



# **EXPLORING THE NARRATIVES OF A FORMERLY INCARCERATED TRINIDADIAN WOMAN THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE**

A CASE STUDY

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Through qualitative interviewing and narrative analysis, this study seeks to illuminate and examine the life story of a formerly incarcerated Trinidadian woman. To gain insight into her experiences across the life course, criminal and conventional, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the same woman in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, focusing on experiences of motherhood, interpersonal relationships, employment, and those of incarceration. The aim was to uncover the events and relationships that the study participant presented as most significant and determinative in her life story, and how they could be further interpreted through four tenets of life course theory: agency, interpersonal relationship effects, events' timing and sequence, and the historical context. Analysis identified victimisation, the subsequent undermining of personal agency, motivated advocacy and motherhood responsibilities as the narratives that were most central to the participant's presentation of her life story's trajectories, with implications for future research and public policy.

*Keywords:* Caribbean, female offender, incarceration, life-course, narrative analysis, semi-structured interviews.

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# INTRODUCTION

Research into female offender experiences in the Caribbean is severely underserved and incomplete, even in comparison to the global male and female offender research gap. What qualitative research does exist is primarily focused on their experiences of victimisation, a key part of the criminality equation but not representative of the complex reality. We have not yet truly begun to qualitatively tackle the questions of how Caribbean women offenders may fit into, or distinguish themselves from, the current knowledge base. What experiences mark their pathways into and out of criminality? How do they personally interpret these experiences and any relationships central to them? With increasing use of the life course paradigm (Cullen, 2011, as cited in McGee et al., 2015), criminologists have been able to identify many of the events and sociodemographic factors that often precede and potentially affect criminality (Farrington, 2003; Jolliffe et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2017). Research into offenders' own narratives of these variables has progressed in recent years, although only in the last few decades have criminologists begun to specifically explore the lived experiences of women offenders (Parry, 2021, Ciesla et al., 2019). Narratives of compromised agency, lifelong abuse, interpersonal trauma, and the variable nature and demands of motherhood have emerged, among others (Ciesla et al., 2019; Fleetwood, 2015; Jarnkvist & Brännström, 2019). Considering that "[w]omen in conflict with the law have their own ideas about why and how they became lawbreakers" (Sommers, 2015, p.3), this study sought to investigate, via qualitative interviews and narrative analysis, what narratives, interpretations, and personal explanations of trajectories could be identified throughout a female offender's life course in Trinidad and Tobago. Further to this end, I sought to analyse this narrative using principles of the life course theory (Elder, 1994, 1998) to contribute to a resolution of the glaring qualitative knowledge gap in female offending in a Caribbean context.

## AIM

With such a severe lack of existing research into the factors and nuances of the pathways to criminal behaviour for women in the Caribbean (Bailey, 2013), and even less in Trinidad and Tobago, this study's aim is to present and investigate one such offender's narratives and work towards resolving this regional knowledge gap. Working within the framework of the life course theory and Elder's (1998) tenets of (1) agency, (2) linked lives, (3) timing, and (4) historical context, I sought to explore how a female offender in Trinidad and Tobago personally interpreted and narrated such experiences as motherhood, employment, and incarceration, among other specific events she deemed formative in the 'story' of her life. Combining semi-structured qualitative interviews and subsequent narrative analysis of her presented story, I undertook to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences that a female offender in Trinidad & Tobago considers formative and determinative in her life course?
2. How can these experiences be understood through the lens of four tenets of life course theory?

# **BACKGROUND: PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

## **Section Outline**

This chapter will focus on the existing life course and narrative knowledge. I will firstly briefly explore current female offender research findings. Following that will be respective overviews of male and female offender life course and narrative research. Finally, I will identify notable features of the Trinidad and Tobago criminological context.

## **The Female Offender**

Research indicates that, globally, women are “arrested, convicted, and incarcerated less often” (Warren & Rosenbaum, 1986, p. 393) than men. Although these measures are not indicative of *actual* criminal behaviour, it is reasonable to assume a sizable disparity exists. Despite this imbalance, continuing relatively recent female offender research is paramount if women’s criminality is to be better understood and effectively engaged with via early intervention policies and rehabilitative programmes. What research has been gathered indicates a number of crucial differences in criminal experiences and outcomes between the demographics. Differences in offending intensity determined by age of offending onset (Krupa & Childs, 2014), in offending and desistance trajectories (ibid.), and differences in rates of victimisation (Brown, 2006; Katz, 2000) between the groups have all been discovered.

The risk factors for men and women are similar (Wong et al., 2010), although the effects and frequency vary significantly (Cauffman, 2008): early life victimisation has been found to have been more often experienced (Katz, 2000) and to predict later criminality more significantly in women (Cauffman, 2008; Katz, 2000), and romantic relationships showed a stronger influence on criminality, either through abuse (Brown, 2006) or interpersonal engagement with partners who offend (Broidy & Cauffman, 2016). Poor mental health and self-image were also found to significantly impact women’s criminal behaviour from adolescence (Krupa & Childs, 2014). Another divergence is the high proportion of female offenders who have no (recorded) history of youth offending, indicating an adult age of onset of criminality, less frequently observed among male offenders, according to Moffitt’s taxonomy (1993). Such a ‘late’ age of onset is found to often coincide with a ‘high-level chronic’ pattern of offending in women (Andersson, 2013) and the identified early childhood and social stressors of interrupted education and familial financial difficulties (ibid.) would not be unexpected findings in this study, as early life experiences are broached in the interview guide.

All of these particularities indicate the need for a better understanding of how women’s criminal behaviour manifests and diverges from their male counterparts, and to avoid applying, to women’s detriment, a simple extrapolation of male offender research to female offenders. Considering the greater share of childcare responsibilities generally shouldered by female offenders (Michaelsen, 2011), it is reasonable to assume that female offender treatment policies are likely to have generational consequences, further driving the need for deeper research (Cauffman, 2008).

## **Male Offenders: Life Course Research & Narratives**

Born out of longitudinal studies of men's childhood and later adult development (Elder, 1998), life course research has since logically developed primarily via research into this demographic (Craig et al., 2017). Research has often been focused on the turning points potentially constituted by transitions in behaviour and subsequent life trajectories for men (ibid). Turning points are here not considered discrete events but "gradual processes" (Skardhamar, 2010, Laub et al. 1998, as cited in Carlsson, 2012).

