comfort in their parents' homes, could potentially focus more on job search – at least this is suggested by the fact that the few women who ultimately gained access to stable, registered jobs had a secure housing solution and stayed with their families.

Yet for many other women, the insecurities in housing, the daily struggle with overcrowding and poverty, the need to look after children or ill mothers combined with poor potentials in the labor market led to situations in which the various forms of exclusion reinforced each other, from which breaking out became hardly possible.

*I do feel that it is more difficult to make ends meet. Being confined is making me more tense. Even now I am at home and I have to adapt to my in-laws. I feel that now that I am free, I want everything too quickly. I worry about finances the most, and I would really like to move away from here. I hope it'll work. We are planning on moving to my grandmother's studio. I would like to be alone with my children, I feel that I just can't find my own way. It's very difficult, because my husband isn't around and all the burdens are on me. I hope we can move out next week. (E4)*

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<sup>89</sup> The resulting exploitation and potential harassment is described in sub-hypothesis 4.2.

**4.5. Sub-hypothesis: The continuity between and co-ordination of integration related services is insufficient.**

**4.5.a. Continuity is not sufficient between activities of prison authorities and after release authorities (including NGO-s).**

In addition to the limited attention to preparing women for release while in prison<sup>90</sup>, we found that currently the co-ordination between pre-release and after release authorities is insufficient – although it must be stressed that this lack of continuity is now being addressed with increasing intensity by the authorities concerned.

However, the women's experience shows that currently there is very little connection between life inside and life after prison. This was found both in terms of access to and information regarding services, as well as in terms of personal relationships. Regarding services, the most obvious agent to provide information and support regarding life after prison, as well as ensure continuity between time in prison and afterwards, is the probation officer.<sup>91</sup>

The majority of women in our research had to report to a probation officer after their release, however, they did not meet their actual probation officers prior to the release. A few weeks prior to release, general presentations were organized in the prisons, where a probation officer addressed issues related to the release, however, most women did not find these general sessions informative or helpful.

*There was a presentation in prison about probation, but they weren't convincing to me. They provided us with their address and contact information, but I wouldn't turn to them for help. (M20)*

*I am going to meet with my probation officer once a month. We will discuss what I should do and what I mustn't do. (M15)*

Even if potentially these sessions could provide general information, they certainly lack the ability to provide tailor-made, individual attention – since women do not get to meet

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<sup>90</sup> Preparation for release was addressed in hypothesis 3.c.

<sup>91</sup> The Probation Officers' Service as an independent organization was set up in July 2003. Formerly, probation officers (for adult convicts) worked at the County Courts, while probation officers for under-age convicts worked in yet another organizational arrangement. With the creation of a national organization, the institutionalization and professionalization of their work, the importance of reintegration was emphasized. The institutional change followed and reflected a change in legislation: a gradual move towards alternative methods in legislation started to take shape, and manifested in e.g. giving more authority to probation officers already at the courtrooms. However, the work of probation officers remained manifold due to the various types of 'service' delivered by them, and overload problems have not yet been resolved despite recruitment efforts (current average case-load is still above 100/ probation officer). Much of the infrastructure and working conditions are not complete yet. The financing of reforms is at risk of being cut due to budget restrictions in 2004-2005. The NPO is also involved in establishing institutional cooperation with other state agencies that provide housing, work, etc. opportunities. However, the actual positive impacts of such efforts on the ground are still to be seen - in our research probation officers did not provide actual support in solving any of the major difficulties faced by the women.

their actual future probation officers. Only in one of the three institutes, in Eger was it customary to encourage the first meeting to take place during the last weeks of imprisonment. Several agents emphasized the need for better co-operation between prisons and probation officers, as well as a personal meeting to take place prior to release.

*There would be less of a break and more continuity between life in prison and life on the outside, if the aftercare services could actually work with ex-prisoners. Probation officers used to work in prison, their relationship with inmates was more closely linked and thus the transition period was easier. When there is close cooperation there is somewhat less damage done to these cases. (A11)*

The need for co-operation between prisons and probation officers has been broadly recognized by the authorities at all levels. It is now reflected in legislation, and has led to a growing number of co-operations between penitentiaries and the corresponding local sections of the NPO. Yet, many of these actually focus on general services, as the above-mentioned general information sessions. The division of responsibilities between prison educators and probation officers is in many ways still open for interpretation. Thus, the actual practice and especially its tangible advantages for the inmates to be released, still have to be worked out in the future.

Co-operation between prisons and other state agents active in reintegration, e.g. the Labor Office, is currently rather accidental.

