

Fact Sheet on Battered Women in Prison

- It is estimated that 92% of all women in California prisons have been battered and abused in their lifetimes.
- Currently there are 2,000 battered women in America who are serving prison time for defending their lives against their batterers. (*Stacey Kabat, Remarks from presentation at Harvard School of Public Health, Center for Health Communication, June 1991*)
- As many as 90% of the women in jail today for killing men had been battered by those men. (*Allison Bass, "Women far less likely to kill than men; no one sure why," The Boston Globe, February 24, 1992, p. 27*)
- According to data release in 1992 by the Georgia Department of Corrections, of the 235 women doing time for murder or manslaughter in Georgia, 44% killed a husband or lover. 96% of the women revealed the presence of domestic violence in the relationship. (*J.O. Hansen, "Is Justice Taking a Beating?" The Atlanta Constitution, April 26, 1992, A1-A7*)
- *The Murderess: A Psychosocial Study of Criminal Homicide (1978)* examined incarcerated female homicide offenders at one institution and found that, of 43 women convicted of murder or voluntary manslaughter, 30 had killed their male partners, 28 of whom had been abusive.
- In 60% of the cases where a woman killed her significant other, the woman claims the victim assaulted or abused her at the time of the crime. (*Judith Haley, "A Study of Women Imprisoned for Homicide," Georgia Department of Corrections, June 1992, p. 16*)
- Male offenders dominated in murders motivated by possessiveness (82%), abuse (75%), and arguments (63%), whereas females were the vast majority of offenders in the category of self-defense (83%).
- In a study of 155 mate homicides in City of Jacksonville, Florida, 1980-1986, at least 7 of the 24 offenders who claimed that their actions were in self-defense were prosecuted by the state; 6 six of them were found guilty. (*Christine E. Rasche, "'Given' Reasons for Violence in Intimate Relationships," Homicide: The Victim/Offender Connection, ed. Anna Wilson (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, 1993) p. 88*)
- The same study showed that among victims of abuse, females were 75% of the total, while victims of self-defense were 96% male.
- The average prison sentence of men who kill their women partners is 2 to 6 years. Women who kill their male partners are sentenced on average to 15 years, despite the fact that most women who kill do so in self-defense (*National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1989*).
- Only males commit beating or strangulation homicides; women are more likely to stab or shoot their victims. This opens women to vastly harsher sentences with legal enhancements for use of a weapon in the commission of the crime.
- In the Georgia study, 95% of the women in prison for homicide had only one victim. 53% had killed their significant other (i.e., legal spouse, common-law spouse, lover and ex-spouse/lover.) (*Judith Haley, "A Study of Women Imprisoned for Homicide," Georgia Department of Corrections, June 1992, p. 15*)
- Currently, women are eight times more likely than men to be killed by their intimate partner. (*Rennison and Welchans 2000*) Estimates of the number of women killed by husbands, boyfriends or former partners range from 1,000 to 4,000 per year.
- In a survey of nearly 10,000 murder cases, women perpetrated 10.5% and men 89.5%. (Dawson and Langan 1994)
- Men tend to be aggressors in homicide cases even when the homicides are committed by women. (*Casenave and Zagh 1992*)
- 75% of women are in prison for non-violent crimes (prostitution, theft, drug use, etc.).
- 85% of women in prison in California are mothers. Their children have the highest infant mortality rate in the state. Women prisoners with children three years or under can lose their parental rights forever after six months, and the children adopted out.



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