

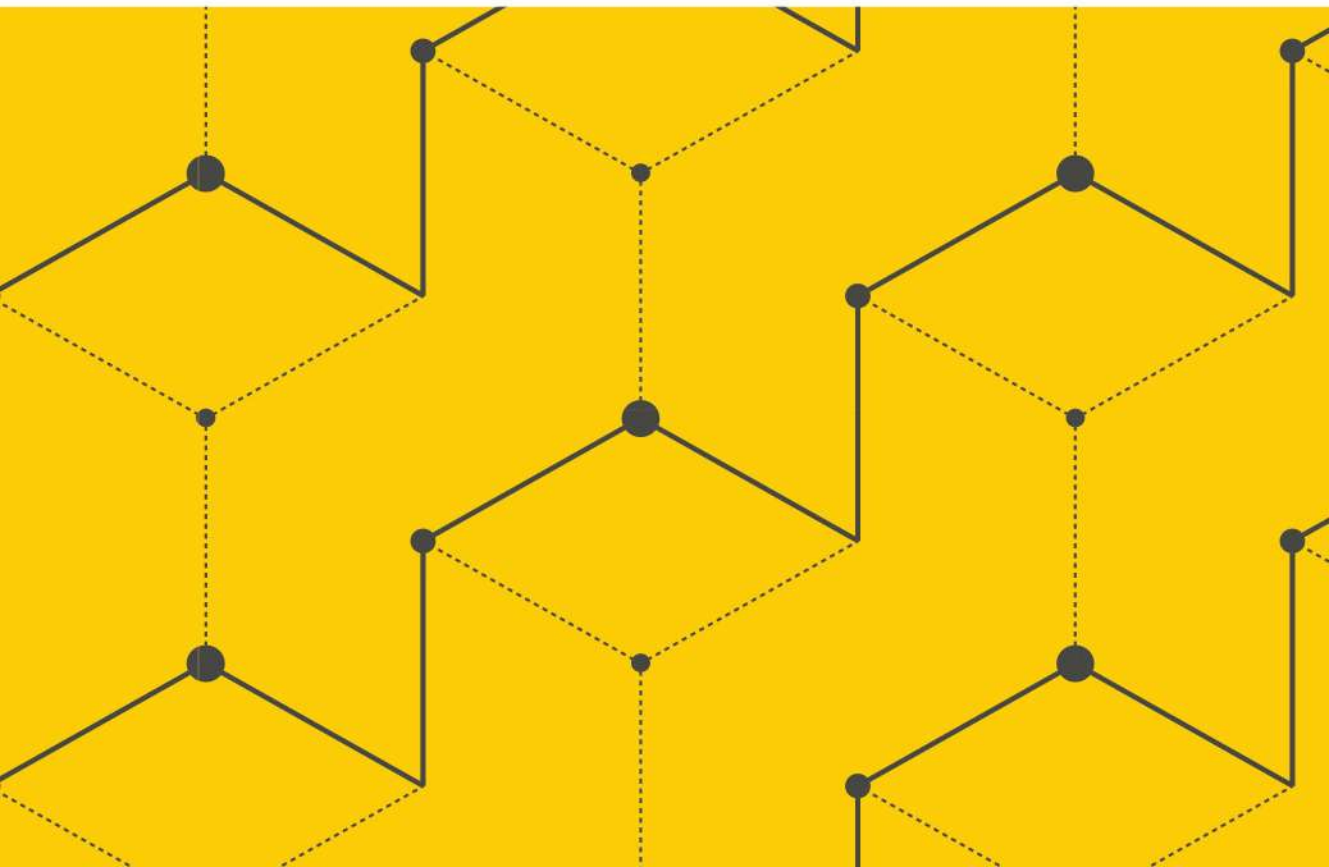


# PRISON ENVIRONMENT

## A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

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*Edited by*  
*Sanja Ćopić & Ana Batrićević*







# **Prison Environment: A Female Perspective**

*Edited by*

*Sanja Čopić, PhD*

*Ana Batrićević, PhD*

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Belgrade, 2024



Sanja Čopić, PhD  
Ana Batrićević, PhD

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Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research  
Gračanička 18, Belgrade, Serbia

E-mail  
krinstitut@gmail.com

For publisher  
Ivana Stevanović, PhD

### Reviewers

*Prof. Danica Vasiljević-Prodanović, PhD*  
University of Belgrade – Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation

*Ivana Stevanović, PhD*  
Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research

*Prof. Nebojša Macanović, PhD*  
University of Banja Luka – Faculty of Political Sciences

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## About the contributors

**Alina Bezljaj** is a researcher in the Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8291-6801>

**Ana Batričević**, PhD, is a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research (Serbia). Her main fields of scientific research include: re-socialization of convicted persons, primarily through innovative methods including dog and horse assisted programmes; protection of human rights of prisoners, elderly persons and national minorities, as well as environmental conservation and the protection of both – animal welfare and human right to healthy environment. Besides other research methods, Ana applies documentary photography in her field researches and, through the transformative and reviving power of images she strives to make the findings of her research accessible not only to scientific community but also to broader public at photography exhibitions and online presentations. Ana has published several books, book chapters, articles in international and national peer reviewed scientific journals, participated in numerous scientific conferences and presented her work at many photography exhibitions in Serbia and abroad. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1727-4222>

**Boris Kordić**, PhD, is a Full Professor at Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade (Serbia), teaching Psychology and Social Psychology. He graduated at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. In 2006, he defended his PhD thesis entitled “Assessment of suitability for psychoanalysis” at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. Since 2001 he has been university lecturer at Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade. His scientific work is related to mentoring, career development, healing aspects of personality, dark side of personality, professional competencies, trauma response and resistance to trauma, as well as research of current problems of young people in society. He has published numerous articles in scientific journals and participated in scientific conferences. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0530-6135>

**Branislava Popović-Čitić**, PhD, is a Full Professor at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, with a PhD in Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences (Serbia). She is an expert in prevention science, with over 250 scientific and professional papers published in the field. She is active in the scientific-research community, as well as in field of prevention practice, with experience in developing and leading over 100 scientific-research and professionally-applicative projects. She is the President of the Managing Board of CEPORA – Center for Youth Development, a member of the Victimology Society of Serbia and the Pedagogical Society of Serbia, she is a member of the expert base of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Network of Children's Organizations of Serbia and the Regional Resource Center for Child Protection for Southeast Europe. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1076-5838>