In this vein, much male life course research has focused on such status changes as marriage, employment, and becoming a father, among others, and the chances for change as well as the new behavioural restrictions that they entail (Elder, 1998), as well as in the social capital that they impart. This latter concept is more extensively studied in Laub and Sampson's age-graded theory of informal social control (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Marriage has been found, more often than otherwise, to serve as a protective factor against continued criminality, arguably due to "adult social ties [that] create interdependent systems of obligation and restraint that impose significant costs for translating criminal propensities into action" (ibid., p.141). This same social bond rationale is proposed to separately underpin the successes of stable employment and military service (ibid.) as successful turning points towards desistance, although the latter does appear less salient in a modern-day context.

With regards to fatherhood, more recent studies have identified attenuated turning point effects in male offenders. Schinkel's (2019) interrogation of the turning point *process* of fatherhood's interaction with the desistance process ultimately identified the female partner's parenting capability, or lack thereof, as the significant determinant in a male offender's decision to actively engage in fatherhood or not, and consequent decisions to continue crime participation or not. The capacity to make behavioural choices, or agency, and the effects of interpersonal relationships are in this way essential to and account for variability in life trajectories.

Much of the male narrative analysis research is fragmentary and has been conducted with the aim of exploring specific processes like personal interpretations of the link between emotion and their own criminal actions (Raval et al., 2012), sexual offending (Rickard, 2015), and gang affiliation (Ashton & Bussu, 2020), among others. A study on the narratives of convicted male sexual offenders, identified narratives of criminal behaviour as an 'abnormality', in which the deviancy was figuratively placed in a box existing outside of the conventional, law-abiding self (Rickard, 2015). Perhaps paradoxically to this abstract separation of a 'true self' and crime, a desistance narrative also emerged in which the offending was ascribed to their male biology: both bodily modification and hormonal and psychiatric treatment were personally considered the solution to their problem of offending (ibid). Essentially, a medico-surgical path to true desistance, from the offender's perspective.

Narratives have been operationalised more specifically as 'roles' in some research focused on criminality processes (Youngs & Canter, 2012), producing such male offender archetypes as the 'hero' and the 'victim' among others. Such narrative roles were determined based on analysis of offender-centric interpretations, emotions, and identity (ibid).

### **Female Offenders: Life Course Research & Narratives.**

With a majority of incarcerated female offenders being mothers (Bachman et al., 2016), the role of motherhood in female criminality is of particular interest. Through a desistance perspective, Michaelsen (2011, 2019) explored the role of motherhood as a turning point for formerly incarcerated women in an American context, recognising its impact as both an impediment and motivator in ultimately highly variable desistance pathways. The demands of caring for children both acted as stressors that financially necessitated a return to crime and as motivators to desist by integrating into conventional society and avoiding further harm to the family unit (ibid). In turn, marriage's role as a traditionally protective event and status in men's desistance is, in women's desistance, significantly more dependent on factors like relationship quality and partners' criminal behaviour (Broidy & Cauffman, 2016).

A limited amount of research into female offenders' lived experiences has been via life history interviews and narrative analysis (Ciesla et al. 2019; Helfgott et al., 2020; Bailey, 2013), What has been gathered testifies to recurring narrative themes (Fleetwood, 2016) in female offenders across crime types and contexts. When prompted to reflect upon their experiences of criminality, female offenders present narratives of poverty (Parry, 2021), self-sacrifice, and the burden of support for familial dependents (Michaelsen, 2011). In many instances, their criminal actions are, if not excused by the offenders, then explained by the reasoning that providing for one's family superseded considerations of morality and legality (Parry, 2021). In this way, the offender maintains to have held individual agency, but it is arguably undermined in the broader context of desperation and survival.

This particular concept of agency in these narratives is often paired with themes of lifelong violence at the hands of adult men, both familial and intimate (Parry, 2021). Consequently, much of the narrative research has been focused on women's experiences of victimisation (Garcia-Hallett, 2019), a known point of overlap with criminal offending (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2015; Parry, 2021). Within a Caribbean context, a qualitative study on women with drug-related offenses in Barbados uncovered narratives concerning experiences of coercion from romantic partners to participate in crime and the connotations of constrained personal agency arguably invoked (Bailey, 2013). Poverty-motivated offending was also a factor in the majority of the study participants' offending narratives (ibid.)

From a feminist criminological viewpoint, and again from a drug-related offending context, Fleetwood (2015) collected female offending data in the form of narratives. What emerged were narratives of rejecting criminality due to its incompatibility with self-image, or narrative identity, and compartmentalisation of drug-related offending as the actions of "desperate" (ibid., p. 376) individuals. Lack of family support as well as the pressure to provide for children also emerged as narratives for motivating criminal behaviour and participating in crime is portrayed as "inevitable" (ibid., p. 378) in such conditions. A similar sentiment of inevitability emerged in a narrative from a participant whose family were all participants in drug-relating offending, invoking the impact of linked lives (Elder, 1998) on criminal behaviour.



A recent study on incarcerated women offenders' written narratives (Helfgott et al., 2020) found that they conceptualised their pathways to incarceration as being set in motion by "chronic adversity" (ibid., p.616) including poverty, abuse, and the lack of positive influences in early life. Further examples of such ordeals in the study were having to undergo traditionally adult experiences before actual adulthood, either through victimisation or assignment of childcare duties, as well as "intergenerational patterns" (ibid., p.617) of criminality.

### **The Trinidad and Tobago Context**

A dual-island nation in the Southern Caribbean with a population of approximately 1.4 million (Data World Bank, 2021), there is sparse qualitative research into offending in Trinidad and Tobago. It is thus difficult to gain insight into what factors may characterise women's criminality experiences in this context. With such little data available to mine for clues into what may precipitate criminal action, there is a clear gap in the national research.

What little we know can be gleaned from quantitative reports: women are a mere fraction of the national prison population, frequently numbering fewer than 150, or under 4% of the incarcerated population in the last 15 years (World Prison Brief, 2020). All are incarcerated within the single Women's Prison, (Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, 2021), and their numbers have been steadily decreasing in the last decade (ibid.). For women under the age of 50, drug-related offenses were the most likely reason for incarceration (Sumter et al., 2012). With regards to homicide offenses, women offenders consistently numbered fewer than ten a year for the crime between 2004 and 2009 (Hunte & Bonair, 2010). Posing great difficulty is the fact that, in Trinidad and Tobago, offender demographic data exists for less than 25 % of recorded criminal acts (Seepersad, R., 2016). Such a dearth of quantitative crime data requires immediate attention and resolution. It also again highlights the need for qualitative research, which would be both complementary and likely highly illuminating concerning the lived experiences and conditions of criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Women in Trinidad and Tobago primarily feature as victims in media discourse, crime statistics, and academic research, particularly regarding the high national rates of domestic violence incidents (Johnson & Boodram, 2019; Le Franc et al., 2008). While exploring women's victimisation experiences is not the specific aim of this study, considering the likelihood of victim-offender overlap and the high rates of domestic abuse in such a small nation, such victimisation would not be unexpected emerging from this study's analysis.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **The Life Course Theory**

This thesis employs the life course theory as the broader analytical structure. This perspective offers a way to examine the extent of criminality, from onset to termination, as a product of concurrent and interacting factors (Elder, 1994, 1998; Farrington, 2003) and, with this study's aim in mind, to parse complex life narratives more thoroughly. The confluence of the following elements can be examined: human agency, relationships' interdependent effects, the specific

sequence in which events occur and their geo-socio-historical context (Elder, 1994, 1998). Together, and through analysis, they form an arguably clearer picture of how and perhaps why individuals elect, or feel forced to elect, to engage in or withdraw from criminality along the life course. Farrington (2003) further clarifies life course criminology's focus on offending as a developmental process that can be anticipated by identifiable risk factors (ibid.) This developmental process is also impacted, on an individual basis, by certain events and the sequences in which they occur (ibid.).