*The existing cooperation has its deficiencies which start with the fact that we don't know what kind of information is provided to them in prison. It has happened before that the Labor Office was asked to do presentations in the penitentiary. So the ex-prisoners who actually make it to the Labor Office are already one step ahead, considering that they are already aware of at least where to go with their unemployment problem. But most of them probably don't know whom to turn to. The Labor Office will provide three-day long in-house trainings about job-hunting techniques to any company or institution that requests it (for instance in the event of lay-offs). The penitentiary system hasn't requested such training courses yet. (A7)*

In our research, while we did not encounter the activities of Labor Offices in the prisons, many of the women actually registered themselves at the Labor Office after their release. Many stated that they were not given any job opportunity, however, a few of them refused the offered 'public work' opportunity. Agents at the Labor Office emphasized the poor job prospects of unskilled women released from prison and the role of the personal network and personal involvement of the agents in arranging job placements for the women<sup>92</sup>.

The NPO is in the process of establishing regular co-operation with Labor Offices, which in some parts of the country has led to regular information sessions and exchange between probation officers and the Labor Office. The NPO aims at developing co-

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<sup>92</sup> Details regarding women's labor-market integration efforts are discussed in hypothesis 4.2.

operation also with homeless shelters, however, at this stage, we cannot report tangible services to the women released in the area of housing.

Lack of co-operation between various agents during imprisonment and after release was tangible at the level of services as presented above, however, also appeared at the level of personal relationships.

Agents who work in prison emphasized that while the prison should be involved in preparing for release, the personal involvement of agents in the prison ends at the prison door. In fact, some agents were convinced that it would be unlawful for them to maintain any contact with ex-prisoners. While many women certainly did not wish to build personal relationships with prison educators etc., for the very few who established important personal relationships with prison agents, this was seen as a major loss.

*I am very sorry that my closest friend in prison, Pirooska, doesn't answer any of my cards and she doesn't call me. I really look up to Pirooska, I learned much from her and I owe a lot to her. I do miss our talks. I called her a few times but she is not allowed to keep in touch with me because of suspicions of corruption. (K12)*

But especially non-state agents, most often teachers or NGO activists, were an important source of inspiration and support both during the imprisonment and also after the release for the few women who established such relationships in prison.

*I made friends with the teacher during the course I attended. She really treated us as human beings and she was intelligent, one could talk to her. After I was released we spoke on the phone and I even met with her. She brought me a bunch of presents and we both cried. I am about to go see her, she continues teaching and we might even go to an exhibition together. (K12)*

*The Father helped me a lot, I used to go to talk to him and play the organ. When I was set free he even found cheap and good accommodation for me at a kind catholic woman's place, but for example he even sent me a coat. He regularly called me after I was released and this meant a great deal to me. I am going to visit him in Kalocsa next week. (K10)*

Many prison officials expect primarily NGO-s to provide significant support - and the solution to prisons' overloaded personnel - in reintegration-related efforts, as well as in ensuring continuity. In recent months, the leaders of the NPA have repeatedly expressed their openness towards co-operation with NGO-s<sup>93</sup>. Currently however, such involvement is rather specific and limited in most prisons. It is rather specific in that civil involvement refers in most cases to religious organizations, and their activities in the spiritual preparation of inmates – as well as to their material services e.g. in providing clothing for inmates to be released. NGO involvement is rather limited even taking into account the

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<sup>93</sup>In March 2004 a conference was organized by the NPA and NPO specifically to encourage such cooperation between NGO-s and the authorities.

small yet growing number of non-religious organizations who provide training and educational services or legal aid to inmate, in that very little support focuses on preparation for release and first steps in life after release.<sup>94</sup> Thus most inmates receive currently no individual attention and support for their reintegration and continuing support after their release.

It must be noted that prisons have limited financial means to finance the services provided by NGO-s. In fact, the NPA plans to rely largely on free NGO services – which further limits NGO-s rather modest capabilities for expansion.

In conclusion it must be stressed that while currently cooperation and continuity between agencies and services is insufficient, there are very tangible positive efforts in order to improve cooperation between penitentiaries and probation officers prior to the release. However, details and the actual practice of such cooperation remains to be seen – the largest concern being that individual and personal attention to people’s needs will continue suffer due to unchanged role expectations of both state agencies, continuing overload and limited training for probation officers and educators, and the essentially state-dominated nature of their support<sup>95</sup>. While NGO-s in many ways would be much better suited to provide continuity, the currently limited number and scope of activity of such NGO-s suggests that they cannot immediately fulfil such needs.

#### **4.5.b. Ex-prisoners are constrained by the uncoordinated requirements of various bureaucracies and their access to vital documents and welfare is slow and troublesome.**

In Hungary most people who leave prison do not possess the vital documents: identity card, address registry card, social security card and tax card – just to name the most important ones.<sup>96</sup> Women faced two difficulties regarding access to documents: in addition to the financial burden, the various bureaucratic requirements made the process rather difficult and slow for many, which in turn presented barriers to and delays in their access to work, welfare or medication.