**Darja Tadič**, PdD, is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8787-2408>

**Dimitrinka Jordanova Peshevska**, PhD in Public Health and PhD in Clinical Psychology is Associate Professor at the University American College Skopje, Vice Dean of the School of Political Science and Psychology, and Head of the Department of Psychology (Republic of North Macedonia). She is an expert in health, clinical and developmental psychology. She is a system family counsellor and Emotionally focused couple therapist. Her special areas of expertise are health behaviours, mental health, public health, violence against children, family violence and dating violence. She has more than 25 years working experience in international and UN organization in social, health and educational area. She has been working at WHO Country Office Skopje (2000-2014) on implementing programs on violence against children, domestic violence, deinstitutionalization and development of community mental health services. She has been involved in policy/strategy development in the areas of mental health, violence against children, domestic violence, social inclusion, non-communicable diseases and other relevant policy and legal documents with the relevant ministries. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3499-3667>

**Dragana Batic**, PhD, is a Full Professor at the Faculty of security – Skopje, University “St. Kliment Ohridski” – Bitola (Republic of North Macedonia) where she teaches psychology in the first, second and third cycle of studies. As a psychologist in her multi-decade work, she dealt with the practical work with clients (psychodiagnostics and psychotherapy), research of psychological phenomena (through quantitative and qualitative researches), and transferring acquired knowledge through teaching, i.e. lectures, as well as through writing papers, books and textbooks. Before her academic work, she worked as a psychologist in the Center for Social Work. Her research deals with people who are traumatized: participants in war, refugees, convicted persons, child victims, children in prisons and correctional homes, women victims of violence, psychological consequences of the pandemic. She participated in numerous researches and projects, scientific and professional conferences in the country and abroad. She is one of the founders of the first psychological counseling center for students at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski"-Bitola, where individual and group psychotherapy are conducted. <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1632-431X>

**Eva Bertok**, PhD, is a researcher at the Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law in Ljubljana (Slovenia). She participated in research in the field of criminology and victimology and also worked as a hate speech analyst. Her recent research work concerns bullying in primary schools, prison climate, domestic violence, restraining orders, stalking, and violent crime in general. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3757-2849>

**Gorazd Meško**, Ph.D., is a Professor of Criminology and Head of the Chair of Criminology at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor (Slovenia). Professor Meško has been an Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Criminal Investigation and Criminology (Revija za kriminalistiko in kriminologijo), guest editor of a special issue of Policing - An International Journal on Rural Policing (2024) and co-

editor of the book *Rural Criminology - Continental Review* (Bristol University Press, 2025). In 2014, he received the Zois Award for the field of social science. He was the president of the European Society of Criminology (ESC) in 2018. He also received the Freda Adler Distinguished Scholar Award (American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology, 2022) and G.O.W. Mueller for his outstanding contribution to comparative/international criminal justice in the areas of scholarship, leadership, and service (Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, International Section, 2024). <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7466-0042>

**Irma Kovčo Vukadin**, PhD, is a Full Professor at the Department of Criminology at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb (Croatia). She teaches several courses including Social Problems, Criminal enforcement law and penology, Crime and Media, and Human Trafficking. Before 2006, she worked at the Police College, where she held various positions including Vice Dean and Head of the Police College. At the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, she has served as the Head of the Department for Criminology and the Center for Lifelong Learning. Her academic interests mainly focus on criminology, victimology, and corrections, and she has published numerous papers on these topics. She has been a member of working groups for drafting laws and regulations at the national level, and an independent expert for the National Preventive Mechanism. She has long collaborated with the Directorate for Prison and Probation System of the Croatian Ministry of Justice and Administration and is currently the chair of the Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences. Irma serves as the editor-in-chief of the scientific journal *Criminology and Social Integration*. She also works with juvenile offenders and their families at the Center for Rehabilitation, which is an organizational unit of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences. She has obtained a certificate in family psychotherapy. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2139-6748>

**Lidija Bukvić** is a Teaching Assistant at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation (Serbia), in the scientific area of Theoretical and methodological approaches in the prevention and treatment of behavioral disorders. She is an author of over 70 scientific and professional publications, with her field of research interest primarily being prevention of behavioral problems, positive development, protective and risk factors. She has working experience in the social welfare sector as a family outreach worker. In addition, she has experience in participating in managing of over 60 local, national and international projects in the civil society sector, within the organisation CEPORA – Center for Positive Youth Development. She is a member of the expert base of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8161-1337>

**Ljeposava Ilijić**, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research. Her research interests include penological and criminological topics, with a specific emphasis on the prison population, treatment in prisons, education and vocational training for inmates, the impact of education on reducing recidivism, adaptation to incarceration, and the deprivations experienced by convicted individuals. Recently, her research interests have expanded to include the

analysis of the consequences of penal populism and mass incarceration, the effects of neoliberal capitalism on the prison system, the philosophy within prison communities, and the investigation of the social and moral climate in prisons. She is also involved in assessing and improving the well-being and welfare of inmates in Serbian prisons. Her work addresses topics such as the quality of prison life and its significance on inmate behavior both during incarceration and after release. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5090-1489>

**Marina Kovačević Lepojević**, PhD, is a Research Associate at the Institute for Educational Research (IER) in the field of education, and at the Center for Positive Development of Children and Youth (CEPORA) in the field of reducing inequalities and promoting equity in education and related fields (Serbia). Her research focus lies on exploring different factors that affect students' problem behavior, psychological well-being, and academic development, with a special interest in exploring the socioemotional learning (SEL) model of the positive youth development paradigm. In addition, important topics of her research work represent the topic of school mental health, mental health literacy of teachers and students, and related mental health issues. She is a member of the European Association for Research on Adolescence (EARA), and a member of the editorial board of journals *Journal of the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research* and *Belgrade School of Special Education and Rehabilitation*. She completed Intermediate Level of RE&CBT Therapy (IAREBT) and Individual and Team Coaching at Koučing Centar (ICF - International Coaching Federation). <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4780-1716>

**Martina Pleško** has just started her scientific development by employment as an assistant at the Department of Criminology at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb (Croatia) in January 2024. In September 2023, she completed her studies in Social pedagogy with a master's thesis entitled "Coping with stress and psychological well-being of prisoners", for which she conducted research with prisoners. She is a member of the project teams focusing on violence in the Croatian prison system and post-penal protection of prisoners. In 2024, she became a member of the European Society of Criminology. Her main scientific interest is penology. <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1136-7809>

**Milena Milićević**, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade (Serbia). Her research interests encompass the quality of life and the position of marginalised groups in complex systems, such as prisons. She is particularly focused on the possibilities of a longitudinal research approach. Milena is the Principal Investigator of the PrisonLIFE project. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8344-5504>