For this narrative analysis, the four tenets will be defined as analytical tools as follows:

- (1) Agency refers to the personal capacity to shape one's own trajectory via behavioural choices which, while made by the individual, are never without external influence in some form, and never purely individual in their deliberation (Elder, 1998).
- (2) The effect of interpersonal relationships, or 'linked lives' (ibid.) is defined as the concept that personal trajectories and within-individual changes are influenced by the trajectories of those with whom we are in "intertwined social relationships" (Thornberry et al. 2003, p. 172).
- (3) The concept of timing is defined as the specific impact of a developmental change by virtue of "when [transitions or events] occur in a person's life" (Elder, 1998, p. 3).
- (4) The 'historical context' refers to the wider structural and social elements and settings that contextualise individuals' life courses, and always influence their choices and trajectories (ibid.)

Personal narratives are rarely simple recitations of timelines and are instead full of the storyteller's interpretations of experiences (Presser, 2009), of relationships, and of their motivations for acting in specific ways. As such, I argue that the concepts of transitions and shifting trajectories of the life course theory marry well with a narrative analytical approach. Applying the life course theory will help in achieving the aim of discovering which experiences a female offender in Trinidad and Tobago, considers particularly determinative of her life trajectories, both conventional and criminal.

## **METHODS & ETHICS**

Initially undertaking a desistance-oriented narrative study with multiple interviewees, I established contact with a local NGO committed to supporting offenders' post-incarceration social reintegration, who agreed to identify and contact women members who had been previously incarcerated after the age of 18 and were potentially willing to share their personal narratives. The NGO then communicated their contact information accordingly. Upon receiving three individuals' details, I contacted them to discuss the study's aims and methods. Ultimately, only one was willing to participate, and two interviews were conducted over the phone, as requested. This study subsequently became a more focused case study analysing her presented narratives via life course theory tenets.

## **Narrative Interviewing**

Aiming to explore a female offender's experiences through life course theory, open-ended and qualitative interviews were determined to be the best method to both comprehensively collect stories and prioritise their narrator's interpretations (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 631) in ways that may have been unnecessarily avoided in the past for fear of lacking scientific objectivity (Presser & Sandberg, 2015). As the questions were likely to invoke sensitive experiences, they may have been more superficially answered via written methods. Using interview questions formulated accordingly, the participant's own experiences and perspectives could be centred. The creation of an interview guide (Appendix C) was the extent of pre-interview preparation to better ensure interviewer-interviewee communication that was not excessively structured.

Semi-structured interviews were used to facilitate an inquiry into the interviewee's personally constructed narrative and its most impactful relationships and experiences, but with 'room' for the participant to initiate new lines of discussion and elaborate freely. In turn, I was able to analyse and interpret her responses more thoroughly in the context of life course research. An objective play-by-play of the steps in her pathway to criminality was not expected to be uncovered via such qualitative methods (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016), nor was it this study's aim.

The interview questions were phrased in accessible English (see Appendix C), and I communicated that the study participant could freely request any unclear point explanations. The questions were primarily open-ended, to avoid boxing the participant into 'yes' or 'no' responses that do provide insight but fail to delve as deeply into her story as required for narrative analysis. Insofar as it is possible to avoid "get[ting] what you ask for" (Carlsson, 2012, p.2) and potentially excluding crucial data via semi-structured interviews, the interview guide was primarily created as a starting point for discussion. Interviewer responses were intended to deepen and clarify the narratives. With narrative analysis being this study's analytical tool, the interview guide was designed to progress linearly to encourage a full life narrative presentation from the interviewee.

The interviews each lasted between two to four hours, constituting approximately 6 hours of recorded data. The first interview held in March lasted four hours due to technical difficulties as well as the participant's explicit willingness to continue and comprehensively recount her life story from birth to the present day. The second interview in April was held to clarify the sequence of events as well as to explore her motherhood experiences more deeply. Before recording, I began each interview with a recap of the study's aims and the interview's structure. I chose to evoke the concept of 'stories' in these informal pre-interview sessions to prime the participant to think of her participation as an opportunity to present her life story (Presser, 2009). I began the initial interview with an open-ended question asking the participant if she could tell me a little about her early life in Trinidad and Tobago, to establish her original story 'setting', as the first element in a linearly constructed narrative.

Finally, my own contribution to these interviews' findings must be considered. While the goal was to elicit qualitative data through the participant's own life story, my pre-existing perceptions of what challenges female offenders face, before, during, and post-incarceration, as well as "inequalities of power and

voice” (Fleetwood, 2015, p.374) between us inevitably factored into the study’s method and findings. While I employed a ten-question interview guide, my less-structured participation (the follow-up questions posed in response to her answers) logically could not have been formulated beforehand. Although difficult to quantify, I cannot discount the impact of my spontaneous choices of *which* avenues of narrative inquiry to further question the interviewee on. As Carlsson (2012) posits, an individual’s story “emerges in an interview situation as a result of both the interviewer and the interview participant” (ibid., p.2). Although they appear predominantly one-sided, it is important that these interviews and their results be understood as a co-created product of our mutual contributions (Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Fleetwood, 2015, 2016).

### **Narrative Analysis**

For the purpose of this study, narrative analysis is defined as a focused and rigorous examination of the “storied form” (Riessman, 2005, p.1) of the interviewee’s life experiences. By inviting the participant to present her storied interpretation of her life, there was the opportunity to interrogate the “sequence and consequence” (ibid.) of her constructed trajectories, so crucial to life course theory. The events that an individual chooses to offer are “selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (ibid.) and are “packed with sociological information” (Franzosi, 1998, p.517). As concerns this study’s aim, analysis of the ‘raw data’ of first-hand narratives may identify which events and relationships potentially affected decision-making and ultimately criminal or conventional actions and trajectories. How these may have affected decision-making is also considered.