*I don't have a social security card and an address registry card. I can't even get the other necessary documents without having these first. I was told I could get early retirement, but I still have to start this process. I am totally lost in these bureaucratic matters, they just keep sending me from one place to the next. (K8)*

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<sup>94</sup>During our research altogether 3 NGO-s were found to offer individual support in reintegration beyond the gate of the prisons. Only one of these worked with women inmates – and this organization was actually in the process of setting up their services. Thus, in effect, currently no such support is available for women released from prison in Hungary.

<sup>95</sup> Hypothesis 4.5.c discusses that probation officers are associated with the prison and represent the controlling state power to the released women.

<sup>96</sup> Acquisition of a passport and driving license has its own problems – they are both rather expensive and access/ need to acquire a passport for people on conditional leave is rather unclear since Hungary’s EU accession.

*My husband sent me away from the flat we own together, that is the address I was registered at. I am afraid he has even officially notified the authorities of my departure. My old address registry card expired in the meantime, and if I don't get a new one I won't have a job, since they have asked for this at work. (K7)*

*It would be great help if at least my paperwork was dealt with, so that I wouldn't have to spend money on this as well, because this would be a big financial burden on us just now. (M2)*

Some of the most assertive women succeeded in getting money for the document from their probation officers or local governments, however, others did not – and thus were left without documents.

*All my paperwork is in order. I kept going to the local government office and to the family welfare agency, until I finally managed to get all my documents extended for free. (K10)*

*I lost both my social security card and my tax card as well, I don't even know where it happened. I have no money to have new ones issued. (K7)*

Information on various forms of welfare was similarly difficult to find for many women. Most women left the prison with a few thousand forints - the obligatory saving in the value of one month's pay in prison – which was used to cover the trip home and, in the best case, the first days' grocery shopping. Most women knew, that the local governments may give a once-off aid to people in need, the so-called 'temporary aid', usually in the value of 5000 forints. Many decided to ask for this money, however, some were refused – while others stated that it was not worth asking for such a symbolic amount of money.

*The local government won't help, they wanted to give me something like 3-400 forints worth of temporary financial aid every three months. But I told them not to bother, you can't do anything with that amount of money. (K12)*

*After having been released they could've provided a bit more help than the 2000 forints. I mean, all right... we committed crimes, but it's not possible to make a fresh start with this money, especially not in December. Those who want to start a new life yet they don't have families to return to, they simply can't manage with this amount of money. (E1)*

Currently in Hungary there is no welfare available specifically for people released from prison. However, there are various forms of social welfare for which the women could have applied – and some of them indeed applied. Yet, many women were not aware of the available forms of aid, the various authorities in question, and the conditions – or (mistakenly) thought that they would not be eligible for welfare.

*I was not given any information about the various forms of financial assistance available, neither in prison nor here in the local government offices. (K12)*

*I am not aware of the possibilities, if there was some type of welfare available, I would try to apply for that. I not exactly sure who to ask for it. (M20)*

*The welfare system is completely unclear to me. My mother receives some type of welfare, so I guess I wouldn't be able to. (M15)*

Others found the conditions very bureaucratic or impossible to be fulfilled:

*I wanted to ask for child-raising benefits because of my two children. My mother was the one who started the paperwork, but I guess it's really complicated. You need proof of school attendance, then proof of employment from both of us and so on. (E4)*

*I went and enquired at the local government offices whether they would provide some financial assistance for our heating bills, but they came up with some ridiculous conditions. I would regularly have to pay my heating bills for three months, before they agreed to help pay part of it. I asked them how I could possibly pay those bills and they told me to borrow some money from relatives – this is what I was told at the local government offices! (K4)*

Even if welfare was granted, it took usually months and women were left with no resources for the most critical period after release.

*They don't provide any emergency aid, everything takes months and by then it's too late. (K7)*

*We would need some money after being released, at least 50.000 – 60.000 forints in order to start a new life. (M2)*

Women who did gain access to some form of regular financial income/ welfare – typically did so through some kind of child-care benefit<sup>97</sup>, or, in a few cases, through taking care of their ill mothers. The income however, was not sufficient to cover subsistence costs. Through this kind of welfare practice, traditional gender roles are reinforced on the one hand, and at the same time, payments do not actually allow for survival. Yet this practice also means that women without (small) children, are in the worst position regarding access to welfare. Thus women who leave prison without family ties – elder women, single and childless women, victims of domestic violence – have not only to cope without vital family assistance, but have smaller chances for getting even some very modest welfare aid.

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<sup>97</sup> A few women received GYES (childcare allowance), családi pótlék (family allowance), gyermekvédelmi segély (child protection aid), nevelési segély (child-raising benefit), and árvasági segély (orphan aid).

#### **4.5.c. State employees as probation officers are strongly associated with the prison (in ex-prisoners' perception.)**

The women did not expect much practical help from the probation officers, they understood the control function of probation officers to be their main mission.

