Employment and the Post-Release Puzzle

The Lived Experience of Securing Legitimate Work among Women Released from Prison in New Zealand

By

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Abstract

As incarceration rates continue to rise in New Zealand (The Department of Corrections, 2019b), the number of people being released from prison will also rise. Life sentences are rare and therefore, the majority of people who are sent to prison will, at some point, be released to reside in the community again. Despite this, individuals are leaving prison unprepared for life on the outside, and they face a range of barriers as they try to establish new lives for themselves in the community. Employment is often cited as a stabilising factor after prison, a factor which can help a person to rebuild their life and become a contributing member of society. However, having a criminal history can negatively impact employment prospects, making employment difficult to obtain, especially in an increasingly competitive employment market. Thus far, research looking at employment after prison, and at prison and the post-release period in general, has been largely centred around men. Women and their specific needs are often overlooked in the research and in the criminal justice system due to their lower incarceration rates, and solutions, policies and practices are often created with men in mind, then adapted slightly to 'fit' women, without much real recognition of women's different needs (Baldry, 2010; Mills, Kendall, Lathlean, & Steel, 2013). Therefore, the research undertaken for this project explores the role of employment in the lives of women who have recently been released from prison, looking at the benefits of and barriers to employment through the lived experiences of those who are in the post-release period, with a goal of adding to women-focused literature, which is desperately needed. Through semi-structured interviews, and guided by a feminist methodological framework, I drew on this lived experience of the participants and put their voices at the forefront of the research findings. The key finding was that while employment is vital for long-term success after release, the benefits of employment extend far beyond financial security, and employment is one piece of a post-release puzzle, which without the other pieces, is relatively useless on its own. A more holistic approach is needed in the post-release period to promote success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2017, there were 702 women in prison in New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2017). Incarceration rates in general are increasing, which includes the rates of women being imprisoned (The Department of Corrections, 2019b). Through researching incarceration statistics, I found 2017 to be the most recent information to provide all of the information I needed, such as prison population rates as well as demographic information, so 2017 statistics are used for this purpose. There is more recent data from 2019 which shows current population rates (9324 men and 729 women (The Department of Corrections, 2019b)), however this data is incomplete, so both the complete data from 2017 and the figures available from 2019 are used throughout to show incarceration rates as well as relevant demographic information. As New Zealand's prison population currently exceeds 10,000, the rates of incarcerated women are clearly far lower than those of men. This creates a problem for how the post-release period is imagined. Just as there are large disparities in the incarceration rates, there are also large disparities in the amount of research conducted with men and women (Baldry, 2010; Miller, Wright, & Smith, 2000). Men dominate prison and crime related research, media representations of crime and even fictional depictions of crime and criminality. Criminality is generally viewed as masculine behaviour (Widom, 1984), despite the fact that literally anyone can commit an act against the law, be it a man or a woman, an adult or a youth, the rich or the poor, the description of what constitutes a 'criminal' is not a one-size-fits-all situation. Though post-release assistance cannot be a blanket approach of 'what works for one person will work for everyone', due to a lack of research into women and criminality, solutions and programmes which were designed for men are consistently used for women as well (Segraeus, 2017), and women's specific social and health related needs are often overlooked in a system that thus far, has mainly been designed with men in mind (Mills, Kendall, et al., 2013).

Women have different needs than men, and it is vital that these are understood so as to find the best approaches to assisting women in the post-release transition from prison to community life, which means finding out what these needs are from the women themselves (T. McIntosh, 2017). This research will contribute to filling this gap. Because employment has been found to be a crucial factor after release (Bentley, 2017; Morrison, Bevan, & Bowman, 2018; Western, Braga, Davis, & Sirois, 2015), which can lead to more stability, both financially and by establishing a routine on the outside, I interviewed women about their post-release experiences, looking specifically at what employment means to them in their lives after prison. Women's post-prison employment opportunities is an under-researched area in New Zealand,

and while some have made valuable research contributions (Bentley, 2017; Morrison et al., 2018; Morrison & Bowman, 2017), more research is needed to understand the benefits of employment, as perceived by the women themselves, and the barriers they face to obtaining it, so that solutions can be created which fit the women and their needs in a New Zealand context.

This research is underpinned by a feminist methodological framework, inspired by the important feminist research of other authors, such as Baldry (2010), Gelsthorpe (2003), Zavella and Wolf (1996), T. McIntosh (2017) and others, discussed further in Chapter 3. As women are the key voices of the research, I wanted to be sure to use a methodological approach which would ensure that the women would be centred in the research, and that their voices would be given the most weight. This research was conducted with the hopes of giving the women I would interview a chance to speak about their experiences, and showing them that they have a voice when it comes to the issues surrounding the post-release period, and that they deserve to be heard. I also wanted to allow the women to feel that they have agency over their own lives, which is something that is taken from them in prison and is hard for them to restore upon leaving, and which as T. McIntosh (2017) states is essential for creating lasting change. Of the 702 women in prison in 2017, 59.1% of those were Māori. The extreme over-representation of Māori in the criminal justice system has long been an issue, with a report from 1988 by Jackson pointing out the same issues then as are still seen today (Jackson, 1988). The numbers meant that it was likely that I would recruit Māori participants, and that the findings of my research would be relevant to Māori. For these reasons, I incorporated kaupapa Māori principles into my research design to include important Māori perspectives.

People in prison are generally from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds, and they are often not integrated into society to begin with (Kirkwood & McNeill, 2015; Wacquant, 2010). This means that upon leaving prison, the life that they are expected to lead upon release is not necessarily one that is familiar to them. They are often not returning to the same life or community that they had before prison, but to a completely different place, with different people and with new expectations placed on them. Therefore, they are not REintegrating, but are trying to become integrated for the first time, which is made all the more difficult due to the damaging effects of incarceration and the weight that comes with a criminal record. The post-release period is therefore a time of incredible vulnerability. It is a time of huge changes, and as with all life changes, people need time to adapt to them. Women (and men) leaving prison need guidance and assistance in order to deal with the changes that they have already experienced, and those that lay ahead. They need treatment for mental health and substance

abuse issues, they need stable accommodation and they need help with having access to potential employment opportunities. Fortunately, there is a system in place to care for people in the criminal justice system, both while incarcerated and upon release. Unfortunately, this system places more importance on 'risk factors' and likelihood of reoffending than it does on the wellbeing of the people in its care.

The Department of Corrections (hereafter 'Corrections') has a key focus of reducing reoffending, and it frames all opportunities upon release as a chance to reduce reoffending (The Department of Corrections, 2019a), and focuses on factors that will contribute to reducing reoffending or will increase the risk of reoffending. What is not seen as main objectives are Corrections offering incentives that have aims of improving individuals wellbeing or creating employment opportunities to improve individuals' quality of life. People who go to prison go from being labelled as an offender, to a prisoner, to then being released and being labelled as being at risk of reoffending. From the moment of the initial offence, their whole lives are shaped around said offence, the consequences of it and then the potential that they may do it again. As labelling theory posits, if you label someone as something and drill that label into them, they will internalise it and eventually embrace it (Becker, 2003). If everyone only sees them as an offender, why should they try to be anything else, and how can they be if this label blocks their opportunities? People in prison are viewed as statistics; certain demographic information can be found about them, but it does not show who they are. People in prison, first and foremost, are people. They deserve to be more than a number on a spreadsheet, and they deserve to share their experiences and have the opportunity to learn from them. Assigning a likelihood of the risk of reoffending may be seen as a necessary practice, but how can they be expected to do anything but fail if they are never given the opportunity to succeed?

This research is all about finding out from women who have spent time in prison what they feel is needed for them to succeed post-release, specifically looking at the role of employment. I interviewed five such women, as well as practitioners who work with women post-release to capture their perspectives on the importance of employment, and to find out what kind of employment opportunities are out there for women after prison and who can assist them with finding employment. The following chapter looks at the relevant literature surrounding the post-release period, employment and specifically, women's post-release experiences with employment. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approaches used in this research, and the methods for participant recruitment and conducting and analysing the interviews. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 discuss the results from the interviews, with Chapter 4

discussing the benefits and the meaning of employment to the women, Chapter 5 discussing the barriers to obtaining employment post-release and Chapter 6 discussing the post-release puzzle and all the factors that are involved in it. Chapter 7 provides the conclusions to the research.

Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature

"One of the greatest needs for persons leaving prison and returning to their communities is immediate employment" (Pogrebin, West-Smith, Walker, & Unnithan, 2014).

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature relevant to this research project, with a focus on the role that employment plays in the transition from prison to the community, specifically by exploring the experiences of women releasees in a New Zealand context that have been researched and documented thus far. While I will focus on New Zealand-based literature wherever possible, the literature on women in prison in New Zealand is minimal, however across the world, the characteristics of incarcerated women appear to remain relatively consistent, suggesting that women in New Zealand may have similar experiences to those in comparable nations. Therefore, in some areas I will draw on international literature, which may provide insights into the factors impacting women that are yet to be fully researched in a New Zealand context. The following sections will explore employment within the broader processes of the post-release period, specifically exploring the impact of employment for women post-release, and how employment interacts with other individual, social and economic factors. The barriers to and benefits of obtaining employment for women will be a key focus. Specifically, this chapter will illustrate the ways by which the nexus between employment and post-release success is gendered in New Zealand, demonstrating the need for research that is focused on women, which includes women's perspectives and has outcomes which are specific to this particular cohort.

Generally, in the literature and in Corrections' discourse, the period following release from prison is called the reintegration period. The term 'reintegration' describes a process by which individuals who were formerly incarcerated are transitioned back into society to become productive and accepted members of their local communities (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2013). The terms re-entry and reintegration are often used interchangeably; however, Visher and Travis define re-entry as simply "the process of leaving prison and returning to free society" (2003, p. 89), which is a process all people who leave prison go through and does not necessarily encompass all of the 'integrating' aspects which are commonly acknowledged as being involved in reintegration. Reintegration implies the successful outcome, or end goal, of becoming fully integrated, which is not always the case. It is something to strive towards, whereas re-entry simply outlines that the individual has returned to the community after their time in prison. By New Zealand's Corrections' standards, reintegration is successful if an

individual does not reoffend after leaving prison. This can be seen in their description of their approach to reintegration, as the first thing that is stated is "one of the keys to reducing re-offending is helping people live crime free after they have served their sentence or order" (The Department of Corrections, 2018). While it is important that people do not reoffend, they have already completed their sentence for the crime they committed, and structuring their lives in the community around their likelihood of committing another crime seems counterproductive to integrating them into the wider community. It is likely to further the stigma around people who have been in prison by labelling them as ex-offenders and reminding them at every turn that this is what they are, which according to labelling theory can cause them to internalise this label and act accordingly (Becker, 2003).

As Kirkwood and McNeill (2015) point out, not all members of society are properly integrated to begin with, whether they have a criminal history or not. Therefore, as a criminal offence is not the only barrier to integrating into society, successful (re)integration should not be focussed on whether or not an individual commits an offence, but on a vast array of factors. Things such as having a job, getting an education, having strong social connections, having a stable place to live, etc., are all perceived as indicators of being integrated into society (Kirkwood & McNeill, 2015). Since a large proportion of people in prison are not integrated in these ways even before they enter prison (Wacquant, 2010), REintegration is not always an appropriate term. Various aspects of becoming integrated into society are often new to people who are leaving prison, and as such, these are not things that they are re-establishing, but rather are things they may be experiencing for the first time. For these reasons, throughout my own research I will refer to the transition from prison to the community as the post-release period, much like Baldry does in her research with women released from prison (Baldry, 2010), which encompasses both re-entry and (re)integration.

The literature on post-release experiences is vast; however, it primarily focuses on men. With the number of women imprisoned in western countries steadily increasing across the world (Walmsley, 2017) the present research seeks to contribute to literature that is women-focused as this area is in desperate need of attention. Walmsley states that while globally, men still make up the majority of the prison population, the incarceration of women has increased by a much higher rate since the year 2000, with the incarceration rates of women increasing by 53% compared to a 20% increase for men on a global scale (2017). New Zealand figures show that in the year 2009, there were 7751 men in prison and 493 women (The Department of Corrections, 2009), then 10 years later in September 2019, there were 9339 men in prison and

702 women (The Department of Corrections, 2019b), which shows a 20.48% increase for men, and a 29.77% increase for women over the last 10 years. My research seeks to challenge how 'success' in the post-release period is measured, as outlined above, by focusing on the factors of success in relation to employment, rather than on recidivism statistics, and by referring to 'the post-release period' to remove the notions of prior integration which usually come with the term reintegration.

While I acknowledge that men and women experience a lot of the same hardships in the post-release period, as this research has a specific focus on women, the primary aim will be to draw on research which looks at what factors have been found to affect women, and how so. This research was conducted as a way to advocate that women's needs should be considered on their own, and for research to be dedicated to this area. Therefore, comparisons with men will only be made where appropriate to outline gaps with regard to women in the literature. The point of this research is not to downplay the needs of men, but simply to show that more time and research needs to be spent looking at the specific effect these factors have on women, in order to work toward more individualised post-release plans that can account for gender differences in life before prison, life in prison and life post-release pertaining to employment.

2.1. The Post-Release Period in the New Zealand Context

The prison population in New Zealand has risen to an all-time high within the last few years. As at the 31st of March 2019, there was a total of 10,053 people in prison: 9324 men and 729 women (The Department of Corrections, 2019b). Moreover, there were 34,897 people serving community sentences or supervision orders: 79.8% men and 20% women (The Department of Corrections, 2019b). This means that in New Zealand, as at March 2019, there were 44,950 individuals involved with the criminal justice system, many of whom were likely to be in need of/currently utilising some form of post-release assistance. Previous statistics show that in 2012, reimprisonment rates within 12 months of release were at 26.7%, while reconviction rates were 44.2% (Sullivan, McDonald, & Thomson, 2016). This means that over 44% of people released from prison had a new conviction within one year of release, and of these, over a quarter returned to prison. While the statistics released by Corrections show the extent of the issue in terms of recidivism and outline why Corrections are concerned with reoffending, these statistics do not paint the whole picture. These numbers focus on rates of reoffending, and not on factors which contribute to it, which makes it easy to attribute blame

to the failures of the individual in managing their own re-entry efforts rather than the failures of a system which is meant to assist them.

As Visher and Travis point out, recidivism is largely dependent on post-release adjustment and the effectiveness of post-release programmes and support (2003). While there is definitely post-release support available, there is no way to know how many people use it and how accessible, or effective, it is, and the recidivism statistics make it clear that there is a need for better support in the transition from prison to the community, though what is not clear from the statistics above is what kind of support is needed to improve the opportunities and quality of life for those leaving prison. In order to break the cycle of imprisonment and help releasees to land on their feet the first time around, a myriad of factors need to be addressed. Throughout this research I will argue that such a strong focus on recidivism is not in the best interests of helping to break the cycle, and to find out which areas need to be addressed, it is important to conduct qualitative research to ask those who have spent time in prison about their experiences post-release (T. McIntosh, 2017). Furthermore, Campbell's (2018) New Zealand focused study found that when post-release programmes were targeted to women's specific needs they responded particularly well, more so than to more general programmes and services, and this supports the need for more research that is specific to women.

In practice, success in the post-release period is rare, and across various cultures, ages and genders, individuals continue to not be able to successfully integrate into the community, and often end up returning to prison (Davis et al., 2013). Western argues that there are 'three pillars' supporting successful (re)integration after prison, those being: housing, family and work (Western et al., 2015). This holds true for men and women and these factors are seen as especially crucial within the first few months following release (Western et al., 2015). Western et al. speak about how being a member of a community involves much more than simply living in a specific location, and this is where their three pillars of reintegration come in. They outline how community membership constitutes attachment to a social group and their ways of living, meaning abiding by certain social roles, social rules and regulations, and certain standards of living. Therefore, having a stable home in a community, ties to family and social groups and securing employment as a means of self-support and subsistence are important factors for strengthening one's place in their community. Another factor which is crucial to speak to, is culture and ethnicity. The following section will outline New Zealand prisons' ethnic make-up, and why this is relevant to post-release needs.

2.1.1. The Experience of Māori in the Post-Release Period

As Baldry says, "inequality is linked to, and a key indicator of higher crime and prison rates" (2010, p. 254). Those who end up in prison are, more often than not, the same people who were marginalised and disadvantaged in society prior to their incarceration, and were often not properly integrated into mainstream society. This is often reflected in the ethnic makeup of the prison population. In western countries, indigenous populations are marginalised in society and are significantly overrepresented in criminal justice systems. New Zealand is a prime example of this. As of March 2019, 51.3% of the total prison population were Māori (The Department of Corrections, 2019b), despite Māori only constituting 12.7% of the general population over the age of 15 (the age is relevant as New Zealand prisons do not house people under the age of 17) (Sullivan et al., 2016). With the general lack of information on women in prison in New Zealand, it was difficult to find up-to-date statistics about the characteristics of these women. After piecing together information from various websites, the latest obtainable data were from 2017. In 2017, there were 702 women in prison in New Zealand. The only available information on these women was ethnicity, age, offence type and sentence. Based on the data found, of the 702 women in prison in 2017, 59.1% of these were Māori (Stats NZ, 2017). The overrepresentation of Māori in the criminal justice system has long been a problem in New Zealand (T. McIntosh & Workman, 2017). However, despite this, little attention has been given to Māori perspectives and solutions. Jackson (1988)'s original report was published 32 years ago, and everything he said then about how Māori are overrepresented in every area of the criminal justice system and large-scale systemic changes are needed, is still relevant now, perhaps even more so, showing that no effective or lasting changes have been made. Much like adapting male-focused solutions to fit the needs of women is ineffective, it is also ineffective to adapt the solutions of one culture to address the needs of another. In this way, Māori women in prison in New Zealand are let down twice, as current post-release initiatives attempt to adapt the solutions of New Zealand European males to fit Māori women, thereby ignoring critical cultural and gender differences.

The New Zealand justice system also reflects that of the United States (US) in a lot of ways. The US, as Baldry (2010) demonstrates, has the highest rates of imprisonment and inequality in the western world, and a justice system based on heavily punitive attitudes, which as Pratt and Clark (2005) point out, can also be seen in New Zealand through the phenomenal rise in imprisonment rates and public calls for harsher punishments over the last two decades. Therefore, while a large amount of the available research on women and employment post-

release comes out of the US, following in their footsteps may not be conducive for success post-release and it is important that New Zealand creates solutions which address the social and cultural dynamics that exist here in New Zealand, and which are tailored appropriately to those who require them.

The notion that the high rates of imprisonment of Māori may be linked to a 'compromised Māori cultural identity' (Mihaere, 2007) has been explored in research on Māori imprisonment in New Zealand, yet post-release programmes fail to provide culturally sensitive approaches to try and address it. Jackson (1988) argues that New Zealand criminal law is created by New Zealand Europeans, based on their own cultural or religious beliefs, and designed to benefit them, while Māori perspectives and beliefs are largely excluded. Jackson's report focused on Māori men in the criminal justice system; in 1988, women were incarcerated at much lower rates than today. So while it still remains true that Māori perspectives and beliefs are excluded from New Zealand law and criminal justice practices, the way in which this impacts Māori women needs further research. Such appears to be the case with post-release practices. Though there have been advancements in Māori research and acceptance by those involved in the criminal justice system that the overrepresentation of Māori is a cause for great concern, these theories and ideas seem to run parallel to the practices and policies which are implemented and any real progress is yet to be made in a practical sense (Mihaere, 2007). For example, a 2001 Corrections report stresses that "providing for the unmet needs of Māori is a matter of urgency" (The Department of Corrections, 2001, p. v). This same report shows the number of Māori in prison in 2001 as being 51% of the prison population. As stated earlier, as of 2019, the prison population is made up of 51.3% Māori, showing that over the last 18 years there has been no change despite a growing amount of research and the development of specific teams within the department to address these issues. T. McIntosh (2017) discusses how Māori women are even more overrepresented than Māori men, not just in prison population numbers, but also in apprehension and conviction statistics. She stresses that social change will only occur and be sustained in this area when it is acknowledged that those who have experienced being in prison need to have agency over their own situation, and that they "have a vital role to play in creating the conditions for change" (T. McIntosh, 2017, p. 115). This position is in line with the methodological frameworks used in my research that stress the importance of placing the participants at the forefront of the research.