There is immense value in discovering not only the bare facts and timing of women’s experiences, but in determining the importance they assign to them, and their “logical coherence” (Franzosi, 1998) and this analysis has been used successfully in earlier studies (Simi et al., 2016; Carlsson, C., 2013). The natural progressions, deviations, and pivotal moments in the participant’s personal ‘stories’ (Riessman, 2005) are further stratified by the time constraints of interviews: When primed to consider her life story within a timeframe, which events or experiences are prioritised as most impactful, and why? What events appear to immediately precede certain behaviours through a quantitative lens but may be discounted by female offenders themselves in a qualitative setting such as narrative interviews?

Through narrative analysis, I sought to learn whom exactly the participant ascribed or denied agency to in her retellings, as well as her perceptions of the qualities and effects of her relationships on her behavioural choices. With this study’s focus on perceived and constructed linearity of events, I first undertook a thematic analysis of the data to identify recurring patterns and then re-analysed the transcriptions to understand how the themes coalesced into broader narratives. A thematic analysis, though, would also be a compelling independent next step towards understanding the structural and personal pathways into and out of criminality for women in the Trinidad and Tobago context.

## **Ethical Approval & Measures**

Dealing primarily with sensitive experiences of criminal activity and relationships and carrying the “risk of [...] harming the [participant] physically or mentally” (Bassmann, 2021), I submitted an application to the Ethics Council of Malmö University’s Faculty of Health and Society. I outlined this project’s aim to fill the critical knowledge gap in Caribbean female offenders’ life course experiences, the research questions, and the precautions to ensure confidentiality. This study received advisory ethical approval with communication recommendations (HS2021 löp nr 13; see Appendix B).

All recommendations were implemented: the letter of information (see Appendix A) was modified to highlight the strict privacy measures and potential participants were informed that interviews could reasonably be expected to last between 30 minutes and two hours. In accordance with measures advised by Malmö University, I pre-empted both interviews by verbally informing the participant that she retained, at all times, the right to choose not to answer questions, with no justification needed, as well as the right to withdraw her consent to participate in the interview.

The telephone interviews were conducted via mobile phone with all data connections disabled, and the interviews (with prior consent) were recorded with an EVISTR Digital Voice Recorder with no internet connection capability. Upon interview completion, the audio files were immediately transferred to a password-protected external hard drive. Transcription was completed using NVivo qualitative analysis software to facilitate narrative analysis of the collected data.

A pseudonym was used in the transcriptions and current age and crimes were presented in broad terms. Upon completing interview transcriptions and storage on the secure hard drive, the audio files were destroyed. Transcriptions were retained until completion of the project was confirmed by Malmö University. All abovementioned measures and timelines for data destruction were communicated prior to the interviews.

## **FINDINGS**

### **‘Norah’: A Brief Introduction**

‘Norah’ is an Afro-Trinidadian woman born in the 1960s in South Trinidad into a large, impoverished family. Her parents separated before she was three and she primarily grew up in her mother’s custody. After becoming pregnant at age 14, she left the public education system and never returned to formal schooling.

Norah has had six children, of whom five survived to adulthood. All were born prior to her incarceration. She has been married once, has since divorced, and has resided for most of her life in South Trinidad, apart from two brief stints in North America. At the time of the interviews, Norah had been released from prison less than six months earlier.

This section presents and explores four distinct yet interacting narratives that were revealed via analysis of the interviews with Norah: those of lifelong victimisation, compromised agency, motivated advocacy, and the duty of motherhood.

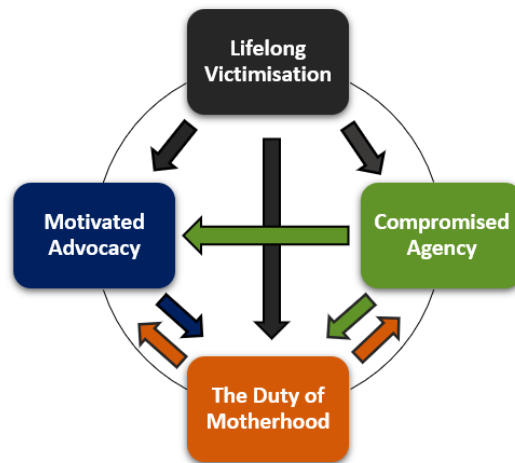


Figure 1. Illustration of the four interacting narratives that emerged via narrative analysis.

## The Lifelong Victimisation Narrative

*“My life is just a series of events, a series of horrific events.”*

Personal trauma after decades of victimisation at others’ hands was a key narrative in Norah’s interviews, and its repercussions are central to her experiences of agency and her views on what being a mother, and productive member of society, should entail.

After prompting her to tell me a little about herself, Norah began an extremely comprehensive life history. She attests to severe childhood abuse, by her mother’s partner, which she considers unsurprisingly, a highly traumatic period. According to Norah, this sexual abuse conferred upon her the status of ‘sexually experienced’ and differentiated her from classmates who proudly proclaimed their virginity. This realisation of a social disparity was a hugely defining moment. She speaks often of the absence of family or community support at this time:

*“[...] And that is the moment when the reality really stepped in for me about what you lost and how you feel and [...] we grew up in an environment where you can't talk, you understand me?”*

The social mores of Trinidad and Tobago in the 1970s and 1980s are specified as the reason Norah felt unable to communicate the ongoing abuse: sex was then strictly taboo and there were no programmes to act as sanctuary. A difficult lifelong relationship with her mother meant no personal relationships to find solace in, and she was arguably re-victimised by this lack of help from all corners.

After what she terms a “seduction and rape” at 14, Norah became pregnant for the first time, ending in a stillbirth. During this pregnancy, she became involved with a man 20 years her senior who pressured her into sex with others, resulting in the birth of her first surviving child at 16. In her mid-20s, then with three children, she entered into an unhappy, initially physically abusive marriage.

Repeatedly, Norah compares the emotional and psychological damage of past abuse to a physical deformity. When speaking about her relationship with her children, Norah reflects that she may not have been perfect and blames her early childhood, adolescent, and adult victimisations:

*“I feel mentally and emotionally handicapped [...] and I say that because I’ve never really gotten the chance to develop to my full potential, of what I would have been, could have been, should have been.”*

In this narrative, early life victimisation results, quite literally, in Norah having to assume the duties of motherhood in mid-adolescence, colouring every aspect of her life since. There is not a moment in Norah’s adult life where she speaks of any decision-making without explicitly factoring in others’ needs.

