Hi everyone,

My name is Frederic Mercier. I am a student at Université de Montréal in criminology. Since the beginning of September, I am doing an internship with Mrs. Jo-Anne Wemmers. During my internship, I am working on the survey on overcrowding that some of you have been completing for several months.

I have started to analyze the data and there are some interesting findings to point out:

First of all, for the months studied, it seems that «strict» overcrowding is rarely happening in the five penitentiaries for Women. Thus, the maximum capacity indicated of all these institutions are rarely, or never, reached or exceeded. However, the mean population for the five penitentiaries varies from 79% (for Joliette) to 92 % (for Edmonton) of the maximum capacity of the institution. This could represent a problem because research show that when 80% of the maximum capacity of a carceral institution is reached or exceeded, there is a significant impact on its functioning. Mainly, it negatively affects the capacity of the administration to deal with the requests of the detainees in a flexible way (classification and movement).

Secondly, even though the maximum capacity of the five institutions is almost never reached, they all show, to different degrees, signs of overcrowding. The Grand Valley Institution shows the most signs of overcrowding with double bunked maximum cells, double bunking in the general population, use of trailers to house women and services and limitation in the women’s movement. Finally, there is construction in the majority of the institutions (4/5) in order to address overcrowding, what affects significantly women’s mobility.

In addition to the quantitative data that I am gathering, I am also doing interviews with women who have already been incarcerated and with professionals. Therefore, I would like to contribute to a better comprehension of the impact of overcrowding on female detainees since there are very few studies on the subject that have been done with women in particular.
My first interviews indicate that overcrowding mainly affects women by increasing the proximity between detainees. In this context, intimacy is rare, conflicts are more likely to emerge and women may feel more stress and anxiety. Overcrowding would also have an impact on services and opportunity offered to women (like access to the gym, the outside, etc.). Depending on the woman’s personality and habits, it could affect significantly her psychological, physical and social well-being.

Finally, even though my results are only preliminary, I am confident that my final report, that should be release in February 2014, will give an interesting overview of the situation in Canada.

I would also like to add that if you have any additional information, or specification that you would like to share about the living conditions of women incarcerated in penitentiaries in Canada, I would be happy to discuss it with you. I would also like to thank you for your collaboration in the data collection.

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