**Milica Kovačević**, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of Belgrade - Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation (Serbia), where she teaches the following courses: The Protection and Rights of Prisoners, International Standards in the Field of Responding to Juvenile Crime, Criminal Law, Juvenile Criminal Law and Juvenile Delinquency and Legal Reaction. She is a law expert. She gained experience in

the judiciary and public administration. Milica has been collaborating with the Center for Positive Development of Children and Youth (CEPORA) and participated in the design and implementation of several projects, including: *Diversity Revolution - From Values to Practice* and *Improvement of the support system for young people without parental care*. Main areas of her research interest include children's rights, human and minority rights, prisons, hate crimes, education and anti-discrimination practices. She has organized and conducted several surveys in the field of legal sciences. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0458-8193>

**Natasha Peovska**, PhD, is associate professor at the Faculty of Security – Skopje, University “St. Kliment Ohridski” – Bitola (Republic of North Macedonia). She is a coordinator for ERASMUS+ programme at the Faculty of Security-Skopje. Her research interest are focused on victims of crime, juvenile delinquency, theories of crime, criminal policy. She is particularly looking for innovative ways for improving the position of the vulnerable victims of crime in the legal system and in the society. Her scientific work is published in around 40 journals and conference proceedings. As a project coordinator and member of the project teams, she took part in managing, conducting a desk and field work in research projects related to juvenile victimization and delinquency, school violence, position of prisoners in Macedonia including the marginalisation and deviancy of children inmates in correctional facilities, the process of statistical presentation of crime, homeless paths etc. <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2562-1660>

**Olivera Pavićević**, PhD, graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade in 1989 (Serbia). In 2008 she got PhD in Sociology of Culture at University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science. She started as Teaching Assistant of Ethics and Social Theory at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Belgrade. She has been employed at the Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research for 25 years, currently holding the position of a Senior Research Associate. In the past three years, she has been involved in the PrisonLIFE project. She has published several books, authored dozens of nationally and internationally significant papers, and participated in numerous scientific symposia and conferences. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4455-7236>

**Rok Hacin**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Criminology at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor (Slovenia). His research focuses on the legitimacy of criminal justice, police and policing, crime mapping, penal policy, and crime and penal statistics. He published numerous scientific articles in national and foreign scientific journals (European Journal of Criminology, Criminal Justice and Behavior, Policing, Revija za kriminalistiko in kriminologijo), as well as chapters and scientific monographs in national and international publishing houses (Routledge, Springer, Univerzitetna založba Univerze v Mariboru). In 2022-2023, he led a project entitled "Research in the field of professional competencies of prison workers and relations in prisons". In 2020, he won the European Society of Criminology Young Criminologist Award. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2265-5422>

**Sanja Ćopić**, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation (Serbia), where she teaches Criminology with Juvenile Delinquency, Victimology, Women and Prison, and Violence Against Children. She was a researcher in the Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research (1995 to 2000, and 2002-2022), and the Institute of Social Sciences (2000-2002). She is a Senior Research Fellow as well. Sanja is one of the founders of the Victimology Society of Serbia (VDS) and serves as the Chair of its Executive Board. She is a member of the European Forum for Restorative Justice and the Criminology Section of the Serbian Association for Criminal Law Theory and Practice, where she currently serves as a member of the Presidency. Her research has mainly focused on violence against women, domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual violence, women in prison, victim services, legal protection of crime victims, restorative justice, alternative sanctions, gender equality, juvenile delinquency, and crime recording. She is Editor-in-Chief of the scientific journal on victimization, human rights, and gender, *Temida*. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6581-0210>

**Sanja Petkovska**, PhD, is a Research Associate at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade (Serbia). She conducts research mainly in the academic fields of sociology of (higher) education and social pathology while using the framework of critical social theory and qualitative methodology. After obtaining first academic degrees in Sociology and Adult Education from the Faculty of Philosophy, she has been awarded a doctoral degree from the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade in Serbia. Besides contributing numerous academic articles, policy analyses and academic presentations in Serbian and English language, she edited a collection of papers *Decolonial Politics in European Peripheries: Redefining Progressiveness, Coloniality and Transition Efforts* (Routledge, 2023). <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4414-6469>

**Sladana Jovanović**, PhD, is a Full Professor of Criminal Law and Criminology at the Union University Law School in Belgrade (Serbia). She started her professional career as the researcher at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research (1995-2023). She is one of the founders of the NGO Atina – Citizens Association for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and All Forms of Gender-Based Violence, and legal consultant/expert on various projects in NGO sector dealing with gender-based issues and violence against women (Autonomous Women’s Center, etc). Her professional work focuses on topics related to gender equality, violence against women and other vulnerable groups (children, the elderly) and victimization; more precisely – domestic and sexual violence, femicide, human trafficking, protection of victims and witnesses in criminal (and misdemeanor) proceedings, the issue of juvenile delinquency, and recently, criminal offenses related to employment and work. She authored and co-authored several books and numerous papers in national and international peer reviewed academic journals. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8300-2594>

**Tiana Ivanovska** is a licenced psychologist and European Accredited Gestalt Psychoterapist, Founder of SebeSlozuvalka, private practice based in Skopje (Republic of North Macedonia). She is currently PhD Candidate on the Faculty of Criminology,



University “St. Kliment Ohridski” - Bitola. She is also active in social work and work with marginalized groups, mainly working with women victims of domestic abuse. Her main focus is working with traumatic and post traumatic conditions supporting people in overcoming trauma on both behavioral and emotional level. Her research interest is mainly focused on domestic violence, the long-term effect of violence on human mental health and other forms of abusive behavior such as bullying, mobbing, discrimination etc. Her special subject of interest is forensic psychology, psychological profiling, and clinical psychopathology. <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9150-0985>

**Vesna Stefanovska**, PhD, is a Full Professor and a Head of the Department of Criminal Law and Criminology at the Faculty of Security – Skopje, University “St. Kliment Ohridski” – Bitola (Republic of North Macedonia). Her research and professional interest include: examining certain theories of crime, vulnerable groups in prison, the role of community and police in crime prevention, the media coverage of crime, restorative justice as more human and peaceful response to crime, especially against juvenile offenders, etc. She is a member of the Coalition “All for Fair Trial” and vice president of the Association for the Right of the Child. She was a secretary (2010-2013) of the National Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency within the Ministry of Justice. She initiated important research projects, including the marginalisation and deviancy of children inmates in correctional facilities, the process of statistical presentation of crime, the media coverage of crime, post penal protection of ex-offenders, homeless paths, etc. Her special subject of interest is criminology, theories of crime, crime prevention, restorative justice, juvenile justice and penology. <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7037-9975>