Māori identity stems from whānau (family) and iwi (tribe) and connections with tīpuna (ancestors), whenua (the land), maunga (mountains) and awa (rivers) (Moeke-Pickering, 1996),

so releasing individuals to an environment where they can reconnect with these various aspects of their lives is important in the post-release period. Belonging for Māori is maintained through whakapapa, or, the ability to find genealogical ties to time, ancestors and place (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). If there are no employment opportunities in a location where Māori people can live amongst their whānau and iwi, or a residence is deemed inappropriate to live, this could inhibit a successful transition into a place they feel they belong. Furthermore, there are aspects of Te Ao Māori that offer support for an individual seeking employment. One of these is a large number of whānau living in one residence, such as grandparents living with their families, thereby providing extra social and financial support, as well as people to help with childcare obligations. It is important to note that, although this is an integral part of Māori culture, it is not the reality for many Māori (Moeke-Pickering, 1996).

As individuals leave prison and the connections they made there, they seek social support from the community which often comes in the form of family and friends. If support is not found, they are more likely to seek connections with their most current group, in this case, others who have been released from prison. This can lead to further criminal behaviour, as being around people who may be tempted to use drugs again or engage in criminal behaviours can cause temptation for an individual to do the same, to fit in with their peers, or simply because they see no other option but to return to the life they know and they have no one to show them that there is another way. How employment contributes to a sense of belonging, a crucial element in the post-release period, and how barriers to employment in turn prevent or impact on belonging, is of central concern to my research. A criminal conviction carries with it the stigma and shame of going to prison and can act as a barrier to gaining employment once released. In this way, criminal convictions can serve as secondary punishments, extending an individual's sentence even after they have served their time in prison and further alienating them from the community (Becker, 2008). Paid employment can facilitate positive social connections, links to other social groups and social status. The stigma of being an 'ex-prisoner' can be reduced when these factors are present. Therefore, paid employment, through its impacts on individual identity and intergroup dynamics in the social structure, is a critically important feature for success in the post-release period.

The long-ingrained socioeconomic-, education-, and employment-based disadvantages that Māori face (Jackson, 1988) create yet another barrier to success for Māori women leaving prison, one that is seemingly insurmountable without wide-scale societal and structural level changes in New Zealand (T. McIntosh, 2017). This is a barrier that these women cannot be

expected to tackle alone, and it is this that provides a key justification for this research. Through drawing attention to this issue and giving women who are currently navigating the challenges of post-release or who have navigated those challenges in the past a space to share their experiences and have their voices be heard, this research aims to begin a discussion around how we, as a society, can make the post-release transition easier by creating a community that welcomes back its prisoners, acknowledges their unique needs and cultural values, and shows compassion and understanding rather than closing doors and further marginalising them as outsiders. My research into the role that paid employment plays in the post-release period for women who are leaving prison may be a catalyst toward a more dedicated effort to developing employment opportunities and dismantling employment barriers for them. If my findings support that premise, then my research will be of valuable.

2.2. Women, Employment and the Post-Release Period

As Pogrebin et al. (2014) makes clear, employment is one of the most vital factors for a successful transition to the community upon leaving prison. Western (2015) highlights how employment doesn't just provide a stable income, but also contributes to social status, community acceptance, formation of daily routines and a sense of pride. Therefore, employment does not just have financial benefits but can lead to social and psychological benefits as well. Despite this, it is often found that women are not offered many opportunities for skills-based training and career building options while in prison (La Vigne, 2009). In fact, in an article published by Corrections in New Zealand, it is stated that women often experience more difficulties than men in obtaining employment post-release, due to both a lack of education and employment history prior to being imprisoned, as well as to a lack of vocational and educational training programmes within the prison (Morrison et al., 2018). This finding, combined with employers' negative perceptions of hiring people with prison histories, limits employment opportunities once released.

Bentley (2017) identifies another barrier in the vocational training offered in New Zealand women's prisons, which is often centred around more 'traditionally feminine' roles, such as cooking, laundry and sewing. She states that this training does not set women up for jobs in the outside labour market, as opposed to the construction and physical labour type training that men receive in prison, which are areas that have a high-demand for workers. The women in Bentley's research echo these thoughts, stating that they felt the programmes and training they received in prison did not meet their goals or needs and did not match the current

labour market, which in turn gave them little hope for successful employment outcomes upon release (Bentley, 2017). The need for more women-focussed programmes and initiatives that are realistic and which aim to prepare women for the labour market upon release led Corrections to develop the Women's Strategy and Action Plan (Bentley, 2017), which has a focus on improving access to services in prison for women, targeting education and looking to improve their employment options upon release. They also set up the department's Offender Recruitment Consultants (ORCs) (Morrison et al., 2018), who work with Corrections' employment partners to find vacancies that match the skills of individuals due to be released. It would seem that Corrections is aware of what is needed, however the solutions are not matching the needs. The key issues with the ORC's is that there are not enough of them for all of the people in prison to get one-to-one help, there are not enough employment partners to hire people coming out of prison, and due to a lack of previous work experience and programmes in prison, those being released are often lacking in the desired skills or training required for many jobs. My research will add to the body of women-focussed research, and find out first-hand from women who have been in prison and from people working in the field whether progress has been made in the right areas and/or if they think there are still improvements to be made.

Employment impacts women in particular ways not likely to have been captured in the primarily male-focused literature. For example, a large proportion of women in prison are mothers, and are often the primary caregivers of their children (Cobbina, 2010; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Gordon's (2015) research highlights the impact of a woman's sentence on her children. Gordon (2015) conducted interviews with parents—both men and women—who were in prison in New Zealand to discuss the effects of imprisonment on their children. She found that children commonly develop negative feelings towards the police and the justice system and this can in turn lead to delinquent acts in youth, and imprisonment in the future, creating intergenerational patterns of imprisonment. In her work, McIntosh (2017) has found that women who are sentenced to prison often have experience with imprisonment in the past, prior to their own sentence, suggesting they come from families or communities with high rates of imprisonment. Gordon's (2015) work emphasises that relevant authorities and groups need to be stepping in to provide support to the children of prisoners, for one, to break the intergenerational pattern of imprisonment, and also to ensure the children remain connected with their families and don't feel excluded from society, as though they too are serving a sentence.

Despite the negative ramifications for families and children of those in prison, for the women, the concern they have for their children and their attachment to motherhood has been found in previous studies (Adams, Morash, Smith, & Cobbina, 2016; O'Brien, 2001) to be a factor which can have a positive impact on post-release success. Employment after prison can have a negative impact on the parent-child relationship, causing the parent to be out of the home more often and less able to rebuild a relationship with their children. On the flip side, employment is necessary to prove that the parent is able to look after and provide for their children, and is a condition of them gaining any form of custody arrangement. As Opie (2012a) outlines, community sentences and probation requirements can interfere with employment, making it difficult for the women to 1) maintain a job and afford stable housing for herself and/or her children, 2) fulfil the requirements for getting custody of her children back (which are largely based on stable housing and employment, among other things) and 3) juggle employment, probation or community sentence requirements and childcare duties if she does get her children back. Therefore, employment can both positively and negatively affect reuniting with children after prison, and childcare can disrupt employment, and vice versa, but employment is essential for those who wish to be able to provide for their children and have some form of custody.

Substance abuse has been found to be a crucial factor in initial offending, affecting women and men at extremely high rates, in difficulties with post-release and in reoffending (Blitz, 2006). There is only one in-prison alcohol and drug treatment programme for women in New Zealand: in Arohata Women's Prison (Care NZ, 2019). This means that women who are dealing with substance abuse problems who are not housed in this prison are prevented from being able to utilise the programme unless they are moved, as are women serving sentences of durations that are too short to enable them to complete it. This is an important point when considering that one of the most commonly cited factors to affect women (and men) in prison is substance abuse. Moreover, as Baldry (2010) points out, women are more likely than men to be in prison on a drug-related charge.

Additionally, moving women from one prison to another in order for them to attend a programme can disrupt the programmes they were involved in, interrupt their normal routines and take them away from a place they have grown accustomed to and people who they may lean on for support. Given these factors, it is vital that all prisons have drug and alcohol treatment units which are accessible to all who need them. While some women engage in treatment while in prison, and a small portion remain engaged in treatment once released, the

relapse rates are high, with one US study reporting that within 8–10 months of release, 36% of women reported regular substance use (La Vigne, 2009). This means that even those who do receive treatment while in prison need to be connected with services to continue treatment once they are released, especially as they will be under the new pressures of being in a new environment and rebuilding their lives. Having a stable job can have positive effects on substance abuse issues which can add to the effects of treatment programmes and help to maintain sobriety on the outside. Working keeps the women busy, gives them something to be proud of, and gives them a reason to continue substance abuse treatment as it is vital for keeping their job (La Vigne, 2009). On the other hand, untreated substance abuse issues can lead to difficulties with finding and keeping a job, so treatment needs to occur first. Due to the lack of opportunities offered in prison, especially for women on shorter sentences, treatment programmes need to be easily accessible and work opportunities need to be provided upon release in order to ease women into life on the outside.

In 2017, a study was conducted which looked at post-release employment in New Zealand (Morrison & Bowman, 2017). Originally, 224 participants were interviewed upon leaving prison, and then of those, 97 were re-interviewed four to six months after their release (72 men and 25 women). Of these 97 participants, it was found that 18% of those who had been working before going to prison returned to work upon release, while 50% of the interviewed participants were consistently unemployed, both before and after prison, and 5.34% (18/97) had returned to prison (Morrison & Bowman, 2017). This New Zealand based research goes to show that more work is definitely needed to help people leaving prison find employment. The following section will discuss some of the key benefits for women of gaining employment on the outside, as found in the literature, followed by a section on the barriers they face to doing so. Some of these have been mentioned above, but will be discussed in more detail below.

2.2.1. Benefits for Women of Finding Employment after Release

Employment can have benefits for rediscovering one's identity and connecting with prosocial support after prison. Through her interviews with women recently released from prison, O'Brien (2001) found that securing employment provided the women with a sense of pride in themselves and faith in their abilities. She describes how at first the women were apprehensive and felt that their criminal convictions would prevent them from being hired, but upon putting themselves up for consideration and applying for jobs anyway, the women were often able to secure employment. O'Brien reported how the women began to view their time

in prison as having more value when they realised they still had opportunities on the outside, and they began to use their time in a prison as a strength instead of a weakness. They did this through reflecting on internal changes, such as the way they now perceived their offending, or a new outlook on wanting to remain sober, or through skills or education they had gained while in prison, and turned these into positive attributes to use to describe themselves when applying for jobs (O'Brien, 2001). Upon gaining employment, the women also found meaning in knowing that they were becoming more involved in their communities and contributing to society in a socially valued way. They were able to find belonging through connecting with other people at their places of work, while also increasing their support systems in the community. In these cases, the women used employment as a means of breaking free of the stigma surrounding women when they leave prison. This increased their feelings of self-worth and gave them an active role in community life, which, according to O'Brien (though unfortunately not to those who believe that recidivism is the true measure of success) is ultimately what the post-release period is all about. Sampson and Laub also conducted a study in which they measured the strength of ties to 'institutions of informal social control' such as work, family and the community (1990, p. 614). They argued that individuals who have strong connections to their work and to their families and communities, and a commitment to further strengthening these ties, showed greater desistance from crime and therefore a reduced likelihood of reimprisonment. This suggests that in order to reach Corrections' goal of reducing reoffending, it is more important to focus on factors which give individuals a true second chance and to encourage them to succeed, rather than to wait for them to fail.

A study by Adams, Morash and Cobbina (2016) found that when a woman has the responsibility of caring and providing for a child, she is more likely to abide by her supervision requirements, a main requirement being to avoid arrest. This effect has been found to be stronger when the mother feels responsible for caring for the children, meaning if she has children but they are cared for by someone else, the effect will not be as strong (Adams et al., 2016). This finding poses some irony, as upon release the primary goal is to create an environment where an individual will be less-tempted to reoffend, however factors which have been seen to contribute to reducing reoffending, such as feeling an important duty to care for a child, are made impossible by the lengths a mother must go to in order to regain custody of her child following her release. Employment may be important in such cases as it could provide women with financial stability to care for not only themselves, but also for their children. Employment and financial stability leads to the ability to maintain stable housing and gives

structure to the women's day-to-day lives, factors which are considered important in the post-release period and for preventing a return to offending behaviours (Western et al., 2015). A steady income and stable housing are also factors which are likely to be considered when deciding whether a child can be returned to their mother, so in this way, employment is vital for reconnecting families.

Employment has the benefits of financial stability, feelings of worthiness and acceptance, stable routines, reconnecting with children and being able to provide for them, in addition to meeting new people and developing new prosocial supports. The benefits of employment can therefore result in many successful outcomes in the post-release period. However, gaining employment after prison can be extremely difficult. The following section discusses some of the main barriers to being successful in gaining employment after prison. My research will primarily focus on these areas to find out first-hand what women who have been in prison in New Zealand and practitioners who work in the field see as the key barriers to gaining employment after prison.

2.2.2. Barriers to Finding Employment after Release

There are significant barriers that exist which can prevent women from gaining employment, or even discourage them from trying to in the first place. Pogrebin et al. (2014) found that although employment is a necessity for financial survival for people leaving prison, and is often also a requirement of parole or probation conditions, individuals are faced with a vast array of barriers to gaining employment when they are released. Among these, one of the most commonly cited barriers was employers' unwillingness to hire people who had been convicted of a crime. Multiple participants in their study claimed that they had filled out an application but when they checked on their application status a few weeks later, they were told that the company didn't hire people with convictions (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Most New Zealander's applying for jobs are required to disclose whether they have criminal convictions, and finding work in New Zealand is difficult even without a criminal conviction. Other key factors which have been found to act as barriers to securing employment upon release from prison are: restrictions and requirements of parole or probation conditions (Opie, 2012a) (such as no driver's license, having to leave work to attend drug and alcohol counselling or probation meetings, or non-association conditions (which means staying away from certain individuals, or certain groups of people, such as co-offenders, previous gang ties, or children/adolescents, etc.)), the availability of jobs in their area (individuals are often released on conditions which

mean they cannot leave a certain area), limited education and skill levels, or medical, mental health or substance abuse issues (C. Visher, 2004).

Women often also have the additional barrier of being responsible for children. While this increases their need for financial stability and as outlined above can have positive benefits, it also means they have to factor in childcare when looking for employment, which could drastically limit the hours they could work (depending on the ages of their children). On the other side of the coin, women often lose custody of their children upon entering prison, and when released, begin the battle to win back custody (La Vigne, 2009). A common requirement for winning back custody is that the women need to be employed/be able to prove that they have a stable income and can provide a home, food, education, clothing and everything else their children need. Accessing stable accommodation after prison is a huge issue (Mills, Gojkovic, Meek, & Mullins, 2013) and often the women can end up jumping between transitional houses or becoming homeless (Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2006; Couloute, 2018), which can stand in the way of them regaining custody, and of living 'normal' lives in general.

While childcare has been shown to increase the women's motivation to gain employment, it can also have damaging effects when their search is extremely difficult or unsuccessful, as the feeling that they may never get their children back can cause relapses into negative thoughts, substance abuse and further criminal offending (La Vigne, 2009). Children are sometimes left with family members, but due to probation requirements or the need to stay away from prior negative social circles, it is common for the women (and men) to be released to a city which is not their original home, meaning they are distant from friends and family, and not close enough to visit their children. Family play important roles for women post-release, assisting in offering support, providing housing, financial support, and helping to find employment (in New Zealand, gaining a job is often based on 'who you know'). A study by Cobbina (2010) explains how familial support can both lead to desistance from crime and positively support the post-release transition. Assuming the family members are prosocial, reconnecting with family can help to establish positive social bonds within the community and further social networks can expand from there. However, being released to a new place far from family and other social groups means that there is a lack of this type of support and the releasee is further isolated, with no connections for financial support while they seek work and no support for gaining employment through social networks.

In our punitive and retributive criminal justice system, prison punishes individuals by way of separation and alienation (Zehr, 2000). For successful release back into the community, these processes of alienation need to be reversed not exacerbated and the individual's journey needs to involve acceptance, belonging and support (Zehr, 2000). The excerpt below is from the Masters thesis of Michelle Richards, which she completed while serving a sentence at Christchurch Women's Prison in New Zealand, and it outlines what she describes as the Prisoners Dilemma (Richards, 2014). She outlines the struggle that individuals face upon trying to reconnect with a community which does not welcome them. A lack of support, limited employment opportunities and rejections based on criminal records further shows individuals released from prison that despite their sentence ending, they're still not treated the same as the rest of society.

> "You tell us each and every day in so many different ways that you don't want us back "3-strikes and you're out" "Not-In-My-Back-Yard" "Once a crim always a crim" And wonder why we have trouble fitting back into society! And then, you send us back to a world that doesn't want us, a world where we are branded "Property of Corrections", where we sit and listen, day in and day out to …. Lock them up and throw away the key, No job for you, you can't be trusted now, No access, no right of way, no way – Until there is no way but back to the beginning" (Richards, 2014).

In today's society, value is placed on giving people second chances and acknowledging that everyone is human, which stems from the knowledge that we, as humans, are not infallible, and people will make mistakes (Achankeng & Hagen, 2019). However, people in prison are often overlooked as members of society, and it is perhaps easier to forget that people who are in prison are human too. Members of the community are actively encouraged to fear people who have been to prison by the constant insistence from the government that one of prison's main purposes is public safety, implying that if communities value their own safety, they must condone the harsh treatment of those who are supposedly a threat to it. The experience of prison is kept separate from those in the community, quite literally as prisons are on the outskirts of society (for example, Arohata women's prison in New Zealand is in Tawa and Rimutaka prison is in Trentham, both a substantial drive from Wellington City), and the lives of those in prison are invisible to everyone outside of the prison walls. Their crimes plastered across the front pages of papers, but once the prison doors close on them, its silence. The media highlights only the worst crimes, ignoring the vast majority of people in prison who are there on more minor charges, and leading the public to believe that our prisons are filled with murderers and people

who commit extremely violent crimes (Wright Monod, 2017). Those people do exist, but they are not the norm of the prison population. Only the 'newsworthy' cases with shock value make it to the papers and are shown on tv, showing a distorted reality of what the 'average criminal' in New Zealand is capable of, and potentially inciting fear in the public over what they believe to be a large population of violent and dangerous people. These individuals need society to accept them, and to give them a second chance, but as it stands, the second chances they receive are relatively empty promises from people who appear to expect them to fail. What good is a second chance if those who are giving it do not believe it will work?

2.3. Chapter Summary

New Zealand prison statistics show that there are more women being incarcerated today than there were in the past. In 2012, there were 527 women in prison (Stats NZ, 2012), five years later, in 2017, there were 702 (Stats NZ, 2017), and two years after that, in 2019, there were 729 (The Department of Corrections, 2019b). To better assist these women in their post-release journeys, the current focus in post-release programmes on the needs of male prisoners needs revising. International literature demonstrates the importance of employment in the post-release period, highlighting it as one of the key predictors of reduced recidivism, and as reducing recidivism is a governmental 'hot topic', creating better employment opportunities for people after prison should be of vital importance. Post-release employment provides income that allows individuals to acquire stable housing and maintain a healthy and secure standard of living, which in turn can help with supporting family and regaining custody of children. Employment also has benefits for individual wellbeing, instilling in those who attain it a sense of pride in themselves and restoring their faith in their abilities, and reducing the stigma and shame that they may feel upon release. Through work, individuals are introduced to new prosocial support people and can broaden their social networks. Employment gives an individual an active role in the community, securing them a place in the social structure which has value and meaning and is viewed as important and respected by other members of society. In these ways, employment can help the individual to reconnect with their own identity through re-establishing their place in the community and rediscovering their social and cultural ties.