She speaks of enormous regret of not having been able to continue her formal education after the age of 14, of having to work gruelling hours to support her family for years. When prompted to discuss her perceptions of her post-incarceration future, she mentions feeling despondent, sometimes to the point of suicidal ideation, but that her “deep spiritual conviction” acts as a protective factor:

*“I could never say I was a person who was ever truly happy, you know? Even now you just learn to exist. I never really got out of life what I wanted or deserved. Life hand me a lemon so you just drink lemonade, you know, though I would’ve liked it to be pineapple, or sorrel, or grapefruit.”*

These victimisations’ effects are cumulative and result in despondency and a self-conception as a ‘damaged’: an individual with diminished potential and thus diminished control over how, and how much, she has been able to dictate her actions, as explored in the following section.

### **The Compromised Agency Narrative**

Of the crime that led to her incarceration, Norah is adamant that she is not guilty: while she thoroughly details the timeline of her actions, which do fit the offense’s legal definition, she contends that she acted unknowingly, and this crucial missing element of intent nullifies her guilt:

*“For me, I never intended to commit a crime. As I told them in there, I didn’t break the law, you know, I just dent it [...] I just let myself get caught up, because one person breaking the law lied to me and I was just trying to survive as a single parent and I get caught up, you understand?”*

At fault is the romantic partner who duped her into participating in the crime, as well as the police who chose not to listen and fully investigate her actual role. These are presented as further victimisations. Delving further into her history, she links her childhood ordeals to her incarceration, which she indicates she simply chose to accept:

*“I end up in jail because when I was growing up and frustrated with no one to talk to me and guide me, you understand? So I had to go outside of there and*

*make it on my own, no one wants to help. I didn't have brothers and sisters and family that I could have depend on."*

*"Ignorance is no excuse, that is why I made up my mind: OK, it happened, I'll take my jail. I went in there, a good law-abiding citizen with every intention of not breaking the rules."*

Throughout her story, Norah readily admits to committing crimes, albeit non-violent and non-drug-related ones, an important distinction to her. While she feels she has had her hand forced in terms of offending, she speaks of having staunchly maintained control of *which* crimes she must commit. She speaks unhesitatingly of minor offenses, frauds, thefts, and, in her professional career, breaking every possible road traffic rule barring the one that would incarcerate her in the event of a pedestrian collision: driving without a license or insurance. There is a deliberateness in her choices to offend: she must not repeat her mother's mistakes. She must provide her children with an environment in which they are insulated from domestic abuse, and they must not ever be left wanting for food, or shelter, or the most fundamental comforts. Her stance is that these offenses were born out of a need to survive and to support her family. There was no real choice, considering the weight of such responsibilities, and as such she is able to maintain a narrative identity of fundamentally being a 'non-criminal':

*"As a young woman, I did what I had to do, and sometimes it meant sleeping with men for money."*

*"My only crime was trying to find the money to provide for my children so they wouldn't have a disastrous life like I had. If that is a crime, I'm guilty. That's the only crime I'm guilty of, doing what I had to do to provide for my children."*

*"I am the first one in my family that ever went to jail [...] we are not a crime family."*

The real crime, according to Norah, is poverty. Financial precarity emerged as a prevailing factor in her narrative as the force behind both her criminal and conventional decision-making, a structural imposition allowing for very little, if any, control. There are no feelings of guilt or remorse associated with these admitted crimes, only regret for the dominating poverty context that demanded their commission.

### **The Motivated Advocacy Narrative**

Very early on, Norah insisted there was no need to anonymise her, as she wanted her story out there for others to learn about and from. Although duly informed that her name would be changed for confidentiality, her willingness to publicise her personal and institutional experiences, that she contends are broader societal issues, was clear. It was possible to identify moments in which Norah parlayed her narrative into calls for personal retribution and public reform, and the two are very linked in her story. There is a clear belief that her victimisations should have been handled by authorities and that losing access to education and thus a stable, conventional career was determinative, setting her on a path where regular offending was the only means of survival. Righting these wrongs is paramount on both a personal and national scale.



### **Personal Advocacy**

Norah emphasises the many ways in which she was first personally mistreated by others and then failed as an abused and teenaged single mother by various institutions through the structural violence of insufficient public services:

*“Who was there to really make sure you go to school? [...] How to protect me from this monster, to say look, this man will rape you and get you pregnant and that go be the end of your education. Why they don’t tell children these things? Mothers need to stand up for their children, my mother didn’t [...] and I had to burn to learn.”*

*“Which counsellor talked to me to help me deal with the shame and the degradation of going back to school, to encourage me and help me trying to put me back in the classroom and say look, you can still get your education?”*

Norah speaks of being abandoned by two of her children’s fathers and physically abused by multiple partners, although she states she physically retaliated against such abuse three months into her marriage, a moment of control she prides herself on, changing the relationship’s nature.

*“I is one who not taking lash, you understand? [...] Because every time you hit me, we going to fight it out.”*

When detailing her incarceration, Norah describes herself as someone unwilling to simply accept the negligent and abusive conditions:

*“Because, you see, like after your rights does get violated and you see all that happened to me? Nobody, absolutely nobody violates my rights right now. Nobody takes nothing that I should rightfully have ... I deserve the right to protect me. ‘Cause I realise, sadly, nobody doing it for you, they will hurt you.”*

These are two of Norah’s strongest proclamations of taking control of the direction of her life in the face of opposition: advocating for her right not to be abused, either by partners or institutions. Norah, speaking from a present-day vantage point, considers herself more educated via current increased media coverage of abuse that she states was lacking in her own early childhood and young adulthood, and, extrapolating this knowledge to the wider current population, considers her early life experiences to be less likely to be reproduced in later cohorts, although advocating for their protection is still a major narrative.

### **Public Advocacy**

Owing to her history of victimisation, Norah demands that authorities better educate the population about how crimes such as the one she was incarcerated for, unfold:

*“I always say, you know, the police and dem, they need to be explicit in the news. Let the public know [how to identify the signs of such a crime] Come on, let the public know! And that is something that I want the public to know, put it out there so that young girls wouldn’t get themselves tie up!”*

Poverty and its consequences were a recurring topic: Her father’s livelihood was conventional but unstable, and necessitated reliance on national public assistance.