Some women had difficulties establishing contact with their probation officer and were worried about the consequences. Others had difficulties with traveling to the probation officers, especially because they lacked the money, or they could not attend monthly meetings due to other obligations. In case the women failed to show up, they were given a warning.

*I reported to the police because I wasn't sure how to get in touch with my probation officer. The police promised me they would notify the probation officer but nothing happened for about two months, and I was getting anxious because I didn't want to be sent back to prison<sup>98</sup>. And then after two months the probation officer came to see me, I was working in a bar at the time, and he wasn't willing to step very close to the place. He stopped 500 meters away and sent me a message to report to Debrecen. I would've had to go now for the second time, but I can't go to Debrecen since I haven't got any money. (K9)*

*I told him that I couldn't go once a month. I was a week late last time but he said that the Ministry of Justice oversees his work as well, and if I didn't show up at the arranged time, he would have me sent back to prison. (K12)*

Most women did not consider the meetings to be useful. In fact, some women considered the meetings useless and irritating – at best, some stated that the probation officer has been nice but could not help. The only practical use some could see was due to the few thousand forints of emergency help – most often asked to arrange personal documents.

*I was told by the probation officer that life is difficult on the outside. I asked him for some money, he gave me 5000 forints with which I bought a winter coat. He seemed nice although he can't help me. These meetings are useless, nothing happens afterwards. (M15)*

*The meetings are pointless because he can't help me, it's more just me reporting to him. If something comes to mind I can ask him, and he'll try to get the answers*

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<sup>98</sup> Her experience a few years earlier with the probation service proved to be very negative. "I had a probation officer but I only showed up once to meet with him because this is how he treated me: 'Have you got a job yet? If not, then get one fast otherwise I'll send you back so quickly you won't know what hit you.' I listened to him but I knew it was the last time he would see me. I did get a job though, first in a factory then in a hospital and afterwards in a laundry. Then all of a sudden the probation officer showed up at my workplace. The boss called me in the following day and started asking me all these questions, like why I had been in prison, and everyone knew about it the next day. I was so ashamed that I left that job and returned to the factory. I never contacted the probation officer again so he filed a report about me. I was returned to prison and I had to serve the three-month early release I had been granted previously."

*for me. His attitude is helpful, he seems flexible for example, since he comes here and I don't have to travel. (E4)*

*I have to meet with the probation officer once a month, in his office. These meetings are mostly about fighting. He asks me what I'm up to and whether I have a job. He is not even interested in anything else, we don't talk about other things. He also keeps telling me what the consequences would be if I did something bad. Since I haven't found a job yet, he constantly argues with me and threatens me with prison. Probation officers should have different responsibilities and not what they actually do, which is just threats about throwing us back in jail. They told us in prison that probation officers are there to help us, well that's just bull. (K3)*

Most agents were aware of the tension between the control and support role of probation officers, and also emphasized the significant constraints from which the probation officer service suffers currently, despite the ongoing major reorganization.

*The job of probation officers is all about balancing on a fine line due to the dual nature of their role. There are probation officers who tend to be bureaucrats but I prefer nurturing more interpersonal relationships. I believe that a good officer is able to invest 20-30 % more energy into those cases where it will do the most good. Unfortunately most often it is the case that those who are in the most desperate situations are the ones who can be helped the least. A screwed up life full of problems won't be resolved by having monthly meetings. Whether they like it or not, we are authority figures, we represent the state. I have also had a case where I had a mother thrown back to prison because she failed to show up for the second time and I was unable to contact her. And I did that in spite of the fact that she had a one-year old with a heart problem. (A17)*

*Inmates don't set much store by them [probation officers], since they work for the state and they are seen as police. There was a term used for probation officers, in prison terminology they were called a 'sack, baggage', a pain in the neck. Civilians would have much more credibility with inmates. (A10)*

Thus even though none of the women in our research was sent back to prison by the probation officers, the threat of such a possibility determined their relationship, and actually was actively played on by many of the probation officers. Thus they were necessarily seen as an extension of the prison system. However, this perception was probably further reinforced by the lack of practical help provided during the meetings – which is partly explained by the current reorganization and workload of the NPO, however, it also has to do with the role expectations, skills etc. of probation officers. Some officers actually showed a positive attitude and tried to answer the questions women raised – yet ultimately, the overwhelming majority of women considered the meetings to be not useful.

**4.6. Sub-hypothesis: Many ex-prisoners cannot be successful in reintegration. Even if they do not return to prison, many people remain marginalized and often in a situation worse than their previous situation.**

During the 10 months, none of the women we followed returned to prison – and to our knowledge, no new criminal proceeding was initiated against them<sup>99</sup>. However, the majority of the women were approached by earlier criminal contacts and a few of them were tempted to engage in new crime.

*Finances are my main concern, in the beginning I was afraid that I would be weak and I wouldn't be able to stop myself from committing a crime, from stealing. I was right to be concerned, there were times when I felt myself waver but then I sat down and thought things through. (M2)*

Due to the poverty experienced after release, some considered the prison to be a better place, at least in terms of the material conditions. At the same time they were fully aware of the pains of the prison to which they did not want to return.