**Violeta Tadić**, PhD, is a Research Associate at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade (Serbia). She is the laureate of the annual “Zagorka Golubović” Award from the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, for the best engaged research work in 2023. During PhD studies she was a scholarship holder of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development and, in that status, was involved in the work of the Institute for Educational Research (IER) in Belgrade, where she served as a Junior Researcher from August 2020 to 2023, and participated in the research project “Assumptions for the Development of Positive Education in Serbia”, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation (no. 200018/01-2023/47-03-451). During the summer semester of 2021, she was a demonstrator in the Social Psychology course at the Faculty of Security Studies. Her special academic interests are related to positive education, school safety, and youth behavioral problems. She has published numerous articles in scientific journals and participated in scientific conferences. <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6060-8243>

**Zorica Mršević**, PhD, is a retired Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences (Serbia), author of 24 books and over 400 scientific papers in the field of violence theory, gender equality, women’s human rights and those of other marginalized groups, and criminology. She served as Deputy Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia for Gender Equality. She taught Comparative Feminist Jurisprudence at the University



of Iowa and Theory of Violence and Women's Human Rights for three years at the Central European University in Budapest. Currently, she teaches Gender Studies and Phenomenology of Violence at the Faculty of European Legal and Political Studies. In 2024, she wrote the Guidelines for the Use of the Law on Gender Equality for the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and participated in a gender equality promotion campaign in five cities, funded by the German development organization GIZ. She received the 'Anđelka Milić Award' in 2017 for her lifetime contribution to gender equality in Serbia. In 2020, she received the annual award from the Victimology Society of Serbia for her advocacy for the rights of marginalized groups. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1968-9699>

## Introduction

Female crime, the position of women in criminal proceedings, and especially in prison, have long been neglected topics, remaining on the peripheries of discussion, both in theory and practice. This has always been justified by the fact that women constitute a small portion of the convicted population, and an even smaller share of the total prison population worldwide (Aebi et al., 2022; Fair & Walmsley, 2022). As a result, there has been insufficient focus on the specificities of female crime compared to male crime, inadequate understanding of the pathways that lead women into criminal behaviour, and neglect of the specific needs and requirements of female convicts once they find themselves behind the bars.

An important step in shedding light on these issues was taken by feminist-oriented criminologists during the 1980s, who brought to the fore issues of female crime on one hand and violence against women on the other, also pointing to their interconnection (Gehring, 2016; Barberet & Jackson, 2017; Nikolić-Ristanović & Konstantinović Vilić, 2018; Russel et al, 2020; Quiroga-Carrillo, Ferraces Otero, Lorenzo Moledo, 2024). They highlighted, and later research confirmed, that women in prison constitute a particularly vulnerable social group (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2012; Pavićević, 2020). Their vulnerability delves from the unique pathways women take to crime and their broader societal roles, which includes four key dimensions: the history of violent victimization, relationship issues, mental health problems, and substance abuse (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003).

However, as pointed out in the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders, prison facilities are designed primarily to address the needs of male prisoners, leaving needs of female convicts unmet, which negatively impacts women's mental and physical health, well-being, and welfare; consequently, decreasing the quality of prison life for incarcerated women. Nevertheless, during the past three decades there has been an increasing interest in female crime and the position of imprisoned women. We believe that this edited volume will present a valuable contribution to the emerging literature that focuses on female perspectives on incarceration, tracing further paths to go beyond traditional, male-centred approaches in correctional institutions.

The idea behind this edited volume, which originated within the framework of the PrisonLIFE project, was to address the position, treatment, rights, and quality of life of female prisoners in Serbia and globally. We wanted to explore the impact of imprisonment on women, their perception of the prison environment, living conditions, and treatment programs within female prisons. Additionally, we intended to examine potential variations in the perception of the quality of prison life and other factors between male and female inmates. In general, contributors to this volume explore specificities of female criminality and imprisonment; provide insights into the adverse effects of imprisonment on women, exploring the unique challenges they face while incarcerated, and delve into how female

## **Female crime rates and figures in the Republic of North Macedonia**

*Studies on female crime have long been on the margins of criminological studies. By the 1960's, most criminologists have focused on male offenders and on the criminal justice system's responses to male crime. The lack of attention to female crime stemmed from the fact that the majority of crimes at that time were committed by men. Considering that in the last two decades of the 20th century, the rate of female incarceration has increased, there is a growing need for research on girls and women as both offenders and victims, on female crime, and also, about the criminal justice response to female crime (Sharp F. Susan, 2009: 245). Main research questions refer to analyses of female patterns, types of female crimes, the link between the victimisation and later criminal behaviour, causes of female crime, women incarceration and women behind the bars. This paper reviews some research studies on female crime with special focus on female crime rate and figures in Macedonia in the last 5 years. The purpose is to examine the patterns of arrest, sentencing and incarceration of women offenders compared to male, as well as to examine the dynamic and trends of those patterns during a five-year period. Another aim of this study is to analyse certain the socio-demographic features of women prisoners that were obtained through access and review of women prisoner's files. A short questionnaire instrument was prepared for data collection on which a descriptive analysis was made.*

*Keywords: Female crime, female offenders, female prison, crime rate*

### **Introduction**

Studies on female crime have long been on the margins of criminological studies. By the 1960s, most criminologists have focused on male offenders and on the criminal justice system's responses to male crime. The lack of attention to female crime stemmed from the fact that the majority of crimes at that time were committed by men. Moreover, traditional criminology's neglect of female criminality also side-lines other issues such as the role of the criminal justice system in their criminalization and victimization. Considering that in the last two decades of the 20th century, the rate of female incarceration has increased, there is a growing need for research on girls and women as both offenders and victims, on female crime, and also, about the criminal justice response to female crime (Sharp F. Susan, 2009: 245).

Main research questions refer to analyses of female patterns, types of female crimes, the link between the victimisation and later criminal behaviour, causes of female crime, women incarceration and women behind the bars. Apart of traditional positivist approach within criminological studies, there are feminist perspectives on gender and crime. Feminist theories in contrast to traditional theories of crime do not treat women and men as homogenous groups but recognize that gender privilege varies across different groups of

women and men. Also, they offer alternative analyses of various crimes, including crimes of violence against women.

In addition, questions about the status and treatment of female offenders during the judicial process in all stages of the criminal procedure, from detection to sentencing, are becoming more and more relevant. The attitude and approach of police officers, prosecutors, judges, and even prison staff towards female offenders can affect future women criminalisation and victimisation. Their gender sensitivity and familiarity with gender-feminist paths in female offending or gender stereotyping determine paternalistic or stricter treatment of female offenders within the criminal justice system.

This paper reviews some research studies on female crime with special focus on female crime rate and figures in Macedonia in the last 5 years. The purpose is to examine the patterns of arrest, sentencing and incarceration of women offenders compared to male, as well as to examine the dynamic and trends of those patterns during a five-year period. Another aim of this study is to analyse certain socio-demographic features of women prisoners that were obtained through access and review of women prisoner's files. A short questionnaire instrument was prepared for data collection on which a descriptive analysis was made.