Yet for all the positive aspects of employment in the transition from prison to the community, there exists just as many, if not more, barriers to obtaining it. Employers' unwillingness to hire someone with a criminal conviction, punitive public attitudes, untreated substance abuse issues, mental health problems and feelings of inadequacy, a lack of education

and previous employment history, a lack of skills training in prison and post-release support and a lack of positive social support on the outside are all factors which can get in the way of individuals gaining and maintaining employment once released from prison. Some issues run deep within the social and economic dynamics in New Zealand, with those who are already disadvantaged and marginalised in society often being the ones who make up the prison population. Addressing these issues is of the highest importance but cannot be done without fundamental change.

The research undertaken for this project explores the role of employment in the lives of women who have recently been released from prison, looking at the benefits of and barriers to employment through the lived experiences of those who are in the post-release period. I conduct interviews with women who have spent time in prison, as well as with people who work for organisations involved with the post-release period in New Zealand. I learn from them what they think is important, putting the voices that matter most at the forefront of my research. The following chapter outlines the methodological basis for my research and explains the research process in detail.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

The purpose of this research is to understand the role of employment in the post-release process for women who are transitioning from prison to the community in the New Zealand context. As mentioned earlier, in New Zealand, 'success' in the post-release period is measured by whether or not an individual reoffends, meaning that everything in their lives after prison is spoken about in relation to the risk of reoffending, and 'success' in the post-release period is often defined by recidivism statistics. This can be seen through Corrections constant push to 'reduce reoffending' (The Department of Corrections, 2019a). Corrections have been striving to reduce reoffending by 25%, but thus far have been unsuccessful, and therefore, the end date of this goal keeps being pushed back. This research adopts the epistemology of social constructionism, that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed, and that as qualitative researchers, to understand the world through lived experience, we must do so from the perspectives of those who live in it (Andrews, 2012), viewing the people as separate from the statistics that supposedly represent them. Applying this to my research, I interviewed two separate groups of participants. Group one was a group of women who had spent time in prison in the past and were now residing in the community. Group two was a group of people who work with women post-release for organisations whose job it is to assist the women in the first group (and many others) upon leaving prison. I decided that perspectives from each of these two groups would offer a more complete picture of the role employment plays in the post-release transition. The women themselves would be able to provide the first-hand accounts of their experiences, while the group of people working in the field would be able to offer their observations across multiple cases as well as their knowledge about how post-release processes are currently operating. This research aims to look at the post-release period from the perspectives of those who experience it and facilitate it, and the role of employment in their successful transition from prison to the community. Using a feminist methodological framework to prioritise the voices of the participants allows me to put the perspectives of the women currently going through the post-release transition at the forefront of my research and empower them to speak about their post-release experiences and the role of employment in that process. Due to the fact that almost 60% of women incarcerated in New Zealand are Māori (Stats NZ, 2017), I also draw on kaupapa Māori research principles to include Māori perspectives and approaches to the research. The following sections will reflect on my own positionality and provide some background on the methodological approaches before outlining the recruitment process, and the data collection and analytical methods employed.

3.1. Positionality

Social constructionist and feminist approaches to research stress the importance of acknowledging your own position as a researcher, both in relation to the participants and in the world in general (Andrews, 2012; Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). I am a Pākehā woman living in New Zealand and am currently a Masters student. I would describe myself as a feminist who strives for equality for all marginalised groups in society. This is where my interest in criminology stems from, and is why I chose to base my research on the post-release experiences of women. While I strongly believe the prison and post-release systems in our country are failing both men and women, as shown by the above-mentioned reoffending rates and post-prison employment statistics, my choice to focus on women was based on the fact that there is a dire lack of research on women's experience of it. The prison population in New Zealand continues to rise and more women are being incarcerated than in the past, so the need to understand women's post-release experiences, and with respect to employment, in order to improve services involved in their success, is higher than ever. I wish to point out that I have never been incarcerated, and as such, I do not know how it feels to be locked up or to experience life after prison. This is why it was important for me to conduct my research in a way that places the participants and their experiences at the forefront of the research, to highlight their lived experience of a process that I myself do not have any direct understanding of. I acknowledge that my own position as a researcher places me in a position of power within the interview dynamic. To mitigate this I chose to employ a feminist methodology, incorporating kaupapa Māori research principles, such as participant autonomy, highlighting Māori research and preparing a pepeha as a means of introducing myself, and semi-structured collaborative interviews. These will be discussed in more detail below.

3.2. Methodology and Epistemology

3.2.1. A Feminist Approach

"To address women's lives and experience in their own terms, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women, is the central agenda for feminist social science and scholarship (…) To see what is there, not what we've been taught is there, not even what we might wish to find, but what is" (Du Bois, 1979, pp. 108–110).

As my research focuses on women who have been released from prison, it is strongly influenced by feminist perspectives and approaches to conducting research. I was drawn to the principles of feminist research for two reasons. Firstly, feminist research places importance on

the participants and their understandings. A key aim of my research was to place the participants at the forefront of my research and give them an opportunity to share their post-release experiences and opinions about it. I wanted the women to feel empowered and heard, and I wanted my research to accurately reflect the role of employment in the post-release period from those who have first-hand knowledge of it. Secondly, I found myself being better able to understand my own views on the research by acknowledging my own biases and opinions when going into the interviews and when analysing the data. The fact that feminist research encourages researchers to take the time to reflect on their own position really enlightened me as to why I wanted to conduct this research and why it was important to me, which helped me to persevere through the many obstacles I faced. Through exploring my own personally held values and beliefs about prison and the post-release transition, I was not only able to separate these from the participant's views, but also take a more open approach to analysing the data, which, relating back to the first point, is vital for being able to accurately reflect the perspectives of the women and do them justice in my research.

I incorporated Gelsthorpe's (2003) key principles to conducting research within a feminist framework when doing my own research. The key principles are: focusing on sex/gender as an organising factor in society and social life; recognising how power influences social relations; understanding that behaviour can be shaped and changed depending on the social context; acknowledging that research methods need to reflect real-life social processes; understanding that undertaking feminist research involves a commitment to social change; recognising the researchers own personal and theoretical beliefs and biases and being able to reflect on these with regard to research ethics and decisions, and being open and creative in research ideas and analysis and evaluation. Feminist approaches also stress the idea of an open and equal partnership between the researcher and the participants. They emphasise the comfort of the participant and challenge the usual power dynamics in the interviewer/interviewee relationship (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006).

Based on the characteristics of my research participants, minimising power imbalances was an important concern. The women I interviewed were, to put it simply, a vulnerable cohort to work with. At the very least, these women have spent time in prison, which is immediately something to which I cannot relate. In addition, most of these women were still in a transition phase, where they are largely left to fend for themselves. They typically found themselves in a city that was not their home, with a lack of stable housing, minimal support networks, and no steady income. On top of that, they were still dealing with overcoming addictions and staying

drug-free, trying to find help for mental and physical health issues, and trying to reunite with children, family, and rebuild their social networks, all while trying to find a place to live and a way to become financially independent. It is for these reasons and many more that will be explored in-depth in the following chapters, that I refer to my participants as a vulnerable cohort. Referring to them as such is by no means a reflection of their individual personalities, as throughout each interview I found myself profoundly moved by just how strong and resourceful these women are, despite being faced with an enormously difficult situation.

Previous researchers have acknowledged that when working with vulnerable or marginalised populations, often the researcher/participant dynamics can exacerbate these inequalities and further marginalise these populations (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Zavella & Wolf, 1996). Feminist methodologies seek to avoid this from happening by encouraging researchers to acknowledge their own position as a researcher and figure out how the power inequalities can be minimised when conducting research. I did this by ensuring that the interviews were conducted in a space where both the participant and I felt comfortable, but which was not associated to either of us, so we met in cafes, where we could talk over a coffee, so it would feel more like a conversation than an interview. I also encouraged the participants to take the lead in the interviews, allowing them to ask any questions they may have and to lead the conversation in a direction that they were comfortable with, showing them that I was there to listen to what they had to say and not just to ask questions. In the past, feminist research in criminology had focused on understanding differences among women and girls with regard to offending, victimisation, and representation in discourse and media (Daly, 2010). More recently, however, there has been a shift toward trying to understand differences between women and men within these areas (Daly, 2010).

Criminology and understandings of crime and victimisation were, and still are, largely male-dominated areas of research. Men were more commonly conducting the research, creating the theories, and working in the criminal justice sector. On top of this, males were and are still more likely to be both the perpetrators and victims of the majority of crimes (the key exceptions being sexual and domestic violence where women were the main victims), and prisons worldwide are vastly more populated by men than women (Miller et al., 2000). Because of this, research on women and crime has largely been based on adapting male-focused research to 'fit' women (Baldry, 2010). Yet women perpetrate different types of offending, are victimised in different ways, and have different needs and experiences than do their male counterparts.

Therefore, a central argument of feminist approaches is that women's criminality and victimality require women-focused theories and solutions (Baldry, 2010).

While research about women and their experiences with the criminal justice system has been expanding, it is still very much in the early stages, and it is still dwarfed by male-dominated research. As the women's prison population continues to grow, both in New Zealand and internationally, attention must be paid to focusing on women's experiences of crime and victimisation, and how these differ from men's, so that theories and solutions can be targeted to address women-specific needs, rather than adopting the approach that 'what works for men can be extended to women as well.' As Hammersly states, "…since gender differences structure personal experience and belief, and given male dominance in society generally, conventional social science is primarily an expression of the experience of men presented as if it were human experience" (1992, p. 187). I see my research as taking a small step toward addressing the resulting lack of understanding about women's experience. Being a female researcher and conducting research that focuses on women and their post-release experience, my research adds to female perspectives in criminology in two ways: firstly by demonstrating a female researcher's approach to working with women; and secondly by centring the voices of women in my research.

Feminism's focus on equality empowers not only women, but also those from populations who are disadvantaged and marginalised in society. This is not advocating for more rights for one group than another, but rather advocating for equal rights for all (Scott, 1988). As a female researcher doing research with a group of women who are also marginalised with the stigma of having been 'inside' and disadvantaged by virtue of having been separated from their normal support structures, the ideals of feminist approaches to conducting research were well-suited to this particular study, and as such they largely form the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of this research project.

3.2.2. Kaupapa Māori Research Principles

When defining kaupapa Māori, Henry and Pene state that, "it literally means the Māori way or agenda, a term used to describe traditional Māori ways of doing, being and thinking, encapsulated in a Māori world view or cosmology" (Henry & Pene, 2001, p. 235). Given that in 2017, Māori women made up 59.1% of the women's prison population in New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2017), it was important to incorporate kaupapa Māori research principles and a Māori worldview in my research. Considering the statistics mentioned above, it was likely that

some of my participants would be Māori. However, even if they were not, I wanted my research to be relevant for the women's prison population in New Zealand, which is predominantly Māori. Incorporating Māori research principles, and a Māori worldview were therefore important to me either way. Mahuika explains that when non-Māori write about the lives of Māori, often they are "presuming to set themselves up as authorities on our culture yet discussing our lives and experiences in ways that are alien to our understanding" (Mahuika, 2008, p. 2). This quote perfectly depicts the importance of including Māori perspectives when analysing data relevant to Māori communities. I acknowledge that I am not the authority on Māori experiences and that I have a responsibility as a Treaty partner to produce Māori relevant research, particularly where that research concerns Māori. Therefore, where appropriate and where I am able, I incorporate Māori perspectives when analysing the data. While my research did not specifically aim to include Māori participants, it did include them, and therefore my findings are specifically relevant to Māori women.

A kaupapa Māori theoretical framework is argued to stem from two different theoretical perspectives, Critical Theory and Social Constructivism (Eketone, 2008). In line with social constructionism, kaupapa Māori research outlines that what is 'real' and what is 'true' for Māori people is constructed through Māori culture and beliefs (Henry & Pene, 2001). This shapes the way Māori view the world, and how they believe research should be conducted. As the aim of this research is to prioritise the perceptions and the beliefs of the participants above all else, looking at how gaining knowledge and conducting research is constructed in line with Māori beliefs and practices was considered important. Kaupapa Māori theory is concerned with indigenous autonomy (Simmonds, Robson, Cram, & Purdie, 2008), and as such, bringing the voices of Māori women to the forefront of my research is a way of giving these women a place to speak out about returning to the community from prison: an issue which directly concerns them. Much like the literature on the prison population is dominated by research on men and solutions based on the needs of men and then adapted to 'fit' women, New Zealand penal policies and solutions are often taken from the UK and the US, and as such, are often Eurocentric (Henry & Pene, 2001) and then adapted to 'fit' Māori. There are programmes inside prison which specifically target Māori, however when it comes to the post-release transition, these programmes appear to be less common, despite the fact that just as a large proportion of those going in to prison are Māori, a large proportion of those coming out will also be. This research incorporates kaupapa Māori approaches to research in order to identify problems and solutions that are relevant for Māori women in New Zealand who are returning

to the community from prison and seeking work. Explicit ways in which kaupapa Māori research principles were incorporated into the research process are explained below in the interviews section, below.

3.3. The Research Project

3.3.1. Recruitment and Participants

Participants

This research has two groups of participants. The first group of participants (Group One) were selected based on two key criteria, one being that they were women, and the other being that they had spent time in prison and were currently released and living in the community. Other than these two criteria, there were no other key characteristics when recruiting potential participants for Group One.

I was initially optimistic about the recruitment process. However, this optimism quickly turned into a more realistic outlook. Given that the number of female prisoners in New Zealand is far lower than that of males, as outlined above, the potential participant pool was already relatively small. On top of this, recruiting former prisoners can be very difficult, a fact which I was reminded of consistently when recruiting. Upon release, prisoners are in a time of transition, which means that they are not easy to track down within the community. The services and groups they are in contact with, who can identify them, often have privacy policies around giving out their personal contact information. I also had to keep in mind the fact that women who are reintegrating may not wish to volunteer for such a project. With these things considered, as well as the time-restraints of my research, I went into the recruitment process without a set number of participants in mind and with the knowledge that I had to be flexible and open to change my research plans. I was able to recruit 5 participants for Group One, all of whom participated in an interview and allowed me to use their transcripts for my research. These women were of mixed ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds, and were from various places. They had spent time in different prisons across New Zealand.

Participants in Group Two were individuals whose work is in supporting those reintegrating from prison in New Zealand. I had not initially planned to include this group in the research. The decision to do so was made due to the aforementioned difficulties involved with recruiting women for Group One, which will be discussed in more detail in the limitations section. Group Two included 5 people from various organisations that help men and women

upon their release from prison. The only characteristic for this group was that their work is to do with the post-release period. The addition of this group meant I would be able to gain other perspectives from people who have first-hand experience working in the field and who work directly with these women, so they see what they go through upon release. From the available literature and information on the post-release experience in New Zealand, it is difficult to piece together an accurate picture of what life on the outside looks like for those currently experiencing it. Therefore, interviewing people working in the field would also provide insight into the programmes and services involved and help to gain a better understanding of what is offered to people upon their release from prison. After recruitment of both groups, I had a total of 10 participants, 5 for each group.

Recruitment

Various recruitment methods were used to try to find potential participants. Initially, I reached out via email or phone to people involved in the post-release transition in New Zealand. Unbeknownst to me at the time, these people later went on to make up group two. This included organisations that work primarily in post-release assistance, or are involved in various aspects of it, such as accommodation, health-care, support networks, various women's organisations, and various programmes that are available to people who have been released from prison. Almost all of the people I reached out to responded, and were willing to help in one way or another. I was often pointed in the direction of someone else they thought might help me, which sometimes resulted in me coming full circle back to people to whom I had originally reached out. While at times this was incredibly frustrating, this showed me that the post-release organisations in New Zealand are relatively well connected, and highlighted the 'key players', thereby showing me who the best people to speak to were. I received many suggestions and a lot of support for my research, and on a few occasions, I was put in direct contact with potential participants, which resulted in interviews being set up. I would not have made it far in the recruitment process without the help and support of these people. Their willingness to assist me and to direct me on to others who may help reassured me that although the post-release space is not an easy field to work in, those who work in it are a community of kind and supportive people who care deeply about the work that they do.

To further get the word out about my research and try to recruit participants, I also created a flyer detailing the intentions of research, who I was aiming to recruit, and my contact details. These were posted on public noticeboards around the Wellington region: in community

centres, supermarkets, gyms, churches, hospitals, and corner dairies. This method was successful in setting up at least one interview. Overall, the recruitment process was long and I met many dead ends. Almost everyone I spoke with expressed how difficult it was to get in touch with this particular cohort, so I persisted despite often feeling despondent about whether I would succeed. However, I was able to get in touch with potential participants and arrange to meet them. Once I had interviewed one participant, I also used a snowball approach and recruited further participants based on whom the existing participants knew. These participants were reached by passing on my contact information to others who might express an interest in the research.

Group Two was recruited via email. After deciding that I needed to expand my research to include the perspectives of those who work in the field, I reached out to the people I had initially contacted to help me in the recruitment process for group one, and asked whether they were interested in being interviewed themselves. I decided to interview an equal number of participants for each group, resulting in five participants for each group, and ten in total. Recruitment took far longer than I initially planned. Other barriers I encountered during the process are discussed in the limitations section at the end of chapter 3.

3.3.2. Ethics Statement

All participants gave written, informed consent to be interviewed. Participants were provided with an information sheet prior to the interview and were verbally informed of their rights as participants before the interview commenced. This included informing the participants that their identity would remain anonymous throughout the entirety of the project, that they could refuse to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with, that they could end the interview at any time, and that they could request that I remove their information from the final thesis and any further publications at any time before the end of December, 2019. Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded, and only upon agreement to this and the signing of a consent form did the interviews take place. A template of the information sheet and consent form can be found in the Appendices. This research was approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee, RM application ID: 0000027596.

3.3.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the research method for both groups. I used a basic interview guide to ensure key research questions were asked. However, the participant was largely in control of what they were comfortable talking about and what we discussed.

Based on a feminist theoretical framework (following Gelsthorpe's key principles (2003)) and incorporating kaupapa Māori research principles (as explained by Henry and Pene (2001)), the interviews were structured as conversations between equal partners, and the comfort of the participant was the primary concern. McIntosh and Morse (2015) explain how semi-structured interviews are an important method for gaining subjective knowledge from individuals who have experienced a particular situation, for which existing literature and information may provide objective knowledge, but where subjective responses are lacking. Semi-structured interviews were used in this research to do precisely that, to gain first-hand knowledge and perspectives from those directly involved. Throughout criminological research, one group of perspectives is commonly lacking, those of people who are/have been incarcerated. In their work, Phillips and Bowling (2003) stress the importance of emphasising minority voices in criminological research. Though their research primarily refers to ethnic minorities, this can be applied to other groups as well, such as incarcerated women, who in New Zealand are very much a minority group, with only 729 women in prison, compared to 9324 men (The Department of Corrections, 2019b). As mentioned above, close to 60% of the women in prison are Māori, and therefore, this group represents an ethnic minority group in New Zealand as well. Phillips and Bowling state that there is a "need to reconcile criminological data with the 'lived experiences' and subjectivities of minorities," (2003, p. 270). Through the use of semi-structured interviews, that is what this research aims to do. I hoped to be able to give a voice to those who are usually overlooked, and yet whos opinions should matter the most since their lives are the subject of studies in this field. The use of semi-structured interviews is common in both feminist and kaupapa Māori research, and as such, there were multiple reasons for utilising this method in the current research.

All interviews were conducted in public in cafes around the Wellington region, so as to ensure the comfort and safety of both the participants and myself, and to provide us with an environment where we would feel we could collaboratively share information between us. Cafes were chosen so I could purchase a coffee for the participants as we spoke to show them my appreciation for participating in the interview. No other koha (gift or compensation) was given to the participants, and their participation was voluntary. The cafes were always located close to where the participants were residing so that I would travel to meet them, rather than them having to travel to meet me. All of the above was made clear and agreed upon while corresponding with the participants to set up the interviews, and was repeated again before the interview took place. The questions asked during the interviews were framed in a way that

would allow the participants to share their own beliefs, cultures and 'truths' without being influenced by me. In line with a kaupapa Māori approach, this provided the participants with autonomy and allowed them to speak to what was important and meaningful to them, rather than what I as an interviewer may have wanted them to say. I also offered participants the option of reviewing their transcripts if they wished so that they could ensure I was portraying their responses correctly. I also prepared a pepeha as a means of introducing myself in a respectful way to any participants who identified as Māori, or if any questions came up relating to my family and where I am from. Ancestors and places of belonging are important ways of connecting oneself in Māori culture. The duration of the interviews each ranged from one to two hours. Despite using the term 'post-release period' instead of reintegration in writing up the results, the reasons for which are outlined in Chapter 2, in the interviews, I used the term reintegration with participants as this is the term used by Corrections and most service providers, and therefore is the term the participants knew and used themselves. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and all transcribed by myself, the primary researcher. The process of data analysis is described below.