*You feel much better if you know that, for example when you turn the tap on your child can simply take a bath. Even prison was better in this regard, since we were able to take showers there twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. This really does make a difference. We have no prospects now. (E4)*

*The one good thing about prison was that we didn't have to concern ourselves with food and accommodation, that was provided to us unlike now, on the outside. I mean I don't want to go back and have that life, but I don't want to live like this either, this isn't a life after all. I often think that it would be better to just die<sup>100</sup>. I have no prospects whatsoever. The thought of returning to prison has actually crossed my mind. I am really worn out by everything. (K8)*

While quite a few women actually came from poverty similar to which they returned after the prison, many women in our research experienced a relative loss of position compared to their status prior to prison. The relative loss was especially experienced by the few who belonged to the middle class and were used to a higher standard of living. Even if they managed to find a job, they could not afford the earlier standard of living and felt very deprived.

*I am making some money but it's not enough to satisfy my needs. I couldn't afford a pass to the swimming pool, I can't go to the solarium and I can't afford to buy any clothes, like I had no money for a bathing suit. I used to drive a Mercedes and I used to have my hair and nails done twice a week, now this is out of the question. I mean taking the bus is alright with me, but of course I wouldn't mind living differently either. (K12)*

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<sup>99</sup> A few of them expected to face the consequences of earlier criminal activities.

<sup>100</sup> She attempted suicide about 4 months after being released.

*I can't make ends meet with the money I make from cleaning. I haven't bought any clothes since getting out of prison, I just wear my daughter's old hand-me-downs, I mean this is awful. I am high maintenance, I need cosmetics and I like to be attractive. Of course I have no money to spend on a hairdresser, so I cut my own hair, but still the first thing I do every morning is style my hair. What really bothers me is that I can't have my broken tooth repaired. (K10)*

*We used to live quite well, and it is really difficult to come to terms with the fact that we have sunk this low. My husband even said, 'Just watch, sooner or later this won't have a happy ending!' The kind of life we live, the fact that we can't provide for necessities, it slowly leaves its mark on everything, on the children, on our relationship. (E4)*

Thus at the material realm, the overwhelming majority of women suffered from poverty greater or just as great as before the prison. The experience of poverty was made worse by a relative loss of position for quite a few women. With the exception of perhaps one or two women, all others suffered from some degree of poverty, and the great majority could not improve or even reach the standard of living prior to prison.

Despite this strong general trend however, some patterns could be identified in the survival 'strategies'<sup>101</sup>.

The few women who succeeded in gaining permanent, registered employment<sup>102</sup> actually mostly enjoyed rather stable family lives as well. Some of them even continued higher education and were in general pleased with their lives. These women, without exception, all held medium-level educational qualifications prior to their entry to prison, and only one of them was Roma – thus they enjoyed a relatively favorable structural position compared to many of the other women. They also received considerable family support after they left the prison.

Family however, became and remained for many other women the one and only foundation of survival after the prison. The notion that the importance of family support in reintegration was particularly vital due to the lack of coordinated and effective support from the authorities has already been addressed in the report. Major barriers to labor-market integration steered many women towards reliance on the family even more - and the dominance of child-care support among the available forms of welfare also reinforced the value of motherhood. Thus, a number of women based their survival strategy on their families, particularly on children – and tried to live from various forms of child-related welfare<sup>103</sup>, or became pregnant immediately after release from prison.<sup>104</sup> Other women

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<sup>101</sup> The term 'strategy' should be used with some precaution for several reasons. The events of the first few months have been very chaotic for many, often included major changes, ruptures, periods of crisis etc. and generally lacked a conscious elaboration or continuity suggested by the term. Also, the period of 10 months is rather short and thus limits our ability to clearly spell out patterns of developments.

<sup>102</sup> Altogether 5 women succeeded in gaining registered, permanent employment.

<sup>103</sup> 2-3 women with children primarily relied on various forms of childcare-benefit and/ or nursing fee due to taking care of ill parents.

were financially dependent on their parents and partners<sup>105</sup>. However, it must be noted that initially they all attempted to find work – and some of them continued to look for work after months of trying, because the incomes gained were far from sufficient to cover the family's needs.

Women, who were not able to find work, nor rely on active family support, were in the most difficult position<sup>106</sup>, defined by multiple forms of exclusion and often were pushed into serious depression. Some have already lost their children due to state care, or had grown-up children, or could not meet their children due to domestic violence. Their parents/ partners have died or were too poor to support them – or such support was impossible due to a former domestic violence incident. Thus these women not only had to face labor-market exclusion, but had major housing problems - became practically homeless - and could not finance the first weeks and months. Some of them had very little emotional support to rely on – in fact, some victims of domestic violence had to face the potential of meeting their former batterers. It is these women who were forced to take up e.g. housekeeping jobs, thus were likely to be exploited and harassed again.