## **Women in crime**

### ***Certain research findings on female offenders***

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been an increase in female offenders in both, total crime and prison population. In Europe, the number of female offenders is increasingly approaching the number of male offenders (25% Denmark, 33% Italy, 40% Spain). Regarding the types of crimes, certain data in North America show that 25% of women's crime is drug-related. Violent crime is also increasing, argued by the fact that women are increasingly taking on dominant roles in traditionally male-dominated groups. Robbery increases by 44 percent and other physical attacks by 21 percent. Generally, female offenders are not professionals but have a criminal history of petty thefts, fraud, forgery, prostitution, drug trafficking (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013: 15). Also, they have problems with drug addictions, property crime, prostitution and sex work and can be part of organized crime groups, especially the young girls. Namely, the young girls usually enter the youth gangs to find shelter, protection and group affiliation because most of them run away from home (Mallicoat L. Stacy, 2019: 225).

As argued, in the last decade of the previous and the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, female incarceration has grown by 108%, mostly as a result of female drug offenders (involved in drug distribution or in property crimes due to addictions). In 2012, 25% of the female prisoners are drug offenders (men are 16 %). Having in mind that in 2008, 9 % of female prisoners are drug offenders, there has been increased growth for 4 years. Primary pathways leading to drug abuse are: exposure to alcohol and drugs in childhood, early childhood victimization and trauma, mental health problems, and economic challenges. Drug abuse by other family members is a high-ranking predictor of early onset (Ibid, 226). In USA, at federal level, 72% of incarcerated women are convicted for drug-related offenses and most

of them include women who are users of illegal substances. But, even when they are involved in illegal drug trafficking, they are rarely members of organized crime groups. The problems with drug addiction are main predictors for property crimes (most for shoplifting) committed by women. According to one study (Johnson, 2004), 52% of female perpetrators of property crimes have problem with drug addiction (Ibid, 230). As a result, 'typical profile', of a female offender is that they are likely to have a history of trauma, suffer from mental illness and have substance abuse and alcohol issues. Most of them are illiterate and have a long history of unemployment. Usually have violent relationships and are primary caregivers in child development. Also, large number has trouble accessing adequate accommodation, especially if they have children.

Internationally, the proportion of females in prison population (including juveniles and those on remand) ranged from 4.1% in the UK to 10.3% in the United States, with the United States, Australia and New Zealand all demonstrating increases in these proportions since 2000 (Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, 2019, stated in Gower, Spiranovic, at all (2023). In general, female prisoners make up between 2% and 9% of the total prison population in around 80% of prisons systems in the world (Walmsley, 2012 stated in Barberat, 2014: 161). Those countries with the largest female prisoner populations are the United States, China, Russia, Brazil and Thailand (ibid, 2014:161). Statistics in America show that since 1980, the number of women incarcerated in the United States has multiplied dramatically. At the end of 2015, there were 111,495 women in prison, which is 7% of the prison population. It is most often the result of petty property crimes that indicate the economic vulnerability that women experience in society, or crimes related to drugs and addiction. According to race, in the United States, 48% of female prisoners are African American, 33% are white, while 15% are Hispanic. Taking into account the percentage representation of citizens according to racial structure in American society (according to the 2016 census, 13.3% are black (African-American), 17.8% Latino, two or more racial are 2.6% and 75.5% are white), incarceration statistics show a disproportionate number of incarcerated African-American women.

While white women are most often punished for property crimes, women of colour are punished for violent and drug-related crimes. In terms of other socio-demographic characteristics, poverty is a significant demographic factor as almost half (48%) were unemployed at the time of their arrest. They also tend to come from poor backgrounds and communities which explain why women commit property and drug -related crimes and are engaged in prostitution. Also, in prison, overcrowding often causes mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, self-harm. Additionally, the pain of confinement and separation from family worsens mental health. Overall, 12% of the female population suffers from mental illness, compared to 75% of the female population in prisons. According to Rodriguez's study (1983), the largest percentage of female offenders is single mothers,  $\frac{3}{4}$  are drug addicts and almost all have a history of prostitution. Average age is 30 years. 17 out of 20 have dropped out of secondary education, while 13 out of 20 have run away from home as younger girls. They were also victims of rape and physical attacks. 15 out of 20 live with a violent man, 13 have history of early pregnancy, but only 4 kept their first baby (Chesney Lind & Pasko, 2013: 109-112). Furthermore, prisons are the result of much oppression, such as race, ethnicity, class and indigenous status. Prisons discriminate against women in a

number of ways, often because women are such a small percentage of prisoners. Women prisoners are thus more invisible than men prisoners. They are provided with fewer programs and training schemes than men, due to economies of scale. In that regard, prisons have a tendency to infantilize women and pathologize them, further oppressing them (Barberet, 2014: 160).

As far as girl delinquency and crime are concerned, in the 21st century, their scope is increasing, much more than that of boy's delinquency. For example, crime rate has been increased *more than 82% for young girls versus 36% for young boys*. However, there is a different rhetoric and explanation of girls' delinquency by race. Black girls are said to have inappropriate lifestyles, while white girls have low self-esteem, they are easily suggestible, and are often abandoned by their parents. The existing racism in the juvenile justice system in relation to delinquent girls can also be seen through certain statistics. Namely, 74% (vs. 26%) of white girls in the welfare (social protection) system (outside the criminal justice system) were treated as children at risk and not as children in conflict with the law, in contrast to the black girls who were more likely to be processed through the juvenile justice system. In addition, there are a disproportionate number of black girls held in juvenile correctional facilities compared to the overall Afro-American population (Chesney Lind & Pasko, 2013: 107).

### **Female offenders in the criminal justice system**

More recent research shows that female offending is changing due to changing practices of social control and women's liberalization has a greater effect on the practices of the criminal justice system more than on women's behaviour.