3.3.4. Thematic Analysis

"Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set," (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Thematic analysis was used in order find patterns in the data. Each individual interview transcript was coded, codes were then collated into themes, and themes were then compared across the transcripts. All final coding and analysis was done by myself, the primary researcher. The first few pages of each transcript were also coded by my Supervisor to ensure reliability in the coding process. A ground-up approach to analysis was used, whereby all themes and concepts spoken about when analysing the data emerged from the interviews based on information given by the participants. As Du Bois (1979) emphasises in the above quote, the aim was not to find what I wished to find, but instead to let the themes emerge from what the participants told me in their own words. As feminist research frameworks focus on putting the participants at the forefront of the research (Zavella & Wolf, 1996), I felt it was important to take the themes from the interview transcripts, rather than try to fit the participants' responses to any pre-existing themes. However, as the interviews were semi-structured, I was looking for answers to some specific questions, so some of the codes and themes were pre-existing, stemming from the interview questions. Despite this, if questions went unanswered or participants shared information they felt was more valuable, their responses were prioritised

over any of the pre-existing themes. The results and discussion section will discuss the findings that are a result of this process.

3.3.5. Limitations and Reflections on the Research Process

This research project was not without its limitations. Firstly, gaining ethics approval to work with this particular cohort was a harsh initiation into the world of ethics. Coming into my Masters, I had never had to complete an ethics application before. However, coming out of my Masters, I feel like a seasoned professional. With the help of my supervisors, my first application went relatively smoothly. I learnt a lot about ensuring the safety of both the participants and myself, and found the process useful for learning about conducting ethical research and the kinds of things I should be considering. Then, I lost a key contact and was forced to change the direction of my research, leading to a first ethics amendment. I wasn't thrilled at facing the application process again, but I persevered and after a few emails back and forth about required changes to my application, the first amendment was finally approved.

The recruitment process was an eye-opening experience for me and taught me a lot about the difficulties of working with vulnerable and marginalised populations. Looking back, I would describe this as more of a journey than a process. I emailed every organisation or group that had anything to do with post-release in New Zealand several times each, to the point where I began to feel like if I ever applied for a job within the field in New Zealand, people would probably remember me as the persistent student who emailed them until she got a response. Luckily, everyone I spoke to was supportive and willing to help however they could. Unfortunately, a lot of the time this involved them suggesting I contact someone else, and considering I had emailed the majority of post-release assistance groups in New Zealand, these were often people with whom I had already spoken. After weeks of going around in circles, I finally got a few leads and managed to set up some interviews. However, these proved to be few and far between, and as the weeks went on, I resonated with what everyone had been telling me: this was a very difficult cohort to get in touch with.

After a few sit downs with my supervisors, the decision was made to add an extra group of participants: practitioners working in post-release assistance, and with that, came a second ethics amendment. This amendment came through quickly and I proceeded to re-email the people I had previously been in contact with, though this time with the intention of asking them to participate in the interviews themselves. I am generally uncomfortable with requesting so much of people who owe me nothing, especially when I was not offering them much in return,

so I had to step outside of my comfort zone with this, something I found myself doing a lot throughout the research process. Thankfully, the people I reached out to for interviews were more than willing to help, and the interviews proceeded. All of this meant the recruitment and interviewing process was much more time-consuming than I originally thought, and I had to constantly revise my project timeline and work on multiple sections of my thesis at once.

Had I known going into this research project how difficult recruitment was going to be, I most likely would have changed my whole project. I still could have after the first speed bump, however by then I felt committed to my project and to sharing the experiences of my participants, and after doing the interviews and meeting all of these wonderful and inspiring people, I am glad that I stuck with this project. Through the limitations of this research, I have learnt a lot about ethics, research, my participants and myself, and in the end, the limitations I faced formed an important part of the research process, and I will reflect back on these limitations throughout the results and discussion sections.

3.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines my own positionality as a researcher and the research methodologies that underpinned this project, followed by the way that data was accumulated and then analysed. I explained why social constructionism was a paradigm used throughout this research, illustrating how knowledge and perceptions of the world are socially constructed through interactions with others and different lived experiences. I outlined how this research draws on feminist and kaupapa Māori research approaches, which posit putting the participants at the forefront of the research to share their lived experiences in their own words and in line with their own beliefs. The lived experiences of two different groups of participants were important to this research. Group one was chosen for their experiences as women who have been in prison and who are now reintegrating back into the community, and group two were chosen due to their experiences as people who assist with the post-release transition in New Zealand. Section 3.3.3. outlined how semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data, and detailed why this particular method was chosen, the key reason being that I wanted the interviews to be largely participant-led so as to gain a sense of what the participants deemed as important to be discussing. This interview style also allowed me to ensure that the participants were only required to discuss what they were comfortable sharing. The limitations to the research, primarily in the recruitment process, were also discussed in detail. The following chapters will present the research results, focussing on the key findings from the thematic

analysis and discussing the research findings in depth. Chapter 4 discusses benefits of employment that go beyond financial necessity, Chapter 5 looks at the barriers to gaining employment after prison and Chapter 6 discusses the key outcome of this research, that employment is but one part of a post-release puzzle.

Chapter 4: Not Just About Earning a Living

This chapter will discuss the benefits of paid employment as perceived by both groups of participants: the women and the practitioners. As many of the benefits are tied to barriers/problems, these are also discussed in this chapter when necessary, and will be discussed in more depth in Chapters 5 and 6. This chapter will focus on how employment means more than just financial stability for the women, and how it is perceived to have an impact on their lives and their success in the post-release experience in other ways. While money was noted as a factor throughout the interviews, I learned that employment can also enhance well-being and improve chances at a successful transition from prison to the community through a variety of other factors, which were expressed as being equally, if not more important than the financial benefit. The key factors I found, which have not been discussed in great detail in previous literature, is that for women leaving prison and looking for work, employment is about improving self-worth; for forming positive social connections; for keeping busy; and establishing routine in their lives. The chapter will be broken down into subsections which each describe the key benefits of employment post-release, as told to me by my participants. It is important to note that in this chapter and throughout the thesis, all names of the participants have been changed so as to protect their identity, and any other identifying information has been excluded. This means that I will not be stating the practitioners' specific roles/organisations, but instead, just the general area that they work in. This chapter also explores how the women perceive employment after prison in the face of the societal pressure for them to get any kind of job to pay the bills, and to do so quickly following their release. The following quote from a participant, Rebecca, outlines the pressure she experienced from family to get any job she can, which was in contrast to her desire to find a job she loves that will make her happy:

> So, I had my family being like "when are you going to get a job?" "you should have a job"... like fuck you. I need, like I've just been in jail for two years of my life, sitting in a fucking cell going "…time...time…time… one day down" I need to find my feet, and balance and direction, you know, because in jail they don't give you that, or help you find something, and then they all just expected me to go and do a factory job or something and I'm like "how mother fuckers, I'm not no factory worker." Like no way, I'm too much of a free spirit to have any kind of Government expected job. But they're like, work means work, it doesn't matter if you're unhappy, you just need money. And I'm like, oh no, I need to be happy – for me.—Rebecca.

Rebecca's response illustrates pressure placed on women who are re-entering society to find employment. It also demonstrates the contention between employment as a source of income, and employment as something that can be enjoyable and fulfilling. Throughout Rebecca's interview, she highlighted many of the immediate employment related difficulties faced by women post-release that were discussed in the previous chapters. The most recurring theme throughout Rebecca's interview was the need for direction. As discussed in Chapter 4, the women need to 'find their feet' and settle into life on the outside and gain a sense of direction about what it is they want to do with their lives.

4.1. "People Like Us"

For most of the women I interviewed, re-gaining a sense of self-worth was an important aspect of the post-release period, and employment emerged as a factor that could impact how the women view themselves. As noted in the previous chapters, the prison experience is belittling and dehumanising and has negative effects on mental health (McCausland, McEntyre, & Baldry, 2018). Rebecca reflected this in the way she spoke about their treatment after prison:

> "It's like, there's all these broken women, and they just kick you the fuck out. It's like, off you go, you've done your time, off you go criminal, try and um, make your way out there"— Rebecca.

Prison perpetuates the 'us and them' mentality by way of alienation (Zehr, 2000). People in prison are quite literally removed from society in a physical way but are also socially and emotionally alienated through a lack of connection with the 'outside world' and through the fact that their experiences are 'invisible' to the rest of society (T. McIntosh, 2017). This creates an automatic group distinction between those who have been to prison and those who have not, which continues after release as individuals try to re-enter a society to which they have had no connection for a long period of time. The label of 'criminal' follows the individual post-release, both formally and informally further isolating them from society (Becker, 2003). Shaking this label, especially once internalised, can be very difficult. Maruna (2011) suggests that one of the reasons the post-release period is fraught with problems, is because there is no ritual associated with it. When a punishment is handed down to an offender by a judge, this is a type of 'status degradation' ritual signifying that the offender is no longer one of us. The transition back into the community, however, does not follow a ritual, and so the offender remains an outsider. Incarceration de-individualises those who end up in prison, and a 'reintegration ritual' which is "powerful enough to counteract these degradation effects" is needed (2011, p. 3).

Hopelessness can follow alienation. When speaking about motivation to find employment, Ellen, who works to help both women and men in the post-release period, talked about how prison can have a negative impact on the motivation levels of individuals. She said:

> Prison is almost like a very demoralising thing. It almost grinds that hopelessness into them, like 'I'm hopeless, I'm here for this reason and I can never get out of this situation'. So I think also it can really grind their motivation into the ground.—Ellen (practitioner)

Employment is a factor that can help with restoring self-esteem. When asked what employment means to her, Caroline said, "It gives you the feeling that… that you're worth something". This sentiment of feeling worth something and feeling valued is reflected in the following two interview excerpts from the practitioners who assist the women in the post-release transition:

> It normalises their lives. They feel um, valued. They feel they're moving on with their life. Um, they've got all these goals that they come out with and straight away, employment is usually at the top of the list of things to do…and through their employment they often meet people and yeah, and that's really, really helpful.—Emma (practitioner)

> I just think it probably restores a sense of self-worth to them to know that they can give back and contribute to society and that they've got their own money.—Anna (practitioner)

Employment, by providing the women with feelings of value and self-worth, can be seen to counteract some of the damaging effects of incarceration. A study by Kalemi et al. (2019) found that self-esteem was lower in women in prison than in women with no criminal history, suggesting that self-esteem is an area to focus on when trying to integrate women back into the community after prison. Rebecca, too, noted that feeling proud of herself, as well as having others feel proud of her, was an important aspect of employment for her. She said:

> Oh my god, okay, it's sooo important to me, I'm just, I'm constantly being proud of myself, it's nourishing my heart knowing that I'm doing the right thing you know? And my family are really proud of me.—Rebecca

It was clear that all of the women suffered with low self-esteem and a negative self-concept. They felt that the system, as it is now, does little to support the women to break free of these negative feelings. Prison left the women feeling demoralised. Many also noted struggling with mental health issues throughout their sentence and upon release, amidst a lack of mental health support. When talking about her initial few weeks of release and her experience with getting mental health assistance, Caroline stated:

It's like you've been chucked in the ocean and you feel like you're sinking. That's how I felt… I'd say that maybe 10% of people will mental illness get help. Um, it, it's just the mental health system is overwhelmed. Like when I got out I, as I said it felt like I was going to sink so I reached out to the mental health people here and by the time I got help I could of killed myself, like I thought about killing myself and then the consistency with the help, like… I could of killed myself 20 times by now and I can see how the suicide rate is so high because it's so overwhelmed, there's not enough money, there's not enough resource workers—it's shocking.—Caroline

This was heart-breaking to hear and made it clear that women need more emotional support, both in prison and upon release. Gavin supported the idea that people in/leaving prison often need more therapy-based help rather than punishment, and he also supported the idea that the women should have more of a say in what kind of support they need, saying:

Most people ending up in the criminal justice system need therapy not punishment. We have no knowledge of what the prison programs are or what might be necessary to make that transition work. The problem is that the decisions around what these women need are made by Corrections' experts and very little work is done on asking the women themselves what they need or what would work for them. A support infrastructure that supports these women to transition back into the community is needed. A financially robust support structure.—Gavin (practitioner)

All of the participants noted that gaining employment could help to alleviate these feelings and improve the women's perception of themselves, which is in line with the study by O'Brien (2001), mentioned in Chapter 2. Gaining employment could help facilitate connections to the community too, which in turn could have positive effects on mental health. As noted earlier, social support is one of Western's key pillars of reintegration (Western et al., 2015). Social connections and the link to employment in the post-release period will be discussed in the following section.

4.2. "You Want that Human Connection"

It was commonly stated throughout the interviews that employment facilitates social connections for the women who are likely to be in an area that is new to them. Having a job would enable the women to feel as though they are part of the community and contributing to the community in a productive and respected way, and help to build prosocial support outside of prison. For a lot of the women, one of the hardest parts of transitioning back into the community was the loneliness they felt once outside of prison. Inside prison, they are

surrounded by people every day, and they are people who can relate to what they are going through. Once they have left prison however, they are largely on their own, and often find themselves in new cities where they need to rebuild their entire lives. Three of the five women were Māori, or identified closely with parts of Māori culture, and to them, being away from family was cited as being one of the things they missed most, and one of the things they felt would have been of the most help to them. Tracey commented on how her extended family all used to live close by, they would share childcare duties, cook meals for each other and just generally be around to help each other out. This is common in Māori culture (Moeke-Pickering, 1996), and due to Tracey having to be released in a new city away from her previous life, she was greatly feeling the impacts of not having her usual family support system. Tracey felt that getting a job would provide her with a way to meet new people in the area and create a new support system. Staying away from negative influences in their lives was commonly cited by the women as one of the main focuses for a successful transition to the community, but they often found it difficult because as much as they didn't want to return to that lifestyle, they felt lonely and were in need of familiarity. When asked about what she found difficult in her first few weeks of release, Tracey said:

> Um… the loneliness. Yup, the loneliness… and lack of, lack of friends. You know, cause you're so used to having people there all the time and now you're…it's just you. Bit lonely you know, I can't really go and see my old friends without getting back into that circle, you know? So…—Tracey

Upon release, the women mainly continue associating with other women who have been released due to being placed in transitional housing. Organisations such as the Salvation Army provide transition housing for people leaving prison, where they can stay for three months while looking for their own place. Moving into the transition housing is often the only choice, especially if a releasee is unable to move in with family or into other approved housing (approved meaning that Corrections has deemed it an appropriate place for them to reside upon their release). Transition houses house a few women at a time, so women often end up sharing accommodation with people in the same position as themselves. I learnt, however, that the women found it comforting to have others nearby who could relate to their experiences. As Nina told me:

> Most of them, the people I've kind of met in passing, have been like either salvation army or…yeah, so they know not to judge and they know yeah...I haven't really…yeah, I haven't really branched out.—Nina

Nina explained how she has felt generally accepted in her transition from prison to the community due to the fact that most of the people she has met have been people in a similar position, and therefore, they don't pass judgement on her criminal history. However, she did note that she hasn't 'branched' out and tried to meet other people, people who don't know about her history, and she was afraid of being stigmatised and discriminated against, which was a common feeling among the women, and rightly so, as it is so often pointed out in the literature that this is what happens (Lam & Harcourt, 2003). Nina spoke about feeling apprehensive about applying for jobs because she was worried about meeting people and having to disclose her offending past, she said:

> Ummm…Just in the back of your mind, about work you know, is people, are people going to judge me or not? Its, yeah. And I guess it's that um, getting over, getting over saying that I'm from prison, you know? You've got to learn to just say it. Say it, instead of ohhh, how do I not answer this question? Or, yeah. Yeah, don't know how you, cause as soon as you say prison people think the worst, they think murderer or um, or violent person or thief or…I've never stolen anything in my life…And then you say, um, meth dealer, they think oh god you know, she's a meth head, a crack head and you know, and I don't want, it took me three years to finally get the prison to actually say oh yeah okay, she wasn't a user, you know, she wasn't a user don't look at her like that, yeah.—Nina.

Nina was worried about how people would perceive her after she disclosed her offending history, and this was interfering with her making social connections outside of the group of women who she also knew had spent time in prison. So while almost all of the participants acknowledged that making social connections and having new support systems could be a positive effect of employment, as Nina points out, there is a lot of apprehension from the women in actually going out and making new social connections (and seeking employment) due to their worry about how others will view them once they find out about their offences. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5, where I explore the barriers to obtaining employment after release.

Another woman I spoke with, Jane, who has been out of prison since 2012, spoke about how as she is quite introverted and has medical conditions which require her to spend a lot of time at home resting, and how having a job stopped her from isolating herself too much, which she saw as a positive effect of employment after prison:

> Yeah and just like cause I'm…I don't really, I don't really like people [laughs] but like you know, I…I'm not like…I mean I'm real social once I get out there but like, it stops me isolating, having a job.—Jane

Caroline also spoke of not wanting to feel isolated upon release, saying:

> Because you want that, that human connection. You know? Yeah. I think that's what makes people unsuccessful in reintegration.—Caroline

It seems that while there are many factors which could make the women become isolated from the community, such as medical conditions or a desire to interact with people they know will not judge them, some of them could also see the social benefits of obtaining employment. The practitioners also noted the social benefits of employment, and focused a lot on the women needing to build strong social connections away from their previous lives. Gavin, a practitioner, spoke about employment helping to normalise the women's lives and making them feel as though they were participating in society in a way that other members of the community do.

> The main benefit to finding women employment after release from prison is that they have an opportunity to participate fully in society. Employment is not just about earning a living to acquire the necessities of life it is also about social connection.—Gavin (practitioner)

Gavin talks about employment as a way for the women to show that they are interested in being productive members of a community, contributing to society and forming social connections. Anna and Ellen stated:

> But it also just get you into that routine, that habit, and you're mixing with other people, and many of the ladies in particular will probably go along to recovery groups and recovery church, just meeting different individuals as well, you know, in a positive aspect hopefully.—Anna (practitioner)

> I guess people can find support people at work as well. So finding friends or people that know the area people that can hook you into other resources, people that can just give you a social life, gives you something to do outside of work as well so it can provide that kind of, those social connections.—Ellen (practitioner)

Anna and Ellen acknowledged the importance of building positive social connections through employment and meeting new people to help lead to other resources to aid with the transition period. They both also acknowledged the importance of the women having something to do, with Anna stating how employment helps the women form a routine and Ellen talking about how the social connections women make at work can lead to activities outside of work and

give them more of a social life. The next section will discuss employment as an important factor for keeping the women busy and providing them with a routine in their lives outside of prison.

4.3. "It's Something to do"

Employment is a way for the women to keep busy. They change from a strict routine in prison, with no freedom, to then being out in the world on their own with a lot of free time on their hands. Employment can give the women structure and having something to do with their days can keep them from relapsing into drug/alcohol habits or back into their previous offending related behaviours. All of the women I interviewed felt as though having a job was a good way for them to keep busy, as the following statements show:

> It's really important cause I…got nothing to do during the day you know? And boredom is probably not a good thing, yeah, you know cause in jail at least your day is structured and your day is filled with things that you've gotta do, whereas here it's just kinda like you're doing nothing.—Tracey
>
> I think employment, that that's important. Just keep people out of trouble.—Caroline
>
> …It's not so much of I'm scared of the outside, no way. But it's kind of like, oh what do I have to do out there, you know? It's always dumb shit [laughs] I have probation or interviews with you know, houses, or going to the doctor, or, you know? Dumb shit. It's something to do.—Nina
>
> I mean it is it's real key but it's also about um…distracting my mind you know, like having something to focus on that isn't me, just me, me, me all the time and yeah like trying to do stuff to like give back I guess like that's really cool, like if I can do that in a job then that, that's a real bonus.—Jane

As Tracey noted, in prison, an inmate's day is very structured. They get used to getting up at a certain time and having certain things they have to do each day. All of the women I interviewed spent between one and four years in prison, which is more than enough time to become accustomed to a daily routine. After they are released, they find themselves idle, and as they are often in a new place with people they do not know, and lacking in transport options, what they can actually do with their days is limited. Employment presents the women with a reason to get out of bed and leave the house, and this was something that they all said they felt that they would benefit from. Jane also spoke about employment as a way to distract her mind, noting that she doesn't want to sit around thinking about herself and her situation all the time.

