Rural Women’s Pathways to Crime: A Grounded Theory Study of Rural Women and their Experiences in Jails and Prisons

In discussing the lack of research on female offenders there is even less research on women incarcerated from rural areas. There is a lack of health services even more so in rural jails and prisons (Kane & DiBartolo, 2002). This creates hardships for women that need mental health and health services. Data shows rural incarcerated women having various physical and mental health issues, yet only the basic needs are met if even that (Kane & DiBartolo, 2002). Rural areas are portrayed as peaceful areas and this perception contributes to the lack in crime research in these areas. Through the minimal research that has been done in rural areas, research shows that rural areas still have a substantial amount of criminal activity at certain periods of time throughout the years (Steiner, 1981). This research suggests more support is needed for women in the rural communities since there are lacks of opportunities and harsher sentences (Flanagan, 1997/1998). Our purpose in this article is to present grounded theory research on the experiences of rural women’s incarceration through the eyes of the women themselves. We discuss the programming available, health issues, and life prior to and after their life of crime/incarceration. We anticipate finding similarities between these women’s experiences and their hardships upon being released into the community. Our
focus is to initiate a discussion that could eventually be a part of a design of programs to provide much needed assistance for the women in these rural areas.