Regarding the police, research shows that women as perpetrators are not often in the focus of police attention, except when their crimes are related to prostitution, escapes, fraud and embezzlement. Also, the police can apply a patriarchal and paternalistic approach to female offenders, which means that they treat them as less dangerous, misguided, naive and less capable of committing crimes. With such an approach, the formal system reinforces and supports patriarchal practices (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988: 613). But a paternalistic approach is much more observed among white female offenders, in contrast to the harsher treatment of black female offenders. Such a double standard is probably the result of the perception that black women is less expected to conform to expected traditional roles within the family and society. In the later stages of the court procedure, women are treated differently, both according to the type of crime, family status, and according to their ethnic and racial origin. Certain indicators show that women are treated more severe when they are punished for non-traditional female crime such as physical assaults or robberies. Or, women who are addicted to drugs are more likely to receive harsh sentences. In addition, certain data show that young girls are treated more harshly for minor status offenses (running away, drunkenness) because the system treats such offenses as a threat to their expected feminine behaviours according to traditional patriarchal society (Albonetti A. Celesta, 2012). But on the other hand, court statistics show that family women receive lenient sanctions, taking into account their family ties and obligations to children. This means that those women who have family status are punished more lightly than those who are not married. Some call this

approach "family justice." This means that the courts reflect the needs and interests of the patriarchy where inequalities between men and women are reproduced. Family-based justice is a visible manifestation of patriarchal needs to maintain and protect the nuclear family where gender and reproductive relations are supported and maintained (Albonetti A. Celesta, 2012). And in prisons there are different approaches that differ according to the race of women prisoners. A dual system arises because of the different view of female nature. Usually, female prisoners belong to economically and socially vulnerable categories of groups, they are young, uneducated (or poorly educated), unemployed and are primarily responsible for their children. Most of the female prisoners have one member in their extended family who is also serving a prison sentence. In addition, such women have a history of physical or sexual abuse and over 70% were victims of physical violence in childhood or adolescence.

### **Female Crime in The Republic of North Macedonia**

Regarding the studies on female crime in Macedonia, the Macedonian scientific community have modest research experience, because only few studies and analysis have been conducted. Part of them provide a comprehensive statistical analysis of crimes committed by women, while others elaborate the pathways to criminal behaviour particularly the interconnection between prior victimisation and later criminal activities. Main data sources are the available statistical data generated by the State Statistics Office and by the prison women department. One research has made in depth interviews with certain female prisoners condemned for murder. Beside them, the majority of criminological research focuses on women as victims, usually of domestic or sexual violence and encompasses many aspects related to their protection, access to legal aid, their victimisation pathways, duration et. The etiology of female offenders is not yet the subject of in-depth research in our country, except that there is a modest attempt to analyse the path of female perpetrators of murder.

#### ***Prior research findings***

In 2012, a research study was conducted about the personality and trait aggression profiles of female prison inmates. In addition, based on women statements, the research team identified different coping strategies that help to moderate the stress which the individual experiences during incarceration. The sample encompasses 26 women inmates (out of a total of 52 during that period). Research data indicates that the strongest stressor for women in prison is separation from children and family. The research results showed that female inmates use different coping strategies for stress, such as affective (A) (expressing emotions, reading, writing) and social strategy (S) (sharing with others, membership and group support). The cognitive strategy is not used enough because women in prison feel isolated and cannot exert any influence to improve their situation (Мојаноски, Бачановиќ и др., 2014).

In the explanatory study of patterns of female criminality in Macedonia (2012-2017) the statistical data shows that the convicted female offenders make up about 5 - 8% from the total number of convicted offenders. Women offenders most often commit property and violent crimes, but also considerable number is convicted for child neglect and/or

abandonment (Stanojoska & Jurtoska, 2018:161-162). In a similar study (Stefanovska, 2018), the percentage of reported female offenders<sup>1</sup> in 2017 ranges between 10 and 15% of the total reported offenders, although in the period 2014-2016 there has been a declining trend (from 11.1% in 2014, to 10.1% in 2015 and 9.8% in 2016). In regards to sentenced female offenders, the statistics show a slight increasing trend ranging from 7 to 9% in the period between 2012 and 2016. According to the ethnic composition of female offender population, there is an increase of the number of Albanian women prisoners especially in 2015 and 2016, and that is twice as much as in the previous years. The percentage of Roma women prisoners, although it is high and it ranges from ½ to 1/3 of all women in prison, has been relatively stable over the years. However, taking into account the percentage of Albanian and Roma population in Macedonia<sup>2</sup>, the participation of female prisoners, especially of Roma nationality, is disproportionate. On the other hand, according to the educational background in 2016, 1/3 out of 97 women is illiterate, while other 1/3 has finished secondary school. 8% are with high education. In 2017, a small-scale survey was conducted in Macedonian women's prison in order to obtain general data about socio-demographics characteristics of women prisoners (Koshevaliska & Maksimova, 2019). The number of female prisoners is gradually increasing in the period 2014-2016 (93 women prisoners in 2014, 105 in 2015 and 97 in 2016). In 2017 and in 2018 their number significantly decreased and at the end of 2017 there were 69 female inmates, while in 2018 - 53. In terms of ethnic composition, in 2017 the participation of Roma women was significantly higher (41.9%) compared to 2024 (20.8%). Macedonian women prisoners were less numerous in 2017 (39%) but in 2024 their percentage is higher (52.8%). The increase of Albanian women prisoners has also been considerable in the recent years. According to the type of committed crime, 58% of women have been sentenced for property crimes (theft, robbery, aggravated theft and fraud) and 12% for murder. In 2017, 30% of women inmates were convicted previously, but in 2024 the rate of recidivism among female prisoners is 40%. One recent study *The Feminist Pathways Perspective: The Pathways to Crime of Female Murderers in the Republic of North Macedonia* in Macedonian women prison (2023) had investigated the pathways to crime of nine female inmates sentenced for murder who were incarcerated. Through in-depth interview with the women, the findings have showed that they have a history of intimate-partner abuse and violent victimisation, and in most of the cases the murder victim is the women's intimate partner. Similar findings were obtained in another study (Maksimova, Koshevaliska, 2023) about the Battered Woman Syndrome in Female Perpetrators in the Republic of North Macedonia. Obtained data have shown that the murder is often committed by women in self-defence or in order to terminate the long term physical and emotional trauma and suffering. Nevertheless, the study has shown that more than 2/3 of women offenders condemned for various crimes were not victims of previous victimisation. Only 29.3% of women prisoners have a history of abuse and prior victimisation, mostly within the primary family group where the abuser is their intimate partner. The previous brief literature review of certain research studies shows that

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<sup>1</sup>“Reported female offender” means offender against whom a criminal report has been filed and submitted to the public prosecutor's office (State statistical office)

<sup>2</sup> According to the census 2002, Albanian are 25,17% and Roma are 2,66%



in the last few years in the Republic of North Macedonia there have been modest attempts to research female criminality. Although some of them have been carried out in women's prisons; in order to understand female crime, it is necessary to investigate its causes, and not only women prisoners but also women sentenced to other criminal sanctions. The Macedonian criminological community should include feminist perspectives in female crime research and to investigate the gender feminist pathways to crime. Although different in explanation, still both, the economic marginalisation and emancipation/liberation theses should be part of more comprehensive studies of Macedonian female criminality. In that regard, an analysis of statistical figures can only indicate some patterns of female crime (scope, crime types, ethnic composition, educational qualifications, prior victimisation, age etc.) Our national statistical bureau does not provide separate data about the sentencing policy toward women perpetrators nor criminal justice statistics generated by the police, public prosecution offices or courts. Those restrictions limit the effort to make a comprehensive review and analysis of the penal policy towards female perpetrators.