She wanted a job that would allow her to think about giving back to other people by focusing on them.

The practitioners also noted the importance of employment as a way of keeping busy. They linked this to the positive social connections and spoke about how through employment, the women are kept busy doing something productive and being around people who can provide them with positive social support. This, in turn, links back to the first factor of employment as a way of increasing the women's perceptions of self-worth, where they feel as though they are doing something important and productive with their time and giving back to the community, which can help them to feel valued and can help others to see that there is more to them than just their offending history. When discussing what she felt were the key benefits of employment for women leaving prison, Ellen said:

> Structure to your life. So it provides someone to do something to distract from you know things that can be on your mind, such as such as past trauma or substance abuse issues. You know it tires you out so you go to sleep at night.—Ellen (practitioner)

Craig, who works as a manager for a reintegration/rehabilitation programme, summarised the key benefits of employment in five key words: "Security, purpose, stability, independence and routine", (Craig). All of the practitioners noted that employment is an important aspect of establishing a routine, which supports the responses given by the women themselves. This finding is also supported by the research from Skardhamar and Telle (2009, p. 4), who state that employment offers more structure, and not having it can leave the individual with more idle time to be exposed to 'criminogenic settings'. The following excerpt from the interview with Gavin explains how, in prison, the women do not have to worry about basic necessities, they know what to expect and when, and, despite the conditions that they are living in, everything is more or less done for them and they have no need to organise anything for themselves. Upon release, they are no longer on a schedule, they have no routine and they have to fend for themselves and remember to do all the basic things that they have not had to do for the last however many years. These basic tasks and re-establishing a routine are rarely cited as big factors impacting a successful transition, however within the first few weeks of release, according to the participants, these things are of the utmost importance in order to get the women settled in a new environment and prepare them for a life outside, which is vastly different from their life behind bars. According to Gavin (and supported by the other participants):

The key focus of people leaving prison in the first few weeks is usually to make sure that they have ID to open a bank account and get themselves on a benefit. In conjunction with this, they leave prison with few or any clothes and so they need to restock themselves with these items, and also, they will have been in an environment where all the toiletries have been supplied so they will have the added expense of paying for new supplies of these. Further to this, they will need to start shopping unless they are returning to an established household. They will need to work out the groceries they need to figure out how to cook and budget for themselves. These are all necessities which they have not had to worry about while they have been in prison. This is the reality of their experience, however, I think that they need to transition very slowly and carefully, for transition or integration back into society is like returning to a different world that you have not been part of for some time. It needs to be a slow and gentle transition, however, this is not the reality. Sometimes people get support with this transition, others can be simply dropped on the side of the road without any support and without any planning around the release. This is a brutal and ruthless treatment of people who have been through a totally disabling experience for which they have not been prepared in the first place or have often received inadequate help for transition.—Gavin (Practitioner)

Gavin suggests that establishing a new routine begins with basic tasks, such as those he mentions above, and then once the women are settled, they can begin looking for employment to further add purpose and structure to their lives. Gavin's quote supports a key finding from this research, that the post-release period is like a puzzle. There are multiple factors to take into consideration, many areas that need to be addressed, many things that could help the process and many that could hinder it. The post-release puzzle will present in different ways for different people, and a holistic and individualised approach is needed to target all of the relevant areas for each individual. This concept of a post-release puzzle will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, however the factors presented in the literature and in the results sections should all be considered as part of it.

It is clear that there are many benefits to obtaining employment, beyond financial stability. Despite the multiple barriers that can prevent the women from obtaining employment after prison, and many things in the first few weeks/months of leaving prison to do before arriving at a stable enough place to begin their search, it is notable that all of the women themselves identified these benefits and expressed their desire to work. As McIntosh (2017) points out, it is important that women leaving prison have agency over their post-release journey and play a role in deciding what would work for them to make their transition to the

community more successful. I strongly support this statement having spoken to women about their lived experiences of re-entry.

Chapter 5: "They Don't Care About Us": Barriers to Post-Release Employment

There are multiple barriers to gaining employment after prison that strongly impact the women's chances at being successfully hired for work. This chapter examines three barriers both the women and practitioners described in the interviews: (1) a lack of preparation before leaving prison, such as a lack of vocational training and release preparation, (2) a lack of support after leaving prison, such as general guidance and more specific employment related support and the impacts of dealing with a criminal record, (3) facing the pressures of the outside world, including an overall lack of hope, both in general about their release and specifically with regard to their employment opportunities, and the temptations that come with being released. These four key barriers were mentioned frequently by all of the participants, and are key themes which encompass other barriers that the women face as well.

5.1. The Barriers to Obtaining Employment Begin in Prison

While the interviews were focused on the post-release period, all of the women also discussed their lives in prison at length. Therefore, throughout the interviews, it became clear that the barriers to obtaining employment begin within the prison walls. As such, this section will discuss the views of the group of women about their time in prison and whether or not it prepared them for release. New Zealand research has shown that a large proportion of women in prison are from low educational backgrounds, low socioeconomic backgrounds and are likely to have had a patchy employment history (Bentley, 2017; T. McIntosh, 2017). This was confirmed through my interviews with the women and supports the earlier discussion about how REintegration is a misleading term, as many of these women were never conventionally integrated into society to begin with. Some had completed high school, while others had dropped out when they were only 15 or 16. All mentioned having little to no prior employment history, though some considered the illegal activities which led to their incarceration to be their previous 'employment' (I did not ask the women about their socioeconomic background or any more personal history, as this research will not be publishing any information which could identify the participants). They recognised that this was not a socially (or legally) accepted form of employment, however it provided them with steady income and allowed them to maintain a lifestyle that they desired, much like legal employment does for others. The goal of prison is to rehabilitate and prepare the individual to re-enter society, so the time in prison should be spent preparing the women for their release. However, according to the participants, and to the literature, this is not the case. Workman and McIntosh (2013, p. 127) state that "there

is ample evidence that imprisoning people does little to prevent crime or reduce reoffending". This supports statements from the participants of my research, such as the one below, from Rebecca, who spoke a lot about how the women need direction and healing. She speaks of the women in prison as being broken, and she talked about how prison further breaks them rather than healing them.

> There definitely needs to be a workshop for women that are getting released or are nearly released, or just more workshops in prison, because if they want bitches to stop reoffending then um, start fucking healing them…[…] you know there's, everyone's broken, it needs, there needs to be more mending and nurturing, especially for women. It's crazy, I sat there with all these ideas and like, there needs to be more workshops and programmes for women to have more direction instead of getting out and going and making more babies and getting back on the pipe. Seriously. Because that's what half of them have fucking done already.—Rebecca

Rebecca's comment outlines the need for a support infrastructure in prison which seeks to heal the women, women who she refers to as broken. What is being done about the harm that these individuals have endured? Norton-Hawk and Sered (2018) note that while incarcerated women are often recognised as also being victims, they are held accountable for their own victim status and are often surrounded by a discourse of making poor decisions, which the authors note 'depicts them as inherently flawed'. The women I interviewed did not disclose all of their personal history to me, but from what they did tell me, it was clear to see that these women have been through a lot in life and it was not one simple and intentional poor decision which caused them to end up in prison, but an array of factors which, as Rebecca stated, left them broken. All of the women I spoke to had (or still were) dealt with addiction issues, both before and after prison, three mentioned physical medical conditions which impacted their day to day life, and therefore their ability to work, all mentioned struggles with their mental health, within prison and after being released, with one mentioning struggling with an eating disorder before and within prison. Two mentioned losing custody of their young children upon going to prison, and one mentioned that her son left to live overseas prior to her incarceration, which caused her a lot of stress and heartbreak at not being able to see him. As outlined in Caroline's quote below, she struggled with her mental health and had suicidal thoughts upon release after having mental health issues which were not dealt with in prison. Caroline had especially difficult circumstances prior to her incarceration, when asked about whether she had family support and how she was coping with her mental health since being released, she said:

No, my mother had passed away and my father was in jail [...] um, well you see they're (mental health services) meant to keep in contact with me but yeah no, no they don't, and I've just moved on. Like recently I had thoughts of killing myself but I haven't acted on them because I think about my own son, and my grandmother killed herself and I saw what that done to my mum. Yeah, yeah, it's sad, but I can see how easy it is to do it.—Caroline.

It became clear throughout the interviews that the women were dealing with a lot more than just the repercussions of the crime that they committed, and though these should not be seen as 'excuses' for committing a crime, they are definitely factors which contribute to an unstable life and are reasons why the women need healing, support and guidance in prison and after. As Mills and Kendall (2018) outline, prisons continue to house mentally ill persons, and further exacerbate these issues, or even create them. They state that this problem does not point to individual pathologies, but rather to social forces acting outside of the individuals' control. Therefore, it should be the responsibility of the criminal justice system to ensure that individuals are being appropriately treated while incarcerated, and that prison conditions are not worsening or creating these mental health issues. People should not be leaving prison worse off than when they entered. Caroline very obviously needed better mental health support, and many of the others did too, as well as needing addiction support, help with getting their children back and guidance on how to go about finding employment and building a new life on the outside.

Part of this road to healing requires preparing the women for their release back into the community, and as Rebecca points out, at the very least, there needs to be workshops for women who are about to be released, or just in general, to prepare them for what is to come on the outside. From the comments made by the women and mentioned below, it can be seen that currently, this need is not being met.

Yeah, they need to sort out the programmes cause they're crap at the moment. They're just bullshit programmes and the female prisoners are just going to basically tick them off. They need better programmes and more that are like, interesting... a lot of them (the women) are so... bored. Yeah. They just think it's another box to tick, you know? They need programmes that are going to catch their attention and make them wanna learn or make them wanna listen.—Caroline.

You know the...after *** left we had this other barista lady come on and you know she was helping me with my CV and then she got told off cause she wasn't allowed to help me with my CV and then we were like, well who is gonna? Who can help me with this you know? And

they're like oh dress for success (a programme run in the women's prison)… well I can't get on dress for success you know?—Tracey.

The women outlined problems with a lack of beneficial programmes, stating that the programmes currently in prison do not capture the women's interest or encourage them to want to learn, but rather are boring and are merely viewed as something that has to be done in order to 'tick it off' the list of requirements. This is supported by the research by Bentley (2017), cited earlier, who found that women's prisons in New Zealand are lacking in education and vocational programmes, and often have programmes which emphasise stereotypical and outdated gender roles for women, which are not useful in the present labour market. In her study, Opie (2012b) also found that beginning the post-release journey while still inside prison would be useful, stating that helping the women create 'vision narratives' while in prison to help them plan their lives on the outside could be highly beneficial. The women also spoke about a lack of people within prison who could actually help them with what they needed, such as writing a CV. Tracey spoke about how in one of her training programmes, the woman who ran the programme was helping her to write a CV, yet the lady got in trouble for doing so as it wasn't meant to be part of her job, despite the fact that the programme was directed at training the women to get jobs after prison. Upon questioning who she was meant to go to for assistance with her CV, Tracey was told that the people in the 'Dress for Success' programme could help her, however Tracey was unable to get into the dress for success programme, saying that it was very competitive to get into, and therefore, she was not able to access this kind of support. On the plus side, Tracey also noted that while in prison, there were programmes which were targeted to the Māori prison population, and she found these very beneficial, however since her release, she had struggled to find any similar support programmes for Māori.

The women stated that the kind of assistance that was available to them in prison was very much dependent on the length of their sentence, with those on longer sentences being offered more assistance as they had more time to go through the various programmes. This ends up strongly disadvantaging the women who are in the middle ground, as they are in prison for long enough that it has a big impact on them and their opportunities and links to the outside, but also, are not in for long enough that they benefit from the programmes being offered. Webster, Hedderman, Turnbull, and May (2001) state that it is very concerning that shorter sentences are generally the most common reason for people not being able to access courses in prison, since a large amount of reoffending is committed by individuals who were sentenced for less than a year. In a roundabout way, this can also cause the women to be kept in prison

for longer periods of time, as parole requirements mean that they need to complete certain programmes and courses in order to be considered for parole, and yet they are often denied from these programmes due to a limited availability. The women spoke of this as being very frustrating, and not getting the proper help they need while in prison due to having a shorter sentence can be incredibly harmful and can bleed over into their lives once released and cause further difficulties for them. Jane outlined this struggle for those 'in the middle', on long, but not long enough, sentences, saying:

> I think there's always a problem, like I've been thinking about it more and more since my friend brought it up the other day, that like, there's a massive problem with the middle people. So like if you've got a short lag then that's sort of, well it's still shit but you know you need less reintegration I guess, and then, but then like if you've got a longer lag then you get like maybe free study, self-care, work to release…, but the middle people get nothing, and then it's the same with like mental health. So like I've got OCD but I'm not like so bad that I can't you know, like I can't touch things or whatever, I don't know if they're really bad. And then but then I'm not like, it still like affects me hard out, I'm in the middle and so there's not a lot of support. There's not a lot of funding…I wouldn't make it to the mental health thing you know… like yeah so it's hard always being in the middle I think yeah.—Jane

However, even those who did have access to some of the programmes inside prison, all of the women who had used them felt that they were not enough, and that not enough was being done in order to help the women, both while inside the prison and in order to prepare them for their release. Rebecca told me a story which surprised me. She began by telling me about a woman who worked with the women leaving prison, whose role was to prepare the women (and men) for employment by helping them with their CV's, training them in how interviews would go, what to wear, what would be asked of them, etc., but most importantly, she connected the women with employers who would be willing to hire them. However, Rebecca then went on to tell me that the woman in this role had been made redundant shortly before Rebecca was due to be released, funding had been cut to this role and they no longer provided this assistance to people leaving prison. Rebecca was crushed, and said:

> But do you know what's happened? Corrections have made her redundant okay, she was our hope. Because I met her before she got made redundant, she did the education and training and helped us get jobs after prison, with the Salvation Army and probation, and her jobs been cut because they can't fund her anymore. So we're fucked honestly. So because I met her, and she got the other girls jobs before she got, before she got let go…so I'm like going on about it like "what the fuck is wrong with you" and it's like "oh, did you need a new flavour in your slushie

machine?" Like no, what the fuck. They don't care about us, coz when we get out of jail, especially with my convictions, she knows employers that will get us into jobs with our convictions, she was a gold nugget for people like us, you know.—Rebecca

Rebecca saying "they don't care about us" basically summed up all of the women's comments about their time in prison into five words. There's some irony in the fact that while these women are in prison and are deemed to be in 'the care of the state', the only form of care they seem to find within the prison walls is among each other. The women felt a lack of support in all areas, from mental health, to coping with addiction issues, to feeling prepared for the outside world. They had hope in the form of one woman, who they saw as a vital asset for their transition back into the community and finding employment, and she was made redundant, leaving the women to once again feel let down by the system and to feel alone in their journey back into the 'real world'. Unfortunately, being released from prison unprepared is just step one of the journey, and being outside prison brings with it many more barriers that the women face in their search for normalcy and acceptance. The next section will discuss the lack of support on the outside, which when combined with a criminal record and a lack of preparation in prison, makes gaining employment very difficult.

5.2. "In our Society, People Who have a Criminal Record are Discriminated Against"

Unfortunately, the lack of guidance within prison continues when the women are released. They leave prison largely untreated for their mental health and addiction issues, and overwhelmingly unprepared for re-establishing their lives and integrating into the community. Though their sentence is now over, their punishment continues in the form of a criminal record, which will now follow the women everywhere they go and have an impact on their opportunities as well as their social status. As mentioned previously, criminal records are both a formal and informal form of punishment, and the implications of having a criminal record are far-reaching. Lam and Harcourt (2003) explain that the double jeopardy principle means that an individual is not punished (legally) twice for the same crime; however, they go on to say that with a more wide application of this principle, an individual should not be subjected to further 'punishments' after their sentence is served, such as discrimination and stigma from the general public. Criminal records further this discrimination and are almost like a secondary punishment for the same crime. In a study by Ispa-Landa and Loeffler (2016), the criminal record was described as an indefinite punishment, with the participants of their study expressing concern that this would subject them to a long-lasting social stigma. This subsection will discuss the women's experiences once released, with a focus on how criminal records have

impacted them and how there are a lack of services available to help them contend with this barrier. This section will also draw on the interviews with the practitioners to add new insights into support for the women post-release and the implications of living with a criminal record.

> The state of reintegration in New Zealand is appalling and a national disgrace. It is under-valued, under-resourced and the value and need for it seemingly not understood. $200,000,000 is spent on rehabilitation, with questionable outcomes. While $20,000,000 is spent on reintegration. There have been improvements with the introduction of Out of Gate services which supports the less than two-year cohort. This service was not without problems, which resulted in Corrections putting out a new RFP (request for proposals) for the service. If it is bad for men, it is markedly worse for women.–Gavin (Practitioner)

While Gavin has devoted a lot of his time to working with individuals post-release and sees it as a truly rewarding job, he is very honest about the effectiveness of post-release assistance at present, and feels that massive, widespread changes are necessary:

> The number of people going back to prison is a Corrections statistic. It is because they don't receive enough support or because they return to the lifestyle and influences which took them there in the first place. Certainly, once they have been in prison, they have several new factors to contend with. They are now discriminated against in the job and accommodation market as well as having to re-establish themselves in the community with minimal assistance.—Gavin (Practitioner)

Gavin comments on the minimal assistance offered to people once leaving prison, and refers to the impacts of a criminal record when he states that people leaving prison are discriminated against in the accommodation and job market, which is supported by findings from the literature (Bentley, 2017; Ispa-Landa & Loeffler, 2016; Lam & Harcourt, 2003). Importantly, his comments are also supported by the lived experience of the women I interviewed. Nina stated that for her, the thought of having to tell people that she has been in prison made her feel uncomfortable about asking for jobs or applying for housing. She said:

> Ummm… Just in the back of your mind, about work you know, is people, are people going to judge me or not? It's, yeah. And I guess it's that um, getting over, getting over saying that I'm from prison, you know. You've got to learn to just say it. Say it, instead of ohhh, how do I not answer this question?–Nina

From Nina's comments, I found that the women were conscious of how their criminal record would affect their job prospects, so much so, that it would often get in the way of them even approaching people about the possibility of work. Like Nina, a lot of the women noted feeling

worried about being judged by others before they had even shared that information. This finding supports that of Pager (2003), who notes that stigma can be a barrier to obtaining employment after release, as was mentioned in Chapter 4, and by the literature discussed earlier in this section. In this way, a criminal record doesn't just diminish their chances of getting a job, but also reduces the likelihood that they will feel comfortable looking for employment, as they have little hope about the outcome. The following statement from Ellen's interview supports this interpretation, as she spoke about witnessing how the women become deterred from looking for employment because of having a criminal record. Ellen said:

> I've seen it, yeah, and I think it's almost a, self-fulfilling prophecy is the right term, in that way. But they know they've got criminal records and they can't fix that and they don't want to apply for jobs because of that. So it's almost like they don't want to try because they've been labelled and they think that employers are going to take one look at the criminal record. And so yeah, as I say, they lose motivation to do these kind of positive things which is a real shame because there are employers that won't hire people with criminal records. And I've seen people who will think that their dreams are totally crushed because of you know, one instance. So you know, I'm just trying to encourage them to get back on the right track and if we had these agencies to recruit them, it would make things even easier and stuff for them you know, just be like OK you can go and see these people and these people can help—Ellen (Practitioner)

What I found throughout the interviews, and as Ellen pointed out, is that there is no one to really help the women with this problem. As mentioned earlier, there used to be a person in a role that existed that involved helping people leaving prison to gain employment. They would speak with potential employers and gauge their willingness to hire people who had criminal convictions, thereby removing the fear that the women held that no one would hire them and that they would be judged for their convictions. This role no longer exists, so the women now have to take it upon themselves to find out if people would be willing to hire them, which as mentioned above, can cause them a lot of worry and anxiety, and feelings of judgement and inadequacy. I was able to track down one woman who previously held this position, and she agreed to be interviewed for my research. Below are some of her comments on how she felt about her position, and why it was so important that the women (and men) had someone to do what she did.