Later, Norah recites the precise figures of all of the major expenses in her life, down to the cent: it is clear financial precarity has informed and arguably dictated every decision. When it comes to criminality, the logic is simple, according to Norah:

*“You need to understand poverty does cause people to commit crime.”*

*“Lack of proper social services in this country, you understand, it triggers a chain of events, from one thing to the next and you get caught up and you end up in the people dem jail.”*

When speaking of her incarceration, she devotes a significant portion of time solely to the abuses and denials of rights that she alleges to have endured there. Incarcerated in the country’s Women’s Prison, this period is deemed both damaging and a useless punishment, ultimately of no benefit to her. This latter sentiment could arguably be due to the fact that she does not consider herself a willing participant in the crime she was incarcerated for, and therefore not guilty of it:

*“That jail system is a total, total, total waste of time, or maybe for me because it’s not like I was a bad person, it’s not that I was like criminal-minded. It’s not to say that I was on drugs or cocaine [...] and end up in jail where I needed to be rehabilitated, no.”*

Norah points to the absence of any actual rehabilitative programs as the reason for the prison’s ineffectiveness. Maintaining her status as “not a criminal”, which would logically deny the need for the promised yet undelivered rehabilitation, the lack of any vocational training meant that there was no benefit whatsoever to her time in “that hellhole”, even after release.

Instead, Norah’s incarceration is a series of indignities by prison officers and the prison service; she details waiting months or years for medical care:

*“If the government put me here, you are responsible for my health and safety. So anytime there is an existing condition in this jail that interferes with my safety, I will hold you responsible for it and I will sue you when I leave this jail.”*

Norah insists that the names of her abusive partners remain anonymous but not so those prison officials whom she accuses of petty mistreatment and denial of access to resources and an outright failure to live up to their ostensible goal of rehabilitation. She also recounts the histories and crimes of her fellow inmates and highlights those whom she believes to have been incarcerated unfairly due to similarly difficult lives. She advocates for their talents and skills and constantly reiterates the damage she considers the prison system inflicts:

*“They are traumatising people in the jail, they are not rehabilitating them.”*

Ultimately, Norah expressed her hope to write a book about her life story, although she states that she would require help, believing herself intellectually incapable of doing so.

## The Duty of Motherhood Narrative

Having become a mother so early in life, motherhood factors into all of her narratives and much of Norah's justifications for and explanations of decisions made. Recalling realising that she was pregnant for the first time at 14, and her years of single motherhood, Norah is stoic and indicates, if indirectly, the scale of the issue in a wider societal context:

*"I wouldn't be the first and I wouldn't be the last young girl to have a baby."*

*"This is what single parents have to go through. You had to degrade and desecrate your body in the name of your survival because, what? You're poor."*

When asked to elaborate on her role as a mother, Norah indicated feelings of both powerlessness, pleading for spiritual intervention and aid, as well as a duty to protect them at all costs from experiencing her past traumas, and to accordingly make the 'right' choices in how and with whom to raise them:

*"[...] I said to God, it was in the fit of frustration and poverty and, you know, extreme hardship, I say "God, you know, if I never get anything out of this life for myself, do me one favour: never make my children see trouble like how I see trouble."*

*"I made sure that they weren't raped by their stepfather, I made sure that they weren't abused, you know. I mean I mightn't have been able to provide ham, lamb, and jam but they never had to beg, they never had to walk the street bare feet, they never go to school without shoes [...] bad as it is, home was always comfortable enough."*

Norah describes a moral imperative to exercise what power she does hold to protect her children from abuse, which she was not protected from herself, and to work extreme hours to provide for her family, even at the cost of her own well-being. It is arguably personal advocacy expressed through the mother role:

*"It doesn't matter that you have children out of horrific circumstances, the fact is that when you have children, you get up and do what you have to do."*

*"Being a provider, and in order to do it, it destroys me [...] I mean I have worked my body to the bone."*

Choosing a husband who has not abused her children and the fact that none of her children has had children before the age of 20 are cited as intentional choices and a personal accomplishment, respectively. When her youngest daughter became involved with delinquent individuals, Norah "made the decision to have her locked away, to help curb that", and her daughter was placed with the Children's Authority until adulthood. Such a step may seem extreme but is to Norah a measure of how far she will go for her children's protection, at once advocating and asserting agency in an area she feels she can and must manage herself.

## DISCUSSION

### Agency

The analysis uncovered that Norah's experiences of victimisation and subsequently minimised agency is similar to those espoused in the existing literature (Ciesla et al., 2019) When it came to criminality, her own agency was conceptualised as both absent and present: it was never a zero-sum factor in the narrative, but instead 'bounded' in nature (McNeill et al., 2011, as cited in Hale, 2020). Poverty and the demands of raising children in a safe environment were overarching conditions for the vast majority of life, and as such are considered to have dictated her actions and trajectory to a large extent: abuse and subsequent early motherhood precipitated her exit from formal schooling and, to her mind, barred her from more traditional and stable career paths that would have put her on a trajectory in which regularly offending was not a matter of survival.

Considering the numerous offenses she related committing, specifically excluding the one she was incarcerated for, it is clear that contradictions in her perceptions of herself as fundamentally non-criminal, further testify to agency as a unique product of individual factors and social and environmental forces (Parry, 2021). This labelling of herself is similar to the narrative of rejecting criminality as incongruent with personal self-image found in Fleetwood's (2015) study. Although her narrative is logically presented in a strictly linear fashion, the numerous assaults, both sexual and physical, that Norah relates having endured are an ever-present, perhaps conscious, motivator to construct a safer life for those who depend upon her. Financial insecurity and the demands of her children's needs are related as constraints on her agency, motivating her offenses (see Michaelsen, 2011). There is also pride expressed in having chosen to work long hours which necessitated road traffic offenses to maximise wages and in therefore having chosen to prioritise her children when other mothers have not, in her personal experience, even if there is paired regret for the need to work to such an extreme due to poverty. These choices are taken within an overarching framework of structural victimisation and duty to others but are still implicitly narrated as having been personal choices.

Considering the ambiguity in research on the effects of motherhood on promoting either criminality or desistance across the life course (Michaelsen, 2011;), it is clear from the findings that Norah's perception of this matter falls strictly on the side of children being (unintentional) motivators to act criminally (Michaelsen, 2011). They are more often referenced as a monolith than individually: they are the family unit that she simply must provide for at any cost and consequently motivate her offending. As in similar studies on motherhood's effect (ibid.), Norah derides the necessity of shouldering the financial burden with insufficient social or institutional support, on a personal or national scale. Norah's offending is an expression of her social ties and the responsibilities they entail. Interestingly, many of her more explicit expressions of 'taking back control' are in opposition to later physical victimisation, after realisation of her personal worth. The life of constant struggle that she attests to is itself a further abstraction of an external force at play in her narrative, signalling the lack of agency she asserts is the principal determinative element of her story.