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<sup>104</sup> Two women were pregnant in the first few weeks after their release and following their meeting with a new partner.

<sup>105</sup> All women who had family ties, were financially dependent on their families for weeks and months – however, quite a few women remained to be fully dependent on mothers and partners for the entire almost one year after their release.

<sup>106</sup> About 4 women remained in such a disadvantaged position, however, it is likely that from the few people whom we lost during the 10 months of the research after their release, several also belong to this pattern.

## Conclusions

The main conclusions of the National Report are the following:

-Many of the women in our research experienced a social position characterized by multiple disadvantages prior to their imprisonment. Yet no doubt there were significant differences between the patterns that could be identified in the relative position and life paths of e.g. victims of domestic violence compared to the “Roma mothers” or the “subversive women”.

-The prison in general has reinforced the impact of primary exclusion – and affected the various groups of women differently. Usually women with a better previous social position managed to secure the better jobs, access to volunteer jobs etc. in prison and thus gain significantly more money and better contacts. While women with very little previous education were actually given the opportunity to complete a few more grades of elementary education, this did not significantly improve their labor-market position. Due to lack of individual attention to inmates, women with better previous social position and self-assertion were more likely to stand out, attract attention and be able to develop strategies that pleased educators and were thus efficient – while the ‘survival only’ strategy did not secure enough attention.

-In the legislation the objective of reintegration is emphasized both as a general principle and it is also discussed at the level of specific areas and functions. Even though some reintegration oriented activities - e.g. prison work and low-level basic education – are available for the majority of inmates in Hungarian prisons, currently life in prisons does not prepare inmates appropriately for a successful reintegration after release. Existing progressive measures in legislation, as LER, are not applied sufficiently.

-Programs in women’s prisons are gendered in that they prepare women for typically ‘female’ jobs through the profile of vocational training and prison work available. At the level of discourse, in terms of the specificity of women prisoners, motherhood is the strongest message both in women’s narratives and also in agents’ discourse. However, not even motherhood is a strong enough value in the reality of prison life – in many instances, the declared gender-neutrality of prisons excludes actual attention to women’s specific needs (e.g. attention to victims of domestic violence.)

-One of the most serious barriers to preparation for release is the lack of individual treatment, and the lack of attention to the specific needs of various groups of inmates. This is partly rooted in the lack of financial resources and serious overload of prison staff, e.g. educators and psychologists. However, it also raises questions regarding the definition of their work, the dominance of administrative work, and the skills and competencies of personnel.

-Women’s prisons and women’ prisoners are disadvantaged in several ways, yet the basic problem is that two of the three women’s facilities are inappropriate from the perspective of reintegration. Mélykút is inaccessible, which contradicts basic expectations from a

low-security regime and a facility for under-age inmates, disables family and social contacts, does not allow work outside the prison, and discourages employers and NGO-s from cooperation. Kalocsa actually operates as a high-security prison even for those who spend there a prison sentence. The location of Kalocsa disables social and family contacts since it is inaccessible for families in other parts of the country, and it is a barrier against the application of reintegration-oriented measures as one-day leaves and LER.

-Besides the generally disadvantaged position of women's prisons, the only independent all-women facility, Kalocsa has left even its relative advantages unexplored. Because of its large population (above 410 women) and high ratio of prisoners with long sentences, it could be an ideal location for vocational training courses, innovative programs, therapy for victims of domestic violence, etc. However, should such opportunities be left unexplored in the currently opening up system of penitentiaries, the relative disadvantaged position of not only Kalocsa, but all women's prisons would be reinforced.

-Cooperation with NGO-s and with the probation service in reintegration-related services was only recently launched in most prisons, yet this trend is expected to intensify. However, NGO-s or probation officers will not be able to deliver all reintegration-related obligations of prisons. Prisons must improve their operations in order to provide individual treatment, but also must focus on vocational training, and mental healthcare services, above all.

-Despite the significant improvement in the field of reintegration after prison marked by the establishment of the national Probation Officers' Service, it can be challenged whether a conceptual framework has been defined in order to coordinate reintegration-related efforts. Women released from prison still face the uncoordinated requirements of various state agencies, which often try to control, rather than service them. No housing solutions are offered for women and no assistance is given to finance the costs of the first few months.

-Given the low level of state or NGO support after release, the importance of family support is all the more decisive. While the family usually refers to parents and children – and only in some cases to partners – women without family contacts are often in the most difficult position and are likely to become homeless and further marginalized. Yet in general, the great majority of women have to face poverty, poor housing conditions, and strong barriers to their labor market entry, especially in the form of the criminal record.