> You know, hand on heart, it's probably the only job that I can say I've actually really enjoyed and I've done lots of different roles in my career. So yeah it was really because you have actually changed someone's life, you know, and I'm very happy to say that all the people that I placed are still actively employed and they wouldn't have got those roles on their own without

somebody helping a lot. So just opening a door, we can open some doors and many employers are happy to give people second chances. And if somebody has got a conviction or convictions, my experience is they're more likely to be loyal because it's not easy for them to get work … So I would definitely help them but also to feel like you need to be doing stuff for yourself so you can't just solely rely on somebody. But then there is a bit of a catch 22 because I wouldn't necessarily be out there advocating that they go cold-calling because the potential employer wouldn't know necessarily all the background and then they might be setting themselves up to fail. So it's quite good having the intermediary to do that.–Anna (Practitioner)

Anna mentioned how having someone else advocating for the women was seen positively by the potential employers, as they felt reassured that if this person is willing to speak to the good character of the individual in question, then they must have something going for them. Anna was also able to help the women prepare for interviews and guide them on how to answers tricky questions about their offending and time in prison, questions which might make the women uncomfortable. While Anna understood that funding is always an issue, she felt funding was being cut from services that were actually proving to be helpful and successful, and she encouraged those in charge to actually get feedback from those in/released from prison to understand what was actually working for them and to get a better sense of where to divert the funding to. From this perspective, one of the main barriers to successful re-entry that I have found through this research, based on the perceived lack of effective support and guidance, is the fact that the men and women who are going through this transition have no say in what works for them, they have no agency over the decisions, which as T. McIntosh (2017) points out, is vital for creating lasting change. The decisions are not made by considering lived experience and learning from it, but rather by looking at statistics and making assumptions about what people need, without asking the people in question. As everyone leaving prison is fighting a different battle, there also needs to be more individualised assistance, from someone who can point the individuals to services which will truly benefit them and their needs. Craig expressed this in his interview, that for an individual to successfully integrate back into the community, rehabilitation needs to cater to the individual needs.

Unfortunately there is limited funding/resources available for prisoner reintegration into the communities. In order for successful reintegration to occur there needs to be an element of rehabilitation to sit alongside each former prisoner. Employment and education is super important, but it cannot work in isolation. Employment is but one aspect to rehabilitation, and needs to work with other skillsets for reintegration to be successful. For example, there is no use in taking a full time job where you have mental health issues, prohibiting your ability to do

the job. A holistic approach is needed, acknowledging that wellbeing is an integral part of reducing recidivism amongst the female population.—Craig (Practitioner)

Those who work to help individuals post-release note that a lack of funding in this area causes a lot of issues. It means those who want to help are unable to do so in ways that would be of benefit to the women, and that not all bases are being covered. As Craig notes, employment is important for integrating back into the community, but it is not the only factor and often will not be successful if other factors are not also managed. As outlined earlier, all of the women were struggling with mental health, addiction, childcare and medical or other issues, both within prison and upon leaving, and all of these things need to be addressed in order to help the women maintain a sense of stability in their lives that allows them to be ready to enter the workforce. As Craig said, a holistic approach is needed, but due to funding restrictions and a lack of truly beneficial and individualised assistance, this need is currently not being met. On top of this, employment is perhaps the factor most impacted by a criminal record, and the following statements from the participants show how they perceive a criminal record to impact on employment.

> Instead of being integrated into society after their imprisonment experience, people are further disabled and excluded from that society because they are branded as having been prisoners or ex-prisoners, which usually makes them a less desirable employee. The main barriers to women acquiring employment after prison are as I outlined before the fact that in our society people who have a criminal record are discriminated against. It is not simply a case that people have done the crime and done the time and then the sentence is over. The sentence goes on forever or as long as the sentence impacts on a person's employment history. A criminal record does not mean that a person has no chance of employment. However, it does mean that they have a huge barrier to overcome that a person without a criminal record does not, therefore they are severely disadvantaged in the employment stakes.—Gavin (Practitioner)

> I don't think many people are wanting to employ people with criminal records, especially when there's other people out there without a criminal record that they can employ.—Caroline

> I can understand why employers would be wary but your criminal history doesn't define who you are as a person, you know?—Tracey

A second chance is what is needed for those who have been convicted (Achankeng & Hagen, 2019), and the practitioners are people who are willing to give them one. However, due to the damaging effects of incarceration, funding issues, a lack of beneficial, individualised programmes and the weight of criminal records, which were found to be the key barriers to

success in the post-release period, it is not surprising that thus far, post-release efforts have been unsuccessful.

5.3. Internal and External Pressures as Barriers to Employment

This sub-section discusses how the pressures the women face upon release can act as a barrier to success in the post-release period, and a barrier to gaining employment. The women face both external and internal pressure about needing to be successful, to stay clean, to find employment and so on, and due to the above-mentioned factors, the women feel a general lack of hope about finding employment accompanied with the pressure they feel to get a job and earn money and live a 'normal' and socially accepted lifestyle. With no direction in prison, no guidance or support after prison, and the pressures they face in the initial release period, they often have little hope that there actually is anyone out there that would hire them and they don't believe that they systems put in place to assist them are acting in their best interests. The women often reported having issues which could affect their ability to work, which further diminished their hope and their confidence in themselves to find employment, and due to funding cuts and lay-offs, the hope they had in others to help them was also gone. In many cases, this lack of hope about life outside prison led to temptation to go back to their previous lifestyles, as illustrated by the following quote from Nina:

> It makes, if you're not… if you're not strong minded and you're a, you know, you… you'll go backwards, you know, you will. You'll go backwards because you've got nothing and you've got nowhere to go and you think… yeah, yeah. I just think, I've been to prison, I can handle anything now, yeah. But a lot of people you, you know, they'll just think 'oh fuck this, I'm broke, I'm going to go sell or steal that, or…' yeah.—Nina

Nina talked about the frustration that many people she knew who had left prison felt when they were unsuccessful in looking for work, which in turn meant they were very limited financially. She explained how this often led to people thinking about reverting back to illegal ways of obtaining money, since the legal ways were proving to be too difficult. This contention is outlined in the study by Skardhamar and Telle (2009), who note that when the perceived financial benefits of illegal activities outweigh those of legal employment, especially when paired with a struggle to find legal employment, going back to illegal activities becomes more likely. While none of my participants expressed any desire to go back to their old lives that involved criminal activity, they did note that there was a feeling among people leaving prison that it was so difficult to maintain a successful life outside of prison, that temptation was never

far away. Most of the women I spoke with had problems with substance use, and this was proving to be the main source of temptation for them upon release. Despite not wanting to ruin progress they had made while being in prison with staying clean, and not actually wanting to go back to using, they found being around drug use to be very difficult. As the women are all usually housed together in transitional housing when they leave prison, if one person relapses, the others are all around it all the time as well. The findings of a study stated that former inmates were likely to experience exposure to drugs in their living environments immediately following release which can cause them to relapse (Binswanger et al., 2012), which supports what the participants of this research said. The same is true for mental health, where if one person is struggling, it also brings the others down and can hinder their own progress. Rebecca spoke of this in her housing situation, saying:

> But I live with three other recovering addicts, and one's real negative, and like, I'm a very positive person, and she's just so dark, it's just it's yin and yang, it just affects all of us, and I just wanna get the fuck out of there.—Rebecca

Trying to stay clean, stay on top of their mental health and trying to find a job so they have a steady income is incredibly difficult for the women to juggle all at once when they are released, and they often feel a lack of motivation when things are not working out. For Rebecca, adjusting to being out of prison proved very difficult when she was first released, so much so that she actually missed being in prison and had thoughts of wanting to go back.

> Fuck man, I wanted to go back into jail after a week […] I was so upset because, all my family is down south, and I put myself in a new place when I was out of jail and I was like oh my god what am I doing here.—Rebecca

Despite Rebecca consistently saying that prison was not working to help women, she said she felt a sense of a sisterhood in prison, and upon leaving she felt very alone and very unsure of what she was doing. Rebecca was very adamant about not going back to using drugs and not offending again, even noting that she was glad she had gone to prison because she felt it was a wake-up call that she needed to make changes and get her life back on track. However upon release, she realised that there were aspects of prison that she missed and there were also aspects of being released which she felt unprepared for, noting that, "it takes you a good month to even realise that you're out of jail", Rebecca. Over the first few months of the release, the women feel pressure to find a place to live, find a job, stay clean, not re-offend and basically just to fully turn their lives around. As noted in the above sections, the women feel that there is little support to help them do this, and many barriers which stand in their way. It is not

surprising that all of this pressure in the first few months post-release can lead to a lack of motivation and a loss of hope if their lives aren't looking picture-perfect. However, for the women, those first few weeks of leaving prison are a crucial time, not to fully turn their lives around, but instead, to stabilise themselves and get used to 1) being out of prison, and 2) being in a new environment and getting re-settled. The quotes below outline some of the women's experiences with post-release and the things they struggled with or thought about when they were first released, things that people who push for them to get into work or up to a certain standard of living as soon as possible may not have considered or understand.

> I think addiction, feeling like ashamed or stigmatised, feeling helpless or powerless because you know, not having enough of something. Yeah and just like blocked opportunities and I guess like not having those, that holistic support. […] So a lot of the time people like I think, not that I can speak for other people but from my observations, is that like people are generally like oh that's the way it is and you just gotta suck it up you know and this is jail and this is you know life after jail and yeah, they don't really see like another way.—Jane

> To stay clean. That was it… I just kind of… kept up my prison routine. So you know I was, I stayed home at like 4:30 and I didn't really, I didn't turn my phone on for a couple of days and yeah.—Tracey

> Accommodation. Yeah trying to stabilise myself. Yeah basically, I, I applied with housing New Zealand. But there's 13,000 people on the wait list. Yeah I tried City Council but because I had one debt they wouldn't let me register with them. Yeah but then *** got involved and referred me to creating positive pathways and they picked me up… Otherwise I would have been motel hopping cause that's what I was doing cause after 3 months that, in your Salvation Army accommodation you just get… kicked out to the street, so I've had to go from motel to motel and having no car it's so difficult… lugging around…—Caroline

> I can have a cigarette! Without getting told off! But I didn't even have a cigarette, I had this vape thing that I'd borrowed yeah it was, it was that because it was kind of a rebellious thing in your head.—Nina

The above quotes show some of the women's initial feelings when they were released. Though they were all aware that at some point they would need to find work and they were all very aware that they needed to improve their financial situation, they often had other things on their mind when they were first released. Accommodation was a key factor here, as the research by Western et al. (2015) suggested it would be, and this will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Other key factors were: staying clean, which for Tracey meant that even

after leaving prison and having much more freedom, she stuck to her prison routine and would not go out in the evening and would shut off her phone so as not to be tempted to meet friends. Jane noted feeling ashamed or stigmatised, and feeling helpless or powerless when it came to not having enough of something, such as money, food, clothing, or other basic necessities. She also talked about how people generally accept that this is the way that it is and don't see another way, which is why they end up feeling powerless to change their own situation. For Nina, her first thought upon leaving prison was that she was able to have a cigarette without being told off. She said she knew this seemed like a small, insignificant thing, but in her mind, it felt like a rebellious act, because for so long it was something that would have landed her in trouble. For the women, leaving prison is such a change, that even thinking about having a cigarette when they are released seems like a big deal. As outlined above, the main structural barriers to employment post-release are a lack of beneficial vocational and educational programmes within prison, a lack of programmes, support and guidance on the outside, and a general lack of support, direction and meaningful assistance. Another key barrier is the criminal record once released and the punitive and unwelcoming attitudes of society toward those who have been in prison. All of this can lead to another barrier, and internal one, which is a feeling of hopelessness and anxiety about being out in the community, which further reinforces the structural barriers once this loss of hope becomes a response and the individuals accept that they are stuck in this cycle.

Society seems to think that as soon as the women are released, they should be contributing to the community in productive ways. But the reality is, it takes the women a long time to even feel as though they have left prison, and they need time to settle in their new environment. The women need to feel comfortable, to feel that they can do normal things without getting in trouble, to learn their way around a new city, to find a place they can call home, to get on top of their addiction issues and learn to manage them and to feel as though they belong in the community and won't be discriminated against. Essentially, the women need to regain control of their own lives before they feel confident enough to enter the workforce, and it would be beneficial to everyone if they were not pressured into working before they are ready.

As the purpose of this research is to show the women that their voices matter, the following chapter will outline the needs of the women, some of which have been described in this chapter in the form of barriers, and more importantly, will discuss how the women and the practitioners think that these issues could be improved going forward. The needs and concerns

outlined in Chapter 6 showed up less frequently in the literature, or showed up as separate factors, however the findings of this research show them to be very tied together with a large amount of overlap. The findings in Chapter 6 are key contributions to help fill in missing gaps in the existing literature. Helping the women gain control of their lives again means asking them what would work for them and what changes they would like to see happen, and the following chapter discusses their responses.

Chapter 6: The Post-Release Puzzle

Post-release employment is often viewed as a standalone variable, however throughout the interviews, I came to see that all post-release factors are part of an interconnected puzzle and single factors are generally not beneficial if they are focused on alone. Therefore, this chapter is about exploring the post-release puzzle and giving the women back the agency over their own lives by allowing them to talk about what they feel is needed. In the subsections below, I will outline the participants' responses to what they felt they needed with regard to their preparation for release in prison, their initial release period, and where they are now. I gave the women the chance to speak about what changes they would like to see, which resulted in a lot of discussion about how they feel the current system is letting them down, and their responses are given in this chapter. Responses from the practitioners to the same question are also given here. While my interview questions were mainly focused on finding employment in the post-release period, it quickly became clear throughout each interview that employment was part of a post-release puzzle.

The puzzle of the post-release period is as follows: without secure accommodation, employment can be difficult to obtain as the individual does not know where they will be residing, meaning they do not know which area to look for work in, especially as transport is often an issue post-release. However, without employment, stable and appropriate accommodation can be hard to find, as without a steady income, accommodation is very hard to secure. Then, without support, mental health, addiction and physical issues can impact both accommodation and employment prospects, and a lack of guidance can impact ones likelihood of obtaining employment as they do not know where, or even how, to look for it. A lack of assistance can impact finding accommodation, as applying for housing with a criminal record can be very difficult, especially when an individual is on the benefit and has a limited income, as is the case for most people post-release. A lack of social support means that usual options, such as staying with family or getting employment through social connections is also off the cards. Another key factor in the post-release puzzle, which was not mentioned explicitly by the participants but which became obvious through their responses, is the punitive mindset of the community. Changing the punitive attitudes of society toward people who have been in prison is paramount to helping persons released from prison feel more comfortable and accepted, and offering the individuals more opportunities to show that they can contribute to society, such as by helping them gain employment, could help to change society's views about them.

All of these factors affect the others, and it became very clear throughout the interviews that a holistic approach is needed in the post-release transition. While there is no real order in which these factors should be taken care of and individual circumstances will vary, one key finding of this research was that all of the participants agreed that accommodation was the most immediate need post-release, and was often one of, if not the main concern for the women upon leaving prison. The following subsection will discuss this finding in detail, with information from the participants on how this impacts other factors of the women's post-release experience, such as finding employment, as mentioned above. The two subsections after that will discuss other ways in which the system is failing these women, and then what the women and the practitioners think needs to happen to improve the system. In line with the feminist research methodology incorporating Kaupapa Māori research principles, this chapter is about giving a voice to the participants and putting them at the forefront of this research.

6.1. Accommodation

Every single participant mentioned accommodation as the number one priority when first being released from prison. This was a key concern for all of the women, and a factor which all of the practitioners knew to be a top priority upon release. There is also a large body of literature looking at the relationship between incarceration and homelessness, and it is a growing and ongoing issue in New Zealand and throughout the world (Couloute, 2018; Keenan, Angel, Martell, Pyne, & Ahmed, 2016; Mills, Gojkovic, et al., 2013). This finding supports Western's key pillars of reintegration (Western et al., 2015), showing that accommodation, employment and support are all vital in the post-release period, however the factors appear to be more interconnected rather than standalone factors, and the following sections will show how they are closely linked. As they all mentioned that accommodation needs to come before anything else, accommodation has an impact on employment, because without a stable place to live, the women are in no position to be looking for a job. On the flip side, without a job and a stable income, finding a place to live can prove very difficult. This section will discuss this struggle. Transitional housing is in high demand for people leaving prison in New Zealand and securing a place to live after prison can be extremely difficult (Mills, Gojkovic, et al., 2013). While the women I spoke to were lucky enough to have been able to utilise the transitional housing, their main complaint was that the housing was not available for long enough. The women get three months in this housing, with the occasional option to extend it if no one happens to be moving in at the end of their three month period, which is rare due to the huge

need for housing for released prisoners. The following quotes from the women outline this issue:

> So 13 weeks with the salvation army is just not long enough and you know they're the only places where we can get parole to you know? If I didn't have salvation army I wouldn't have got my parole. So I don't really have any family and any of my addresses that I did put up got knocked back because you know?—Tracey

> But that's what I mean, coming out of jail there's no direction, and it's like, the good thing that we are doing is we put ourselves somewhere where we aren't going back to what we were doing, and there's not that much support there for us but we're trying to do the right thing…. you only get three months and it's not long enough.—Rebecca

> Yeah like after three months in there basically I just got kicked out so I had to go from hotel to hotel until I found accommodation and I done that through creating positive pathways… well my probation officer hooked me up with them, yeah she referred me because she was impressed with my progress and they help you find affordable housing. So they rent private rentals… that's when I moved out here, but this is just a house until they find me permanent accommodation in Wellington city… yeah I don't like it out here. It's too far out, yeah it's way too far out.—Caroline

The women outline how three months is just not enough time, and they are often left with few options once the three months is up. As Tracey pointed out, she had to go to the transitional housing because at her parole hearings, all of the other possible residences she could go to were deemed inappropriate for her to live at, largely because it would mean associating with people from her life before prison, which was marked as a risk factor for her chances of reoffending. This is often the case for people leaving prison, and though it is intended for their own good, it leaves them with limited options. The Salvation Army's transitional housing fills a much needed gap in this respect, providing a place to live upon release; however, due to the large numbers of people being released from prison and the housing crisis in New Zealand in general, there is limited availability in the transitional housing (Mills, Gojkovic, et al., 2013). Caroline's account shows just how disruptive finding suitable accommodation can be in the post-release period, which can make holding down a job and maintaining good support networks difficult. The following quote from Jane outlines how having social support really helped her with finding accommodation after prison, though she also notes feeling as though she had to lie about her criminal record as she felt it could jeopardise her lease after her friend moved out.