### **Interdependent Relationship Effects**

Analysis indicated that Norah's early childhood and adolescence reflected several of the familial and social risk factors associated with later offending in women. Her parents' divorce and the subsequent family unit separation (Jolliffe et al. 2017), her family's financial difficulties (ibid.), her sexual abuse (Katz, 2000) and her difficult relationship with her custodial parent (Jolliffe et al. 2017) all elevated the risk of future criminal behaviour, according to the research. Previous research indicates childhood abuse is a significant predictor of future criminality (Farrington, 2003; Katz, 2000) and this was corroborated by the chronic sexual abuse she experienced and that she also narratively presented as fundamental to her self-perceptions and consequent trajectories, due to lasting trauma. Her trajectory is arguably linked to the criminal offending trajectory of her mother's partner.

In clarifying her narrative identity as a non-criminal individual, Norah provides as evidence the fact that she is "not from a crime family", indicating that, in this respect, the criminal trajectories of her early childhood social ties are not determinative in her narrative, as they were not a factor as in Fleetwood's (2015) study. However, a further effect identified in the analysis of poor-quality interpersonal relationships' impact is Norah's identification of a lack of social support being one of the main reasons that she was ultimately incarcerated, echoed in the same study (Fleetwood, 2015) and in life course research indicating women are more strongly impacted by negative social interactions (Farrington, 2003). Similar to Bailey's (2013) study, also conducted in a Caribbean context, her criminal offending, is narratively presented as a direct consequence of the criminal choices and trajectory of her romantic partner, although her ignorance of the crime is stressed, as opposed to the coercion element identified in Bailey's research (ibid.)

### **Timing & Sequence**

The element of timing is most apparent in Norah's recounting of becoming 'sexually experienced' by way of chronic sexual abuse in her childhood. She attributes this as her initial awareness of having been set on a different path than her agetates, also invoking the lack of agency she had in labelling herself as 'experienced'. Her narrative links this social trauma as facilitating her later sexual abuse and first pregnancy. This pregnancy in early adolescence was a development that occurred 'too early' with regards to conventional social norms and timelines (Elder, 1998), with consequences for her personal trajectory. This narrative of assuming adult roles and responsibilities at an inappropriate moment in the life course, in this case too young, is echoed in Helfgott et al.'s (2020) study on written narratives: poor timing is narratively presented as the root of a path to criminality and subsequent incarceration. Its ultimately permanent interruption of her formal education and the knock-on effects on her lifetime career opportunities are all clear indicators that the sequence of these events have, at least subjectively, limited her choices, and informed her justifications of her choices to act criminally or conventionally throughout her life.

When reflecting on her future and desistance, her recent financial stability, and the change in her primary relationship to her children who, now all legal adults, are significantly less financially dependent upon her, Norah presented a very defined and confident vision of her future desistance, without these formerly principal

motivators at play, a distinct condition that has been seen to impact the success desistance process in other female offender-oriented research (Michaelsen, 2011)

### **Historical Context**

Repeatedly, within her advocacy narrative, Norah makes note of the differences that she sees between her childhood era and that of today's youth, highlighting the differences that she notes in public access to information and the number of informed guardians, that she considers less hindered by restrictive sexual taboos. While the catastrophic impacts of poverty, early childhood abuse are certainly not limited to the Trinidadian context in female offender narratives (Farrington, 2003; Katz, 2000), the analysis indicates that Norah's historical and geographical context-specific reality formed a perfect storm. Growing up in Trinidad in the 1960s and 1970s in profound poverty with little recourse to child-oriented social services or even an adult in the community to whom to communicate the abuse is presented as indicative, if not determinative, of future mistreatment and abandonment by others with whom she shared her life. Repeatedly she questions: What would her life have been like if teachers and social services had intervened at a young age and ensured she remained on a conventional path?

With this being the primary example in the narrative, I argue that the results concerning historical context are ultimately inconclusive and require deeper quantitative and qualitative research into actual changes in social awareness and child protection policies in Trinidad and Tobago in the last five decades.

## **LIMITATIONS**

With this study's extremely small sample size of a single participant, the findings are not and were not intended to be representative of the female offender population in Trinidad and Tobago, nor evidence of direct causal links to offending (Farrington, 2003). They reflect instead an initial exploration of the narratives developed by a female offender in this very specific cultural context, which is important information, in spite of the data not being generalisable. In future, studies with larger sample sizes would likely be better positioned to discover narratives that may be shared among a significant number of the local female offending population, and consequently better capable of informing future research directions and public policy. As narratives "do not mirror but refract the past" (Riessman, 2015, p. 6), their richly informative data should also be considered with rigorous quantitative research into female offending experiences, for improved understanding and implementation of effective social policies.

In seeking to explore a lifelong narrative, the participant was predominantly asked to recall emotions and motivations of actions that occurred years in the past, which are arguably coloured by her current perspectives and thus there are possible biases in memory (Ciesla et al., 2019) due to memory's "reconstructed" (Gemignani, 2014) nature. This is an inevitable feature of such narrative and life history interviews but does not undermine the value of collecting such qualitative data. It must also be noted that the first of the two interviews was conducted while the study was still primarily focused on life narratives in the context of post-incarceration desistance, and the participant was initially primed by the information letter to consider her narrative responses in this view, potentially

affecting her choices in framing her storytelling, and ultimately the findings. Finally, the 'co-creation' element (Presser & Sandberg, 2015) of the findings mentioned earlier in this paper are a factor to be considered when evaluating the results and further discussion.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this narrative analysis of a formerly incarcerated female offender's life story in Trinidad & Tobago have afforded a glimpse into this extremely under-researched group's lived experiences and contributed to resolving the critical regional knowledge gap. Analysis has uncovered narratives that focus strongly on experiences of victimisation, its limiting effects on personal agency, and the resulting motivation to advocate for self and others, that was arguably expressed through a separate narrative of the weight of expectations of motherhood. From a life course perspective, the participant's variable agency was able to be particularly explored, as were the effects of social ties, timing, and historical context that could be inferred from her narratives.

From the narratives, there are clear indications that local risk factors are identical to the existing research literature, although further research within this local context is needed to strengthen the criminological knowledge base. Further local research would also better inform future public policies and programmes, more effectively meeting the arguably neglected social, institutional, and financial needs of female offenders and girls and women on high-risk pathways to offending.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER

<b>Project title:</b> Exploring Desistance and Turning Points in Life after Incarceration for Trinidadian Women: A Narrative Study	<b>Date:</b> 22/02/2021
<b>Study manager/s: (Student/s)</b> Brittani Bruchet	<b>Studying at Malmö University,</b> <b>Faculty of Health and Society,</b> <b>S-205 06 Malmö,</b> <b>Phone +46 40 665 70 00</b> <b>Education and level:</b> <b>Master's in Criminology</b>

My name is Brittani Bruchet, and I will be carrying out this thesis project as a Master's student in Criminology at Malmö University, under the supervision of Mika Hagerlid and with the approval of the university's Board of Ethics. This project's objective is to explore and briefly examine how the life events of women who have been incarcerated in Trinidad & Tobago may impact decisions to decrease, or stop, participation in criminal activity.