-The patterns developed related to primary exclusion, and reinforced in prison, continue to influence women's further life chances – together with the availability of the above-mentioned family support. All of the few women who actually managed to find permanent employment, held middle-level educational qualifications and enjoyed family support. Yet it seems that in the absence of any of the two, it became virtually impossible to both find a permanent job or to finance the first weeks and months after release. Especially women who lacked both, found themselves in totally marginalized and hopeless positions.

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## **Appendix: Research Summary**

### **Women, Integration after Prison (MIP): Analysis of the Processes of Socio-Labor Integration of Women Prisoners in Europe**

The MIP research project has been carried out within the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme "Improving the base of socio-economic research", with the participation of academic research institutions and NGO-s from six European countries: Spain, Germany, England and Wales, Italy, France and Hungary, under the coordination of SURT, a Spanish partner. The project was launched in November 2002 and will be completed by the spring of 2005.

The objective of MIP has been to develop a comparative research project about the reality of women in European prisons and their life after release – with an emphasis on the efficiency of the social and penitentiary policies which promote their social and labor integration in the six participating countries. The research aimed to identify the key factors that affect the social exclusion or integration of imprisoned women. The evaluation of existing social and penitentiary policies and measures for reintegration of women prisoners was a key objective of MIP. The research aims to contribute to their improvement by formulating recommendations based on the research findings.

#### **Methodology**

The MIP project included an analysis of the policy and legislative context in each country as well as an analysis of reinsertion measures, programs run by the different state and non-state agencies during and after the prison. Reports were produced on the demographic, socio-economic and penitentiary aspects of the national legislation and corresponding policy work in every country. The effectiveness of work, education and training programs, measures in the field of ensuring housing, health -and substance abuse treatment in women's prisons, as well as measures impacting social contacts and family relations as well economic resources were addressed in a separate report. National reports – as this National Report for Hungary - were produced in each country after the closure of fieldwork.

While secondary sources were also used for data collection, the core of the methodology consisted of a series of interviews with women in each country as well as agent interviews. The first interviews with the women took place during the last weeks of their prison sentence, and were followed by interviews within 1 and 4 months after their release. The final interviews were recorded about 9 months after the release. Detailed life trajectory interviews with two women in each country were also part of the methodology. Interviews with reinsertion agents added insights from prison personnel, probation officers, NGO-s, penitentiary judges and other decision-makers and professionals involved in reinsertion. Due to national differences, variations in the methodology were unavoidable, and in some countries following up women proved to be difficult, however, most teams conducted first interviews with 20 women, and 25 or more professionals working in the criminal justice and penal systems.

In Hungary, women with definitive prison sentences can be accommodated in three facilities. We interviewed altogether in the three locations 20 women prior to their release, and followed up with 17 of them 4-6 weeks later for a second interview, and

about 4 months after release for a third interview. About 9 months after release we interviewed 15 of the women for the fourth time. The length of the first interviewed varied between 1.5-2.5 hours, while follow-up interviews were usually shorter, on average 1-1.5 hours each. The great majority of interviews were tape-recorded, the few exceptions were produced by inappropriate circumstances, e.g. the necessity to deliver phone interviews in a few cases. The two women for the life-trajectory interviews were interviewed at several occasions. We very much appreciate that our interview partners were extremely cooperative, often disclosed difficult experiences with trust and openness and were very eager to contribute to the research.

Interviews were conducted with 27 agents (during 22 interviews) and included penitentiary wards, educators, prison psychologists, managers of women's units, department leaders at the National Prison Administration, executives at NPA, penitentiary judges, executives at the Probation Officers Service, and several NGO-s. All of our interview partners as well as the above-mentioned organizations were very cooperative and very committed to supporting the research – and showed great interest in learning about the research findings. We are confident that the Hungarian institutions, organizations and individuals will utilise the outcomes of this research. We would like to thank all their support and cooperation for the following organizations and institutions who took part in the research through the agent interviews:

- Kalocsa Prison
- Mélykút Prison
- Eger Prison
- National Prison Administration
- Probation Officers Service
- County Court Bács-Kiskun County
- Employment Office of Budapest
- Váltóság Alapítvány (NGO)
- Élő Reménység Alapítvány (NGO)
- Szolnoki Népfőiskola (NGO)
- Rácsok Alapítvány (NGO)
- Mécses Szeretetszolgálat (NGO)
- Utolsó Esély a Reintegrációért (NGO)
- AVP Hungary (NGO).

We interviewed the following agents at the above-mentioned organizations:

- 3 executives/ heads of departments at the NPA
- 2 managers of women's prison units/ senior officials
- 3 prison educators
- 4 prison guards
- 1 penitentiary judge
- 1 prison psychologist
- 3 officers at the Employment Office
- 2 probation officers/ executives
- 8 agents at NGO-s involved in prison education/ or reintegration after release.