Yeah with housing, yeah I was lucky that I had that first wings house and they were my first referee, then my next house a friend of mine was on the lease, then when she left I had to get on the lease and I kind of didn't know if I should lie or not so I sort of started lying and then it just came out and then she was like well you've proved yourself so we'll give you the lease which was amazing but that was like after years you know of like being out of jail.—Jane

The feeling of a criminal record being a barrier to accommodation was common for the women, and is cited in the literature (Ispa-Landa & Loeffler, 2016), with Nina noting:

Yeah, especially like the housing places. A lot of them don't seem to ask until you get to meet them or you're really… yeah they really wanna know well like, well where did you live before? And it's like oh my god (groans) ***Street, yeah but where before that? uhhh (groans) prison, yeah.—Nina

When I interviewed Nina, she only had five days left in the Salvation Army housing, and she did not know where she would be going next, which was causing her a lot of stress. She mentioned that they had said she may have to go and live in a 'dry house', a place where recovering addicts are housed together in a temporary living situation. Nina was against this as she felt that living with other addicts would be more detrimental to her own recovery, which was found to be true in the study cited above (Binswanger et al., 2012) however she was told this may be her only option. Another participant, Rebecca, was living in one of these recovery houses at the time of her interview, and she supported what Nina said about how being around other recovering addicts did not feel like it helped her recovery and often brought her down if the others were in a low mood. She also had the following to say about her living situation:

Yeah at the place I'm at now, like I feel like I'm still in jail. There's so many rules, no one is allowed there after nine, no one is allowed to stay over, not allowed to feed visitors, it's just like fuck off… I'm a real homely person like 'come up for tea man' … like my friends wanna come over and stay and it's like 'no you're not allowed to' it just makes me feel like I'm a child.—Rebecca

Rebecca felt like the recovery house too closely resembled her time in prison, feeling like she still had to follow strict rules and was not able to feel as though this was her home. It is clear to see that after spending time in prison, living among so many other women and in a place which in no way resembles a home, the women needed a space to call their own and a place which they felt would be conducive to their recovery, or where they could settle down in order to start doing other things to further their integration, such as finding employment. Through the interviews with the women I found that feeling stable and settled was seen as a

necessary precursor for finding employment, and this was reflected in the interviews with the practitioners, as shown below.

> For a lot of female prisoners, the issues around reintegration are mainly to do with security for themselves and whānau. In terms of finding accommodation, stable jobs and income, and childcare, so that they are able to attend rehabilitative programs without worrying about if they have enough food on their tables. If we can find ways to reduce the pressure of housing and jobs, we can then start rehabilitation and integration.—Craig (Practitioner)

> There is a discrimination in the areas of employment and accommodation. Accommodation is particularly critical. Accommodation in New Zealand has been neglected for too long. The housing crisis and the shortage of supply has been obvious as a growing problem for at least the last ten years. There have been no steps to address this problem. The current government is making efforts to address the problem however it seems to be too little too late and we will be stuck in this crisis situation quite probably for many years to come. The two highest priorities for a person released from prison are finding suitable accommodation and employment. Suitable accommodation that is sustainable for the longer term has to be the first priority. —Gavin (Practitioner)

> Accommodation is number one because if you don't have somewhere to live, how can you focus on anything else in your life.—Ellen (Practitioner)

> Definitely housing needs to be sorted out really before anything else. Work will come after, after people are just more settled. Yeah you know even if they are just in transitional housing. My experience from my previous role is that even then, I can't really be looking to place you until I know where you're going to be permanently. Because when you're in transitional housing you could be you know living in [suburbs of the city] and most of the work, a lot of the work is out in [further from the city] so many of these people, whether it's females or men that are released, they are reliant on public transport. They don't have their driver's license. They can drive… but they don't have their licence, so it really narrows it right down. So it's better if we've got them somewhere permanent.—Anna (Practitioner)

As can be seen from the above quotes, the practitioners agree the accommodation and getting settled are the top priority when someone is released from prison, and they believe that despite someone's desire to work, they need to be settled first. Anna, who works to find accommodation for homeless people, said that an overwhelming proportion of her clients are people who have been released from prison. This is supported by Baldry et al. (2006, p. 20), who note that with the rise in prison releasees (stemming from rising incarceration rates), outcomes of this have been chronic homelessness and poverty, and they state that not having

stable accommodation is a "predictor of return to prison." This clearly demonstrates that there is a real need for better accommodation services for people leaving prison (Mills, Gojkovic, et al., 2013), because, as Ellen puts it, if a person doesn't have somewhere to live and come home to every day, how can they be focused on anything other than 'where am I going to sleep tonight?' This should also be of interest to those who have a vested interest in reducing reoffending, as getting people into stable accommodation seems to be a way to do this. The accommodation aspect of the post-release period is failing a lot of people, and it is not the only one. The following sub-section looks at other ways the women feel that they have been let down in their attempts to successfully transition into the community.

6.2. A Lack of Wraparound Support: In Prison and Post-Release

From their time in prison, to their initial release, to where they are now, this section will discuss the areas in which the women felt let down, starting from in prison and extending into the post-release period. As mentioned in Chapter 5, there were things the women spoke about in the interviews which they felt were important, but were not necessarily directly related to employment. A lot of the things they brought up were issues that they had dealt with, either in prison or once they were released, which were meaningful enough to them that they mentioned them unprompted. The semi-structured interview approach used in this research were specifically chosen to allow for and to encourage these types of discussions, and so sharing the outcomes of these conversations is important to the research project. There is overlap between what is mentioned here and the barriers mentioned in Chapter 5. While in Chapter 5 they are viewed as barriers to gaining employment, in this section, they were brought up in instances where the women felt that they were aspects of the system which were not beneficial in any way, not just with regard to employment, and could be improved. For clarity, this section will outline the issues brought up, and the following section will show the participants' recommendations for improvements.

Despite my questions revolving around the post-release period, the women all talked about their time in prison, and this is where the majority of their negative feelings stemmed from. Given that we know that the vast majority of people who go to prison will, at some point, be residing in the community again, prison and life after prison should not be viewed separately. The time spent in prison should facilitate an easier transition back into the community. As it currently stands, prison has damaging and lasting effects on individuals, and creates more difficulty for them and for post-release service providers upon release, with many

noting that prison does not work (Alexander, 2010; Buttle, 2017; T. McIntosh & Workman, 2017). As noted in a book by Schenwar (2014, p. 3), "Incarceration serves as the default answer to many of the worst social problems plaguing this country—not because it solves them, but because it buries them". Though Schenwar writes about America, New Zealand is not far behind in the punitive attitudes that call for harsher sentences and tougher stances on crime (Pratt & Clark, 2005). Preparation for release and post-release planning should begin from the moment of sentencing; despite the calls for harsher sentences, most individuals will be released from prison. The focus should not just be on getting someone through their sentence, but on getting them through their sentence and out the other side, into a life which will encourage prosocial behaviour and healing. This means providing opportunities in prison for individuals to further their skills and experiences in areas that they are interested in. It means treating them for mental health and addiction issues, in the same manner a person not in prison would be treated and in a way which is conducive to their recovery. It means offering the same support on the inside that they should also receive on the outside, which includes providing the individuals with realistic expectations about how their criminal record might affect their job prospects and how they can get through this barrier. These individuals need support, guidance and opportunities, not just upon release, but beginning while they are in prison (Bentley, 2017). The women participants painted a grim picture of the experience of imprisonment, showing that the way they were treated from the moment of apprehension was essentially setting them up for what the next few years would be like for them. The following quote reflects this.

> And do you know what's even more degrading, is when you're sitting in holding cells, and there's just snot, there's bits of blood, probably urine, you know, they actually just treat you like you're a piece of shit. It's disgusting. And even in the police cells, and in the police rooms that you talk to your lawyer in, there's like splatters of blood, it's like, what the fuck is wrong with you people, like get someone to hygienically clean this. Like a virus is gonna jump off the wall, but it's like "nah, we're degenerates of society, we deserve a virus", you know what I mean… it's just, the whole thing is gross.—Rebecca

In the above quote, Rebecca is talking about when she was in the holding cells. At this point, she was not even convicted yet, but she is already using terms like feeling degraded, and saying she felt like because people who get arrested are viewed as 'degenerates of society', they are expected to sit in these conditions. Throughout the entire criminal justice system process, people who have been accused of a crime are treated as 'less than', which, unfortunately, often results in them receiving less than basic human rights, with Brown and

Ross (2010, p. 47) describing dehumanisation as "part and parcel of imprisonment". Rebecca, and some of the other women, felt that prisons especially need more mental health support which is supported by literature focused on women's mental health needs in prison (Mills & Kendall, 2016), with Rebecca stating that there needs to be separate mental health units, for the following reason:

> So we'd have to deal with, just, women that needed a bit more extra support with things you know, like one of my neighbours would cut herself, and they were pathetic little cuts, but it was for attention and like, she needs her own ward. Now I'm sitting in my cell thinking, what if she actually fucking does it you know, what if I have that one night, that she's done that right beside my cell, you know, I just put that on myself.—Rebecca

Rebecca felt that having individuals with more serious mental health concerns in among the general prison population puts an unnecessary burden on the other women. She talked about how everyone is dealing with their own issues, and the last thing they need is to feel responsible for helping someone else when no one else will, or feeling powerless to save someone when they are alone in their cell going through something. Mental health wasn't the only thing neglected in prison, with two of my participants reporting that they suffered injuries which went untreated for too long due to them being in prison, and now the injuries are worse and are preventing them from being able to work and causing them issues with paying for medical treatment and getting to doctor visits now that they are released.

> I have a back injury, so that happened in jail, well, I went in to jail with a broken back but I didn't realise and they left me untreated from May till August and then my disc completely shattered and crushed my spinal cord so now yeah I'm stuck using a catheter and I have no feeling at the back of my legs and my saddle area but I've gone to the health and disability commissioner and they're investigating to decide what action they're going to take, yeah and I've asked the, I've asked the jail for compensation as well. They're being quite difficult but I'll just keep, keep putting the pressure on and I'll get a lawyer as well. So yeah I'm going to fight for my rights with that.—Caroline

> Cause you have to, to be in self-care you have to get a job and I said to them by then my hip was really bad and I said I don't want to go to self-care I don't [due to her hip pain] And they basically said if you don't go to self-care they won't give you parole. So, I went there and the second day I was there I hurt my hip real bad going up and down ladders. Yeah, they're not very good, they didn't do really anything about it until the time was getting, until I got parole basically "oh my god she's getting out, we'd better do something so she doesn't…" you know, get out and give us a bad name… So six days before I got out I got a a steroid injection in my

hip and in my thigh. And that didn't do anything but yeah. But so they can cross that off the books.—Nina

The above examples show that despite the pain they were in, Caroline and Nina felt helpless in that they had no control over getting medical attention, and they felt they were forced to carry on as usual, with Nina being made to do work which involved climbing up ladders, despite having a bad hip. The two women express how they felt that those who were supposed to be tasked with caring for them were more concerned with protecting their own image rather than actually getting proper help for the women, which now left them with worse injuries and more to deal with upon release. Caroline and Nina both said that their injuries directly impacted their ability to work, which further limited their employment opportunities, which as discussed earlier, are already limited a lot by them having a criminal record. The women stated that they felt they didn't have support from staff in prisons, they felt like those in charge do not care about them, they were made to feel different and less deserving of humane treatment, and they felt unsettled and constantly disrupted in prison, often being moved from cell to cell, or even between prisons. It is clear that even though all of the women said that they knew they deserved to go to prison as they know they did something wrong, they believe they deserve better than the way they were treated. They felt that their time in prison did not leave them prepared to transition back into the community, but instead, left them worse off than they were before. This has an effect on everyone, because as Gavin says:

> Prison is a disabling experience which needs a special workforce to assist those people who have experienced this. In short, incarceration causes harm to the people who get caught in its web. Society not only has to pay to inflict the damage of incarceration, it is also faced with the cost of repairing the damage of that incarceration so that people can be effectively integrated.—Gavin (Practitioner)

Gavin points out that it is expensive to keep people in prison, and since incarceration causes harm, more tax-payer dollars then have to go to more post-release and rehabilitation services which are required to correct this harm. People are going to be released from prison, and therefore, time in prison would be better spent helping them to see how they can become productive members of the community, rather than drilling it into them that they are 'criminals' and should be expected to suffer, which doesn't benefit anyone.

The women also had concerns with the lack of programmes and support offered to them, largely surrounding education and vocational training. This was discussed in depth in Chapter 5, but one main finding was that the women felt that the men's prison and post-release services

were better than those offered to women. While the men's prison population far outweighs that of the women's, the women's prison population has been growing drastically lately (Stats NZ, 2017) and the support and programmes offered to them has failed to grow with it, both within prison and upon release.

> Like they've got a lot of reintegration for the men, they've got waay more than women do.—Rebecca

> I guess that as a result of more men having been incarcerated, and so the demand I guess is higher. But that's not to say that the needs are greater than for women. And I think women have different needs when they come out of prison which I think could also require a bit more work, like seeing what their needs are and how specifically we can help with what they need help with rather than assuming that they have the same needs as men when they come out and just kind of tailoring it more towards their needs as a woman.—Ellen (Practitioner)

Ellen reinforces a statement made earlier, where women are often assumed to have the same needs as men, and therefore, less work is done looking at women's specific needs and how best to help them (Baldry, 2010). For the practitioners, they largely agreed with the women about the lack of services and opportunities available for women, both in prison and once released, and from their point of view. There were two main concerns. Firstly, they felt that post-release services were vastly under-funded, as expressed in Chapter 4, so they felt that where there are programmes and services which genuinely seem beneficial, they lack in funding, so there is an inability to reach as many people as possible. They also felt that there was a tendency for those in charge of making decisions to ignore the voices that count. This includes, the women (and men) in prison as well as people working in the field who work directly with people in prison, people on other sentences, or people who are transitioning back into the community.

> So I mean I guess at the end of the day, Corrections has this much funding and then they allocate it to what they see as most needing… I don't think they probably listened too much to the people on the grounds. It's the people up on The Terrace and in the Beehive that seem to make the decisions.—Anna (Practitioner)

> The problem is that the decisions around what these women need are made by Corrections' experts and very little work is done on asking the women themselves what they need or what would work for them.—Gavin (Practitioner)

While the practitioners hold these beliefs and think it is important to include the women in the decision-making process, they have no influence over what happens inside prison, and their work with people upon release can be largely dependent on them securing contracts with Corrections, leaving them little leeway in how best to make a change. Despite this, all of the participants had ideas for change, and these are presented in the following subsection.

6.3. Participant Recommendations

This section looks at the participants' responses to the question: If you could have a say in what kind of opportunities and programmes were offered, either in prison or upon release, what kind of things would you like to see happen? The question was directed at both the women and the practitioners, and below are their responses. This section is to highlight the participants' voices. The participants all provided reasonable and beneficial responses. The women know more about their own needs and what would benefit them than anyone else, and the practitioners speak from experience working in the field, all of the following suggestions stem from the participants' lived experience, and therefore, are of the highest value.

> The whole emergency housing. I mean it's good. It's there. The problem is I don't think there was a lot of foresight or forethought going into it when National set it up. So it's work and income that essentially pay for it. It's under a special needs Grant. The client doesn't pay anything towards it. And you are paying essentially the same rates as normally, like motels and hotels. So it's not at a discounted rate it's the same as if you or I wanted to go and stay somewhere for a week. So that's why it's astronomical. And because the person or individual, they don't pay anything towards it, and there's millions and millions of dollars just going on and it's not actually fixing anything whereas that money would have been better going into trying to find transitional housing where they're in there for three to six months and in that period you're looking to try and get them into permanent housing.—Anna (Practitioner)

Anna works to find accommodation for homeless people, a lot of whom have been in prison, so it is perhaps not surprising that her biggest concern is the emergency housing system. She spoke about how she felt that the money spent on housing individuals in motels once they're at the end of the line and have no other options would be much better spent on creating more transitional housing for people leaving prison, so that more people could utilise it and for longer periods of time (see Mills, Gojkovic, et al. (2013) for the importance of providing housing for people leaving prison). Like the women who had used the housing, Anna felt that three months is in no way long enough for someone to adapt to being out of prison, they need time to get reaccustomed to life on the outside and plan their next moves, and three months is not enough.

Like Baldry et al. (2006), Anna found that in her experience, a lack of stable housing and subsequent homelessness often led to a return to substance abuse and criminal behaviour. She also says that extending the time would be beneficial for those whose job it is to find more permanent housing, as it would give them longer to organise appropriate and stable housing.

> Like just like direction, you know, like women need help like getting their CVs together, getting a bit more direction on what they wanna do with their life, where they should be situated, how they're gonna get their kids back, just like, an out of prison plan. Hard out, there needs to be an out of prison plan. […] Jail needs a mental health unit as well.—Rebecca

Rebecca was very vocal about the need for an out of prison plan. She was adamant that every person leaving prison needed to be leaving with a plan, they need direction and stability, and they need guidance on how to best achieve that. Rebecca said that this planning needs to begin in prison, and time in prison would be best spent helping to prepare the women for their release in any way possible, with education, vocational training (which were outline by Bentley (2017) as being very important and much needed in prison), coming up with plans for after release and just generally equipping them with the tools they will need to succeed.

> I think encouraging more people to be on the frontline with these people whether this is part of Corrections or part of these agencies. I don't know how that would be possible, maybe more funding. Or yeah but more kind of visibility for the people that do work on the frontline with these offenders because I think… I don't think it's a place that many people think about pursuing a career. Yeah but it's clearly an important one. If the government has recognized that one of our main goals is trying to reduce reoffending… Yeah I think it could be a good push for funding because I know that lots of kind of programmes and contracts have been kind of ended that were actually really beneficial but the because of many reasons, low numbers or funding, maybe if it had been widely advertised a bit more then maybe that push would have been beneficial to a lot of people.—Ellen (Practitioner)

As a frontline worker, Ellen spoke about needing more funding and more people in the frontline. She said she had seen a lot of beneficial programmes fall through because of funding cuts which was highly disappointing. She also spoke about how she would love to be able to devote a lot of one-to-one time with the individuals she works with, but due to the number of people leaving prison compared to the number of practitioners, the staff are overwhelmed and just do not have the time to work as closely with the individuals as they would like. Funding was a big issue among all of the practitioners, and they all felt that the funding that does exist was not being directed into the right areas.

The main problem I see at the moment is that the transition from the disabling effects of incarceration to the reality of community life is not well understood or/and the prisoners are not prepared for this transition. A prisoner I spoke to recently put it well in saying that "when I was in prison everything I need it was only two minutes away compared with being back in the community where if I need something I will probably have to go to a supermarket to get it and I will have to consider if I have the transport to get to the supermarket and if I have the money to pay for it". This is a major transition from the reality of prison life and if a person is not prepared for it or has mental health issues or addiction issues the chances of them relapsing back into their previous life is very real and great. There needs to be much more targeted assistance available to women who have left prison and much more meaningful financial assistance to reintegrate. It is the same for men as it is for women. The steps to Freedom check has not increased for probably 30 years or more which is a disgraceful indictment on the way people who have been in prison are treated in our society. There needs to be a dedicated workforce similar to the workforce that is employed to assist with physically, intellectually and behaviourally impaired people. Gavin (Practitioner)

Gavin calls for a specialised workforce to assist people in the prison to community transition, and the people who work to assist individuals coming out of prison need to be able to understand that prison is a 'disabling experience' to assist the individuals in a manner appropriate to the situation. He talks about a lack of preparation when the individuals are released, a lack of realisation among those who work in the area that transitioning to the community doesn't just involved big things like finding a place to live or a job, but also more every day issues, such as locating the nearest supermarket, buying household products, and figuring out how to get from A to B without a car. Gavin was especially aware of the post-release puzzle, citing multiple factors that individuals deal with upon release which are often overlooked in the literature and in post-release assistance programmes.

Yeah, it's like if anything worked for me, it wasn't Corrections. Yeah so it was like well support houses and rehab centres and my parents, but not everyone has got sober parents and like supportive family yeah. Yeah well I don't believe in prisons anyway so I don't think, I mean if we're gonna have them yes there needs to be more of that stuff but I don't think it's an environment that is conducive to getting well, so like there needs to be more drug courts maybe more like mental health, you know like maybe not mental health courts, oh maybe not mental health.. but you know like redirection instead of incarceration, yeah.—Jane

Jane holds the belief that prisons don't work, and despite knowing that what she did was wrong, she felt that a different course of action would have been more beneficial to her, stating that

she felt she needed treatment rather than incarceration. Incarceration is supposed to include treatment, however for Jane that was not the case. She had pre-existing mental health and substance abuse issues which went untreated, and she had conditions which worsened in prison which she had to seek treatment for once she was released. Jane was released to a treatment facility, where she stayed for some time, and she felt that this was far more beneficial to leading her down a better path than going to prison was. Jane said she knows prisons will never be abolished, but she felt that wherever possible, alternate possibilities should be considered, which is supported by the likes of T. McIntosh and Workman (2017) and (Buttle, 2017).