### ***Certain traits of the Female crime (2018 – 2023)***

*Scope and dynamics of crime.* The extent of crime will be analysed through the number of reported, accused and convicted women in the last 5 years. The percentage of reported female perpetrators in the total number of reported perpetrators ranges between 10.5 and 11.4%. The percentage of accused women is gradually increasing and in 2022 it was 10%. Likewise, the percentage of convicted women out of all convicted persons is gradually increasing and in 2022 it was 9.8%, although in 2018 that percentage was 7.2%. Having in mind those oscillations, we can raise the question whether this means that the penal policy against female perpetrators is becoming more repressive and harsher?

*Table 1. Reported, accused and convicted women, Source: State Statistical office, stat.gov.mk*

	2018	%	2019	%	2020	%	2021	%	2022	%
<b>All reported perpetrators</b>	11.609		12.255		12.347		12.233		12.429	
<b>Reported women</b>	1.204	10,4	1.384	11,3	1.357	11	1.385	11,3	1.315	10,5
<b>All accused perpetrators</b>	6.828		5.370		6.339		8.580		8.550	
<b>Accused Women</b>	524	7,7	485	9	626	9,9	787	9,2	853	10
<b>All convicted perpetrators</b>	5.857		4.712		6.351		7.634		7.769	
<b>Convicted women</b>	419	7,2	410	8,8	558	8,8	664	8,7	758	9,8

Having in mind the fact that in the recent years, a high percentage of reported women end up with a final court sentence and certain criminal sanction, it can be concluded that the conviction rate of women has been increasing. Although in our system of statistics it is not possible to follow the criminal procedure against reported offenders through all court phases (for example, to determinate how many of the reported offenders are accused and lately convicted), indirectly through the number of reported, accused and convicted perpetrators during one calendar year we can get an approximate picture of the conviction rate. In

addition to that, the statistical data show a significant increase of accused and convicted women during the last 5 years compared to relatively stable number of reported women offenders. Whether this increasing trend is the consequence of a stricter penal policy towards female perpetrators, or the result of increased efficiency of the judicial system are questions that require additional analysis and in-depth research.

*Girl's delinquency.* The number of girl's offenders was increasing in 2021 and 2022 and they make up about 10 % of all juvenile offenders in contrast to 2019 when this percentage was 5.7% and in 2018 even 3%. So, in almost 4 years this number is doubled and tripled. A similar trend is present in the number of accused and convicted girl's offenders.

*Types of crime.* According to the type of crime, property crime is the most prevalent, and covers 42% of the total crimes committed. Violent crime percentage ranges from 7.5 to 14, while traffic crimes hold third place on the list of most common female crimes. Crimes committed against family member or youth cover 9 % and females can be also perpetrators of crimes against public order and peace (about 5%). However, the statistics show a decrease in the number of violent and property crimes committed by women in the last 3 years. That percentage has been below 30%, mostly because of restricted freedom of movement due to lockdown and confinement measures in the times of Covid -19, having in mind public security and public health considerations. In addition, the decrease in property crime in 2022 is more due to the reduced commission of electricity, thermal energy or natural gas theft, because among property crimes, a significant percentage refer to theft (55 - 68%), half of which to electricity theft. Preventing electricity theft became priority of the electricity distribution company that undertakes serious measures to detect the perpetrators and to allow any witness to report the perpetrator for stealing electricity via the company website. Besides this crime, a characteristic of female criminality are crimes against marriage, family and youth, which occupy a significant percentage of the total crime. Crimes against official duty cover less than 5 % of all crimes. But over the course of 4 years, 11 murders by women have been registered, 4 of which were committed in 2019 and 3 in 2020. Crimes against life and body comprise about 6-7% of the total criminality of women.

In general, although the number of registered crimes against property is decreasing, the number of accused women perpetrators is increasing, which indicates a higher rate of efficiency and criminal charges filed. Accused women offenders rate is inversely proportional to the number of reported cases, which means that the criminal charges for property crimes against women offenders proceed in further criminal proceedings within the court system. But, this is not the case with the criminal charges for crimes against official duty, because the number of accused women for such crimes is decreasing and almost every fifth or sixth reported offender gets certain accusation. This phenomenon is an indicator that such crimes are difficult to prove, the number of accused is decreasing, the crime becomes obsolete, evidence cannot be provided, the proceedings are terminated and charges are not brought.

*Nationality.* According to the nationality, the number of Macedonian women offenders is relatively constant and ranges up to 70% of all ethnic communities in Macedonia. If we consider the number of the Macedonian population in the country, it can be noted that the number of Macedonian women who commit crimes is higher. The number of Albanian women has been increasing in the last 5 years, which means that in 2022 they make up 16.7% compared to the previous 12%. In contrast to them, the number of Roma women is slightly decreasing and in the last two years they cover 6.5% of all reported women. Although that number is disproportionate to the number of Roma population in Macedonia, there is still a decrease.

*Table 2. Reported women offender by nationality, Source: State Statistical office*

	2018	%	2019	%	2020	%	2021	%	2022	%
<b>All reported women</b>	1204		1384		1357		1385		1315	
<b>Macedonian</b>	849	70,5	993	71,4	929	68,5	918	66,3	908	69
<b>Albanian</b>	128	10,6	168	12,1	183	13,5	219	15,8	219	16,7
<b>Turks</b>	22	1,8	44	3,2	55	4	45	3,2	44	3,3
<b>Roma</b>	99	8,2	97	7	108	8	91	6,6	84	6,4

*Table 3. Women prisoners by nationality, Source: Department for execution of sanction*

	2018	%	2021	%	2022	%	2024	%
<b>Total</b>	53		72		85		72	
<b>Macedonian</b>	20	37,3	25	34,7	26	30,6	39	52,8
<b>Albanian</b>	15	28,3	26	31,1	27	31,8	14	19,4
<b>Turks</b>	1		6	8,3	1		/	
<b>Roma</b>	14	26,4	14	19,4	14	16,5	15	20,8

The ethnicity of the prison population shows that the number of Macedonian women serving prison sentence has increased significantly in 2024. Compared to previous years when they made up 1/3 of the prison population, the latest data in April 2024 they make up more than half. This indicates that as they started to commit more serious crimes, the more severe sentencing policy became towards them. Compared to the number of reported perpetrators according to ethnicity and prison sentence, it can be noted that Albanian and Roma women are more likely to get prison sentence than Macedonian women. Still, the number of Roma inmates is relatively stable and ranges from 14 to 15 women that cover 17 to 20% of the total women prison population.