The Hungarian research team at the Center for Policy Studies of CEU consisted of several researchers from CPS, that is, in particular, Andrea Krizsán, Herta Tóth and Réka Sáfrány as well as CPS Director Viola Zentai. Financial and Project Management responsibilities at CPS were fulfilled by Zsuzsa Gábor, while financial, project management and research assistance was delivered by Rozália Kerndorfer, Ágnes Magyar and Lilla Jakobsz respectively at various stages of the project. However, throughout the fieldwork CEU's research team built on the interviewing work of Gábor Tajta and Anikó Csáki, both of whom gained competence in working with prisons and prisoners through their involvement with Váltóság Alapítvány, a leading Hungarian NGO. Gábor Tajta also acted as a consultant in the early phases of the project.

We present here the research hypotheses of MIP, which reflect an overall picture about the main avenues of research thinking in the project. The national reports - prepared after the analysis of data collected during the fieldwork - follow this list of research hypothesis, developed on the basis of the theoretical background of the MIP project.

## **1. PRIMARY EXCLUSION AND GENDER**

Many women in prison were already suffering a degree of social exclusion at the time of their imprisonment. Their situation prior to imprisonment is characterized by multiple disadvantages. Primary exclusion often has gender-specific aspects. The situation of exclusion and gender determine the type of crimes for which certain women are sent to prison:

- Economic crimes are typical among women prisoners – this type of crime is related to both exclusion and gender.
- Domestic violence is often directly or indirectly present as a key factor in women's life course.
- Some women are imprisoned due to crimes committed as a result of multiple dependence on a man (usually partner, or father, or brother etc).
- In some cases the social networks, the neighborhood, or multigenerational patterns may strongly influence the type of crime committed.

## **2. FURTHER EXCLUSION BY PRISON**

Imprisonment excludes women who were not socially excluded before their imprisonment and excludes already excluded women still further. Multiple effects of exclusion are at work due to their imprisonment. Women suffer an irrecoverable loss of roots, due to the separation from children and violation of their gender role as mothers and wives.

Prison frequently becomes a factor of secondary exclusion. It does not contribute to the elimination of exclusion processes and mechanisms, on the contrary, it often aggravates them by recreating social and personal conditions that reproduce criminal conduct:

- During the prison sentence, social contacts of inmates suffer and deteriorate.

- Prisons do not strengthen skills that are vital for reintegration.
- Inmates' health conditions often deteriorate both in terms of their physical and psychological well being. Efforts to help inmates to come to terms with their crime/ guilt / etc. are not systematic.

Women's prisons are in the position of remnants due to their small weight in the prison system. The conditions and consequences of imprisonment are influenced by this, e.g. poorer material conditions and access to work and training opportunities, or difficulties for visitors due to significant distance from home.

There is a contradiction between the principles and the practice of social and criminal justice regarding the function of prisons. Despite the emphasis in legislation on social integration, actual daily prison life does not reflect social integration as a priority. There is a remarkable difference between the level of discourse and actual reality in prison life, regarding the extent to which social integration is actually addressed. The penitentiary system and social integration cannot be smoothly reconciled, which reinforces the social exclusion of some of societies' most vulnerable groups.

### **3. REINTEGRATION MEASURES IN PRISONS**

Presently applied measures and programs for the social integration or reintegration of women ex-prisoners are inadequate.

- Work within prisons fails to supply inmates with marketable occupational skills or other useful, convertible skills for other areas after release.
- Training and education in prisons does not sufficiently contribute to the acquisition of education and skills needed after release.
- Women do not receive enough preparation and support for their smooth return to family and other intimate ties and integration into the community.
- Programs in prisons are gendered, which often reflect and reinforce traditional gender roles.

### **4. BARRIERS TO REINTEGRATION AFTER RELEASE**

Several barriers to the social reintegration of women ex-prisoners remain. The prison experience is often an obstacle to generating adaptive strategies and to the acquisition of key capacities that are necessary for an effective insertion process. Skills that would be needed after release are not developed by prisons.

In regards to social-labour integration, women find themselves in difficult circumstances, and this can lead to the accumulation of situations of exclusion.

Upon leaving prison, women often face a new "conviction" in that the effects of prison can lead to an increase in their rootlessness or rupture in their lives. Thus new conditions are required in order to overcome the effects of prisonization, as well as to reconstruct their lives.

The necessities for social integration must be attended even before the need for job integration, although both levels of social integration are integrally related, neither of them can be contemplated as being independent of one another.

The continuity between and coordination of integration related services is insufficient.

- Continuity is not sufficient between activities of prison authorities and agencies which provide services after the release (including state institutions and NGO-s).

- Ex-prisoners suffer from the uncoordinated requirements of various state bureaucracies. Their access to vital personal documents and welfare is slow, troublesome and often means further financial burden.

- State employees as probation officers are strongly associated with the prison, thus are often not trusted.

Many ex-prisoners cannot be successful in reintegration. Even if they do not return to prison, many remain marginalized and often in a situation worse than their previous situation.