> Yeah well I think they need someone, where they're going, getting released to, they need someone to go with them for a couple of days or, just to… Especially if it's someone like me, I mean a lot of people have got family and they're off doing their own… yeah. You know, I knew absolutely nothing… Um, well leaving, before I even left, I said to them that I was anxious and paranoid about where I'm going to live after the three months is up, where do we all go? Yeah, where do we all go? And um, "oh no we'll find you lodging, we'll.." Yeah, you've given me basically 10 days' notice, yeah and I'm, that sort of thing needs to be sorted.—Nina

Nina expressed feeling alone and abandoned after leaving prison. When we spoke, her time in the transitional housing was almost up, and she was clearly, and understandably, very anxious about where she would end up. She had no idea where she was going to go, but received comments brushing off her worries whenever she asked about it. She said she would like to have someone assigned to be with her for a few days following release, to help her sort basic things, such as finding the right bus route and getting her used to being in a new city, and she also would have liked to be more in the loop about what was happening with her housing situation. She said she was being told 'not to worry about it' but as she said, of course she was anxious about it as she is the one who is about to become homeless. Nina, essentially, just wanted more support, and more knowledge of what was happening with her own situation.

> I think like more, more employment where you get released to work cause while I was in self-care I was also waiting for, for some released work. I can't do much with my back but yeah and the… there was nothing. There was one girl that was doing released work so yeah but I think that that should be more available so that that way when people leave jail they've got a job to go to.—Caroline

Caroline thought the release to work programme in prison was very valuable, but felt that not enough people were able to participate in it. Caroline, and a few of the other women, expressed

that they felt the release to work programme was their best chance at getting a job after prison, yet none of them had had the opportunity to utilise this programme.

> More Arts based programmes and therapy based services. Both can be expensive to engage with, but if there are ways to do it with reducing costs (maybe a state lead subsidy) then it can be a more of a realistic option.—Craig (Practitioner)

Craig felt that the types of programmes and services needed were more expensive than those currently utilised, which is why those that are needed are not available. He expressed that there needs to be some form of funding, a state-lead subsidy as he suggested, to make these services a more available option, once again showing the frustrations that the practitioners have with the current state of post-release funding priorities.

> Um… I think like ACC counselling should be more available for people. ACC counselling, self-esteem, something to do with self-esteem. Yeah and cooking. Like cooking classes cause a lot of people, myself included, can't really cook… Oh, and prison itself [laughs] yeah… yeah. It's obviously not working so you know, something's got to change aye.—Tracey

Tracey echoed Nina's sentiment about prison itself being one of the key issues, saying in no uncertain terms that she does not think the current system is working. She also said she felt there needs to be more counselling services readily available to people both inside and upon leaving prison, and programmes aimed at raising self-esteem. As a Māori woman, Tracey would have also liked to have had more accessible programmes and services targeted to Māori upon leaving prison as she noted these were much harder to find outside of prison than while inside but she felt more connected to these programmes. A lack of programmes targeted to Māori is an issue raised often which desperately needs attention (T. McIntosh & Workman, 2017; Mihaere, 2007). Low self-esteem was a big issue for a lot of the women I spoke to, and they admitted it interfered with their likelihood to seek employment and other opportunities, as they worried they would be judged and rejected as soon as they mentioned their prison history.

> I do think if they had more education in prison to do with yeah the health and wellbeing and that sort of thing that would be very good you know, okay I understand prison has to be, but I think it would, you know, people rehabilitating in the community would you know, do more for the people and the families, yeah everybody. Probably more variety of things. Yeah I don't know. Definitely computer skills and I know they don't want anybody to use a phone, but [laughs] yeah, yeah, that sort of thing. Yeah those sort of, jobs in healthcare would open up people's, you know, especially if they're in prison, their eyes… up again to people and even to

themselves because sometimes their background hasn't been a very caring background. So introducing them to how to care for people yeah would be great. And I know that in the care industry too when people suffer from depression its very helpful to be helping other people you know, doing things for other people, caring for other people, that's helpful.—Emma (Practitioner)

Emma felt that educating the women about health and wellbeing would be beneficial, which ties in with Tracey saying she would have appreciated counselling and self-esteem courses. Emma also raised an interesting point about how she thinks it would be beneficial for the women to be trained in healthcare roles. She spoke about how a lot of the women did not have caring backgrounds growing up, and she thinks teaching them how to care for others would give them purpose and make them feel good about being able to help others, suggesting that this may also help with the womens' own mental health issues as she said that coming from a mental health background, she has found that people struggling with mental health issues can often find it helpful and rewarding to be able to help and care for others.

The participants' responses show the complexity of the post-release puzzle. While there are similarities in the responses, I also found that each participant had their own key focus when leaving prison, their own goals and desires, their own barriers and issues to deal with and their own take on what would help with their situation. A lot of the factors of the post-release puzzle are the same for each individual, and there is overlap between the benefits and the barriers, but each individual also has their own unique situation, and programmes and assistance in the post-release period need to account for this. The key thing I have learned through talking to the participants is as follows: individualising the post-release experience is the only way to improve it. Prison strips people of their individuality and of any control over their own lives, they need to gain this back and see that they have a say in how their life will be after prison. They need support systems that will guide them in a direction they want to go and in a manner that they see as helpful. They do not need to leave prison only to continue to be told what to do and how to do it. Most importantly, they are the ones who have been through this experience, and they know best what will help them to get through it, so they should be listened to and importance should be placed on lived experience and the people at the centre of the post-release experience, rather than on the statistics that supposedly represent them.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

There is countless literature documenting factors which are important to forming a stable life after release from prison, looking at getting housing, getting a job, family and social support. These are all big picture, long-term goals. But, what is often not considered, and what I found in this research, is that in the initial release period, after regaining their freedom, it is short-term factors which appear to be on the minds of the women who have been released. Having a cigarette without being told off, walking down the street alone, with no security guards watching their every move, eating the food they couldn't eat in prison, and at reasonable times of the day when they're hungry, not when they're told to eat. The individual needs to learn that they are in control of their own lives again, and regain a sense of their own individuality and self-worth before they can begin working toward the bigger goals. The significance of regaining this sense of who they were has also been identified by other ex-prisoners:

> "After one has been in prison, it is the small things that one appreciates: being able to take a walk whenever one wants, going into a shop and buying a newspaper, speaking or choosing to remain silent. The simple act of being able to control one's person." (Mandela, 2013)

Though this research focused primarily on employment, it quickly became clear that employment is but one of many important factors in the post-release period, and that while employment may assist in solving other issues, other factors need to be taken into consideration before employment can be obtained. Individuals need to be allowed the time to readjust to life on the outside, and during this process of adjustment, they need wraparound support in all areas to work toward more long-term goals, areas specified by them, not by someone who thinks they know best. As the goal is to assist these individuals to live better lives, what better way to do so than to ask them what they need. Therefore, the following is a list of recommendations based on the participants' responses, a list of what they need and what would help them. Though they are not all directly related to employment, the post-release factors are all linked and can impact each other, and therefore, all are considered relevant to the current research topic.

1) There needs to be more programmes offered in prison, specifically to target basic skills, employment, education and general preparation for the transition back to the community.

2) Having self-care and release to work available to more women would be beneficial for their release preparation, as well as opening the door to employment opportunities.

3) Mental health, addiction and medical treatment need to be readily available and properly utilised within prison, for all individuals who require it, meaning more mental health units are needed, each prison needs a drug and alcohol treatment unit and medical complaints need to be taken seriously.

4) Individuals need to know what they can expect when they are released and be given guidance on who to talk to and where to get the assistance they are entitled to, no one should be left uninformed and left to fend for themselves.

5) There needs to be more community based support, with getting the assistance they require and with help finding access to education and employment opportunities.

6) There needs to be more transitional housing, for longer periods of time, and more of a plan in place for people once they leave this housing.

7) Due to the above factors, funding for prisons needs to be spent on programmes and support services which are truly beneficial to those who need them, and accommodation and post-release services need to have more funding, used for programmes which have been proven to be beneficial.

8) The judgement of what is beneficial to individuals within prison and upon release, should lie in the hands of those who are/have been in prison. People who have no frontline experience, no interaction with people in prison and no lived experience of prison or life after prison should not be making decisions that affect the lives of those who have first-hand knowledge and lived experience.

9) Prison as it is now makes things worse. Without widespread structural changes to the criminal justice system, especially the prison system, it is unlikely that the post-release transition will have more successful outcomes.

Finally, 10) the participants in this research who have been to prison want to change. They want a chance at making up for their mistakes, and a second chance at living a productive and satisfying life, and a chance to prove to others, and to themselves, that they can achieve this. They want to be accepted into the community, and they do not

want to go back to prison. People who have been to prison are people, and they deserve to be treated as such.

The participants' responses speak for themselves, this is what they feel needs changing, and as they speak from lived experience and are expressing what they need and what would help them, it would be foolish not to listen. Those who were marginalised before prison, such as Māori women, women from low socio-economic backgrounds or with low education levels, which sadly is a large proportion of the prison population, need extra help. The research here points to the post-release puzzle beginning in prison, and the solutions to it needing to begin there too. However, with a deeper look into the participants' lives before prison, it is likely that it would be discovered that they needed assistance long before being incarcerated. Therefore, the post-release puzzle also points to barriers created by long-ingrained structural and societal issues. This can be seen through the incarceration rates of Māori women, who make up almost 60% of the prison population. The impact of these findings is more profound for Māori women because the proportion of female prisoners who are Māori is higher than that of non-Māori. The present findings, when matched up with low school achievement, biases on behalf of employers and racist practices by police, illustrate a chain of operations by which Māori women are effectively excluded from the labour market. Therefore, every suggestion in this research needs to be amplified for Māori women, to help overcome the other links to disadvantage and marginalisation that are so rampant in the criminal justice system and in society in general. These structural and societal barriers cannot be broken down by an individual, so wraparound support needs to come from organisations, the Department of Corrections, the government and from society in general. This is not a battle that people being released from prison can be expected to face alone.

As outlined above, those ending up in prison are often those who were not integrated into society to begin with, they are then separated further upon going to prison, which makes their return to the community all the more difficult now that they have additional barriers to contend with. The factors impacting an individual's likelihood of succeeding in the post-release period are factors which they have likely been dealing with since before their incarceration, and these are amplified and new barriers are added upon their incarceration and then again upon release. This further shows the need for individualised care and post-release planning, as well as holistic, wraparound support, which is especially crucial for those from marginalised backgrounds who may have very few positive social ties. For women, as pointed out in the literature and participant responses, there are additional barriers of trying to reconnect with or

care for children, which can interfere with (or be dependent upon) employment, which can result in choosing between trying to be a mother or trying to find work and build a life first. There is also the issue of a lack of employment opportunities after prison for women due to the gendered nature of the training they receive in prison, in traditionally 'feminine roles', such as sewing or basic food production, which have no real place in the labour market today. Women need to be offered equal opportunities to men for employment after prison, which begins with training them for job opportunities which are relevant to the current labour market and which are tied in with Corrections' employment partners' needs.

As such, if the true goal when releasing someone from prison is to assist them in leading a productive life in the community, then I believe that it is in everyone's best interests to start listening to what the individuals need in order for this to become a reality. This means more research focusing on women, to realise their separate needs, more research on lived experience, more conversations with people in prison about what programmes and courses would be of use to them, as well as more mental health and substance abuse counselling in prison. It also means more planning with the individual when release is near, creating an out of prison plan individualised to them and their needs and goals, and continuing this upon release. Assistance should be offered in the form of guidance, not control. These are their lives, and the control should lie with them. The key take home message from this research is that yes, employment is extremely important in the post-release period, but so are a lot of factors, and the importance of each factor depends on the individual and their own situation, and where they are at in the transition process. What I found about employment is that currently, there is a lack of employment related assistance and training in prison, a lack of programmes and training outside of prison, and a lack of people available to help the women deal with having a criminal record and trying to find a job. I also found that for the women, employment is more than just money, it is stability, it is something to do and a way to form routine, it is a chance to meet new people and a chance to start over, also, while Corrections and often friends and family of those who are released from prison push for them to just get any job they can, the women would rather get a job they enjoy, that they look forward to working at and that they can grow in and be proud of.

The post-release puzzle is complex, and differs from person to person. A holistic, wraparound approach is needed, and it needs to be tailored to suit the individual. Most importantly, only those who have been to prison and been released can speak to the experience, and listening to them and valuing their input could go a long way in improving a system which

so obviously is not currently working. Given the complaints the women made about their time in prison and how damaging it was to them and their lives, I was shocked that some of them admitted wanting to return to prison upon being released. What does that say about our society and our post-release assistance practices that the women would rather return to a place, which, in their words, broke them? I was ashamed as a New Zealand citizen that we have a society which is so unwelcoming and discriminatory to people who have been in prison, that they would consider returning to prison to escape it. I felt disappointed that we have a system designed to take care of people in prison and upon leaving, yet the women felt they were mistreated and forgotten about in prison, and abandoned and not cared for once they were released. Widespread structural and societal changes are desperately needed, and these changes should be driven by the voices of those who have the lived experience to speak to the issues at hand.

Glossary

Whānau: family

Iwi: tribe

Tīpuna: ancestors

Whenua: the land

Maunga: mountains

Awa: rivers

Kaupapa Māori: Māori principles or policies

Koha: A gift or offering

Te Ao Māori: Māori world

Pākehā: A white New Zealander, as opposed to Māori

Pepeha: A way of introducing oneself in Māori culture

ORCs: Offender Recruitment Consultants

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer.

Are you a woman who has spent time in prison? Maybe you know a woman who has? If so, I'd love to speak to you.

I am a Masters student at Victoria University of Wellington who is studying the importance of employment for women leaving prison and returning to their life in the community. I am working on a research project looking at the benefits of employment for women after prison, and the barriers they face to finding it.

Over the next few months I will be looking for women who are willing to share their experiences with me so I can tell the story from their perspectives. If you are interested and would be willing to participate in an interview, or you know someone who would be, please email me at jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz, or call or text me on 0224054129. Interviews will be strictly confidential, so nothing you say will be shared in a way that will identify you.

When you contact me, I will share more information about the project with you, and I can meet you to discuss the interview process or answer any questions you may have. If you do agree to take part, we can arrange an interview, which should take no more than an hour of your time.

This project has ethics approval from the Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University.

Please feel free to take my contact information from the bottom of this flyer.

Thank you.

jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study	jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz phone: 0224054129 University study

Appendix B: Interview Guides.

Interview Guide: Practitioners.

1. What does your organisation do? (Identifying information will be left out if you wish)
2. What does your role involve? (Identifying information will be left out)
3. Why did you decide to work in this field?
4. What do you think of the state of reintegration in New Zealand in general?
5. What do you think of the state of reintegration in New Zealand specifically for women?
6. Based on question 5, what areas do you think need improvement? (e.g., in what areas is support lacking for these women?)
7. In your experience, how many women on average end up going back to prison after being released? Do you think enough support is offered to try and prevent this?
8. What kind of programmes and skills training are you aware of that are offered to women in prison? Do you work with both women and men?
9. Of those programmes offered in prison, which do you think are most important? What areas need improvement? What else should be offered while the women are still in prison and preparing for release?
10. What kind of programmes and assistance are you aware of for women who have left prison?
11. What kind of programmes and assistance do you think there needs to be for women who have left prison that there isn't already?
12. What do you think are the key focuses for people leaving prison? What is most important for them in the first few weeks of release?
13. What do you think, if any, are the differences for men and women when leaving prison?
14. What do you think of the employment opportunities offered to women who have spent time in prison?
15. What do you think are the main benefits of finding employment for women after prison?
16. What do you think are the main barriers to finding employment for women after prison?
17. What are your views on the impacts of a criminal record on people's chances of gaining employment?
18. In your opinion, where does finding employment rank in importance upon release? Are there other factors you deem more or equally important? If so, what are they?

Interview Guide: Women.

- In your opinion, what is the importance of employment to reintegration?
- How would you describe the current state of reintegration in New Zealand?
- What does employment mean to you in your own life?
- In your experience, what appear to be the most important factors for successful reintegration? (and for finding employment?)
- In your experience, what appear to be the biggest barriers to successful reintegration? (and for finding employment?)
- What do you think shapes the way you view reintegration?
- What do you think shapes the way you view employment?
- Were you employed before your time in prison? (If yes, what kind of employment? If no, have you been employed in the past?)
- What does having a job mean to you? Is it an important part of life for you? Why/why not?
- What do you think of the employment opportunities for women who have been in prison? (Do you feel you have been well-prepared to search for employment upon release?)
- Do you have a job now? (Do you want one? Have you been looking for one?)
- How are you feeling about reintegration back into the community? (for those who have been released for a while – how have you found the reintegration process so far?)
- What have been/do you think will be the biggest barriers to reintegration for you?
- In your opinion, what do you think women struggle with the most when they leave prison? Why do you think this?
- What will be/was most important to you when you were first released? What was your focus in the first few weeks after leaving prison?
- What are the biggest benefits of gaining employment for you?
- If you had a say in what reintegration opportunities and programmes were offered to you, what would your priorities be?

Appendix C: Template of Information sheet—The information sheet was the same for the women and the practitioners, but varied slightly in the wording for each group. Below is an example of the information sheet for the women.

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Employment and the Post-Release Puzzle

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is Jasmin Kale and I am a Masters student in Criminology at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis which focuses on reintegration for women in New Zealand.

What is the aim of the project?

This project aims to explore the place of paid work for women in New Zealand who are transitioning from prison to the community.

Your participation will support this research by providing background knowledge, various viewpoints on employment and reintegration, and detailed accounts of first-hand experiences in a New Zealand context. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee, RM application ID: 0000027596.

How can you help?

You have been invited to participate because of your experience with the post-release transition from prison to the community. If you agree to take part, I will interview you at a previously arranged location which is convenient for you, at a date set before the 1st of December 2019. I will ask you questions about reintegration and employment opportunities for women in New Zealand who have spent time in prison, and your own experiences with this. The interview will take approximately one hour. I will audio record the interview with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time before 1st December 2019. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you and will not be included in any academic publications nor in my final thesis.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential[*]. This means that only I, the researcher, and my two supervisors will be aware of your identity. The research data will all be combined and summarised together, and your identity will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. You will not be named in the final report.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries, and any recordings that don't contain identifying information will be kept securely and destroyed on the 1st March 2020 upon completion of my thesis. Any identifying information will be destroyed on the 1st of December 2019 once the interview process is complete.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will primarily be used in my Masters thesis with the possibility of also using the findings for academic publications and conferences if the opportunities arise over the course of my degree.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study before the 1st of December 2019;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview transcript;
- read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions or concerns, either now or in the future, please don't hesitate to contact me. If necessary, you can also contact either of my supervisors at any time.

---

[*] Confidentiality will be preserved except where you disclose something that causes me to be concerned about a risk of harm to yourself and/or others.

Student:
Name: Jasmin Kale
Email: jasmin.kale@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor 1:
Name: Dr Sarah Monod de Froideville
Role: Lecturer
School: Institute of Criminology, School of Social and Cultural Studies
Phone: 04) 463 5874
Email: Sarah.monoddefroideville@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor 2:
Name: Dr Liam Martin
Role: Lecturer
School: Institute of Criminology, School of Social and Cultural Studies
Phone: 04) 463 6862
Email: liam.martin@vuw.ac.nz

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research, you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convenor: Dr Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

Appendix D: Template of consent form. The following consent form was given to the women and the practitioners to sign before each interview.

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

Employment and the Post-Release Puzzle

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for one year.

Researcher: Jasmin Kale, Institute of Criminology, School of Social and Cultural studies, Victoria University of Wellington.

• I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.

• I agree to take part in an interview.

I understand that:

• I may withdraw from this study at any point before the 1st of December 2019 and any information that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.

• The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on the 1st of December 2019.

• Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors.

• I understand that the findings will be used for a Masters thesis or possibly for academic publications and presentations at conferences.

☐ I understand that the notes, recordings, and transcripts will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors.

• My name will not be used in reports if I do not wish and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify me.

• I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes ☐   No ☐

• I would like to receive a copy of the final summary of findings and have   Yes ☐   No ☐
  added my email address below.

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

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