### ***Women in prison***

Women prisoners are between 3% to 4.2% of the prison population, which is on a relatively low level on the world women prison population list.

Table 4. Women prisoners' rate in total prison population, Source: Department for execution of sanction

Year	2018	2021	2022	2024
Women prisoners	72 (3,2%)	53 (2,7%)	72 (3,3%)	85 (4,2%)
All prisoners	2237	1954	2166	2004

#### *Certain features*

Female prisoners serve prison sentence for *murder* (13 inmates), *drug trafficking* (13 inmates), *child trafficking* (12 inmates), *robbery* (12 inmates), *fraud* (6 inmates), *aggravated theft* (5 inmates), *mediation in prostitution* (2 inmates), *human trafficking* (2 inmates), and *abuse of official position* (2). In general, those data show that prison penalty in most cases is imposed for more serious crimes and that the participation of women in such crimes is increasing. In April 2024 the number of women convicted of drugs, trafficking in minors and murder has increased, while crimes against sexual freedom have decreased. According to the nationality, Macedonian women offenders are mostly convicted of drugs (77%), murder (38%), robbery (38%), fraud (100%), abuse of official position (100%). Roma women are typical perpetrators of child trafficking (50%), they are illiterate and with incomplete primary education. Albanian women are in most cases perpetrators of murder (38%), child trafficking (33%) and robbery.

Regarding the *educational structure*, a significant percentage of female prisoners in Macedonia is illiterate or with incomplete primary education (36%). More than one third has completed high school (39%), while 15.3 of the inmates have completed only primary education. With high university degree are 9.7 % of women and they are perpetrators of crime of abuse of official position, fraud, murder and one crime of drug trafficking. Female perpetrators without education, i.e. who have not completed elementary school, are usually convicted of child trafficking and robbery. Most of them are Roma. According to age, 36 % are women inmates age between 41 and 50 and other 1/3 are those between 31 and 40. Women over 50 are mostly perpetrators of murder and drug trafficking, and they are commonly long-term prisoners who are sentenced to 10 years or more.

Over 90% of the women were married or in an extramarital union. Some of them are divorced, and some are widowed, while 2/3 are still married or in an extramarital union. The largest percentage of them (over 80%) has children and only 8 inmates are single. In regards to work history, 1/3 of the female inmates was employed at the time of the crime or had a certain work history. They worked in confectionary industry, in catering services, in trade industry, as shop or casino workers. A few inmates had working experience as hairdressers and bakers. 2/3 has the status of unemployed, although several of them were occasionally engaged in agriculture or in collecting plastic bottles for redemption. Taking into account their educational structure and work status, it can be concluded that more than half of them are of low social status, with low or no income.

Concerning problems with addictions, 1/3 (36%) had or still have a problem with addiction to drugs, and a smaller percentage of convicted women in Macedonia have a problem with alcohol abuse. 10 women are long-term addicts and receive regular methadone therapy in prison. Half of them are perpetrators of property crimes (robbery and aggravated

theft), ¼ of drug trafficking crimes and ¼ of child trafficking. It is important to point out that 60% of them are mothers. Taking into account the fact that they are relatively young, i.e. they are up to 40 years old, a significant part of them have minor children. It is also significant to point out that half of them are divorced, i.e. widows, 5 of the prisoners live in an extramarital union, while 2 are single. According to the educational structure, half of the sample has completed secondary education while 40% are illiterate. In terms of their working history, 70% of them have no working experience, while 30% have worked in catering and other low-paid jobs that are often impermanent. Taking into account their long-term addiction, low professional qualifications, their work and family status, age and the fact that the majority of them are mothers and recipients of methadone therapy in prison, the prison system should have a serious approach to this issue, conduct adequate treatment with them and apply the special program for imprisoned drug addicts.

Altogether 70 % of women convicted of murder, committed the crime within the family and in 2/3 of the cases the victim was their abusive spouse or extramarital partner. In one of the cases, the victim of murder was perpetrator's child, whereas in the second - the perpetrator's mother and in the third - the perpetrator's parents. In all cases, the perpetrator knew the victim. Regarding the work status of these perpetrators, half were employed, while the rest were unemployed. Almost 2/3 of them are mothers, while 5 have no children. Taking into account the fact that they are sentenced to long prison sentences (70% are over 10 years and one to life imprisonment) and that they are mothers, it is necessary to consider the mentioned vulnerabilities and to better address the negative impact of prison life, especially the importance of the relationships with their children and/or other family members. In that sense, prison should they should provide sufficient opportunity for visits with family and children, along with re-entry programs. The limitations and, in worst cases, the absence of sufficient contacts with family can make them insensitive, unable to receive love and family support. Also, the separation of the mother from the child/children is a serious challenge that the prison authorities have to deal with. Separation from children lowers the mother's self-esteem, feelings of shame and guilt arise, and they experience stress due to the stigma that they are not successful and good mothers. In particular, the insecurity, duration and pains of imprisonment experienced in prison negatively affect their further ability to take good care of their children after release.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of gender equality in the criminal justice system is also an issue of interest. That system is predominantly defined and built for male offenders and has rarely been applied to women. This means that policies, punishments, and programs have been predominantly developed for men, but are assumed to be good enough for women. There are multiple stages in the criminal justice system where gender can influence decision-making. Thus, a series of studies show that the criminal justice system, police, courts and correctional institutions continue to lead to gender inequality. That means that women receive more lenient treatment in the early stages of the court proceedings, as well as in the process of accusation and sentencing. But that approach is not the same towards women of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. The aforementioned confirms that the structural divisions and inequalities in society by race, class and gender are interwoven and interconnected.

Therefore, the treatment of women in the criminal justice system should include, and take into account gender-specific needs, because they have different life experiences and motives for crime.

However, in Macedonia, women's participation in crime seen through official figures is relatively stable and constitutes a small percentage of total crime. No significant oscillations are observed in the convict population, compared to some changes in the female prison population and structure. For example, the number of both, women of Macedonian and Albanian nationality and women convicted of murder, drug trafficking and child trafficking is increasing. Taking into account the seriousness of the mentioned forms of crime, it can be concluded that the number of serious crimes is increasing, especially the trafficking of minors.

But in order to understand the penal policy against female perpetrators, the annual statistical reports should provide additional data on the type of criminal sanctions imposed against women offenders, separate from male offenders. In addition, in order to be familiar with women's crime and to build a strategy and theoretical basis for its reduction, further studies should focus and explore the causes of female crime in our country together with the patterns of different treatment of female offenders by the criminal justice system. Namely, gender-based bias has been documented at every stage in the criminal justice system and, discriminatory treatment against female offenders has been found in many studies. Therefore, the investigation of female crime should be constantly on the agenda of criminological research which, in turn will also increase the visibility and representation of women in criminological research.

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