Currently, much of this type of research focuses primarily on men. Some such examples of life events are motherhood, employment, and the incarceration period itself although you will be able to discuss any life event that you consider important to your desistance from crime after incarceration.

This study will be carried out by interviewing women such as yourself who have been previously imprisoned and since released, and who agree to speak about their personal experiences. The mostly open-ended interview questions regarding your personal experiences will focus on desisting from crime and the previously mentioned life events, as well as any other important moments or events you wish to speak about.

You are under no obligation to answer all questions, only those that you feel comfortable answering.

The interview can be conducted in **whichever form you choose**: by phone, by video conference, or by meeting in person. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded to ensure no information that you provide is missed. **Your privacy and confidentiality are the main priority at all times**: these audio recordings will be stored on a secure password protected external device (to which only I have access) and deleted as soon as they have been fully transcribed. These transcriptions and all interview notes will be destroyed as soon as a final grade is received for this student project.

No personal identifying information will be used in either the transcription or the final thesis project, to minimise any risks to your privacy.

If you should agree to participate, please understand it is entirely voluntary and that you can end the interview and/or withdraw your consent at any time, and for any reason, which you do not have to disclose.

The interview may last between 25 minutes and 2 hours. As an independent student project, should you decline to participate, there will be no impact on your access to any services and I will not be reporting the results of this project to any other individual or organisation.

You are hereby asked to take part in this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to ask any questions you have concerning this project.

Brittani Bruchet

## APPENDIX B: CONFIRMATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL



Malmö universitet / Fakulteten för Hälsa och samhälle  
Etikrådet  
Adm sekreterare Ewa Sortberg Bassmann

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**Council's**  
2021 02 12

HS2021 löp nr 13

**Project:** Exploring Turning Points in Desistance after Incarceration Women: A Narrative Study

**Student:** Brittani Bruchet

**Supervisor:** Mika Hagerlid

**Rapporteur:** Anne Wennick

### The Council on Ethics' council on application HS 2021/serial no 13 presented 2021-02-12

The Council on Ethics at the Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University has no objection to the project being carried out as a master thesis, but recommends the student and supervisor to reflect on the following:

- that the letter of information clarifies how confidentiality is ensured throughout the project,
- that the letter of information state the estimated time that must be set aside to participate in the project,
- that the letter of information clarifies that the student conducting the study sounds under absolute secrecy, and
- that the recruitment process is carried out in two steps to ensure the voluntariness of participation; i) the gatekeeper asks presumptive participants if hers or his contact information can be conveyed to the student, ii) if yes, the student provides further information about the project and asks about their position on participation.

The points above are recommended for the student to manage together with the project supervisor.

Anne Wennick  
Member of the Council on Ethics at the Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University

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## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

	Initial Question	Related Sub-Questions
Q1	Can you tell me a little about yourself?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and where did you grow up in Trinidad or Tobago?</li> <li>• How were your experiences of primary and secondary school?</li> <li>• Do you have any children?</li> <li>• What was the first crime you recall committing?</li> </ul>
Q2	Can you tell me about when you were first incarcerated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your incarceration experience and your feelings during it?</li> <li>• How long were you incarcerated for?</li> <li>• (if already a mother) Who assumed custody of your child/children during your incarceration?</li> <li>• What was the post-release reunion with your child/children like?</li> <li>• Did you experience any moments you consider pivotal during your incarceration?</li> </ul>
Q3	What were your thoughts or intentions concerning any potential future criminal activity during your prison sentence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have these thoughts/intentions changed in any way since you have begun your reintegration process?</li> <li>• How and why have they changed?</li> <li>• After your release, were you ever reincarcerated? If yes: Can you tell me about the motivations leading up to that incarceration? What were the differences and similarities between your incarcerations?</li> <li>• How has your lifestyle changed, if at all, after incarceration?</li> <li>• Would you consider your incarceration a turning point for you?</li> </ul>
Q4	How old were you when you had your first child? (For interviewees who are mothers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was this before or after your first crime? First incarceration?</li> <li>• At that point in your life, how did you feel about becoming a mother?</li> <li>• (If negatively) What do you feel was missing, or made the experience difficult? (If positively) What made the experience such a positive one for you, more specifically?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were there any immediate changes to your criminality when you discovered you were expecting a child?</li> <li>• (If more than one child) What were your experiences with your later children? How were they similar or different?</li> </ul>
<b>Q5</b>	What role do you think your child has played in your desistance from crime?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What impact do you personally feel they had on your decisions to engage in crime, if any?</li> <li>• Are there any decision-making moments that stand out to you, with regards to choosing to engage in crime and your child/children?</li> <li>• Do you consider them a motivator to desist?</li> <li>• Are there elements of childcare that you consider stressful, or in any way a difficulty in your desistance process?</li> </ul>
<b>Q6</b>	What was your employment history prior to your incarceration?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long were you employed at each position?</li> <li>• Did these periods of employment coincide with your participation in criminal activity?</li> <li>• How did you feel about your employment?</li> </ul>
<b>Q7</b>	What has been your experience in securing gainful employment after your incarceration?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you required to disclose your status as a former inmate/ disclose your criminal record?</li> <li>• Were you offered any vocational/career training during your incarceration or during your initial reintegration period?</li> <li>• What barriers, if any, do you experience in gaining conventional employment?</li> <li>• Do you feel the barriers impact on your decision-making with regards to criminal activity?</li> <li>• How important do you personally consider employment to be in your desistance process?</li> </ul>
<b>Q8</b>	How impactful do you feel your personal relationships have been in your desistance processes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would you say that the impact has been largely positive?</li> <li>• In what ways, if any, have your personal relationships been harmful to your desistance process?</li> <li>• From whom would you say you experience the greatest level of impact:</li> </ul>

		<p>Family? Friends? Colleagues? Romantic interests?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has your manner of socialising changed between pre- and post-desistance process?</li> </ul>
<b>Q9</b>	Overall, what do you consider to be the biggest factor in your daily desistance process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes it effective for you? Is there a rewarding feeling associated? Is there a negative, avoidant aspect to it?</li> </ul>
<b>Q10</b>	Are there any other 'turning points', or elements of the desistance process as you experience it, that I have not touched upon, that you feel are important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you think of moments in which there has been the opportunity to commit crime, can you recall what prompted you to decide, one way or the other?</li> <li>• Do you think they are likely to be shared by other women who have been incarcerated?</li> </ul>