

# Research & Policy Brief

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## Maine's Women Offenders:

### *WHAT DO WE KNOW? 2007 – 2009 UPDATE*

#### INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970's women have disproportionately been impacted by a massive increase in incarceration rates in comparison to men. In the U.S. from 2000 to 2009 the number of incarcerated females increased by 24%, compared to 16% for males. In Maine, the numbers are much more staggering. From 2000 to 2009 the increase of incarcerated females in Maine was 118%, for males during the same time period it was 17%. Females in Maine are now about 7% of the incarcerated population, which is the same as the nation (Frost, Greene, & Pranis, 2006; West, Sabol, & Greenman, 2010).

This brief presents a summary of a report which updated the previous 2009 report (King, 2009) with new data. The new sample consists of case records of 1939 women who entered probation in 2007, 2008, and 2009. This sample is compared to the previous report's sample of women who entered probation in 2004, 2005, and 2006. All case records were imported from the MDOC's Correctional Information System (CORIS) and includes basic demographic information such as gender, age, and race/ethnicity. The goal is to present the latest statistics and any trends between the two samples. This report aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of Maine's women offenders?
2. What are the recidivism rates of Maine's women offenders?
3. Are there any trends over the 6 year time period?

#### Key Findings

- The number of women under supervision has increased.
- Recidivism rates of women have increased.
- Recidivism continues to vary greatly by county.
- The LSI-R risk assessment tool may not be the best predictor for moderate and high risk women.

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## Findings: What Do We Know?

### Demographics

The number of women entering probation decreased from 2007-2009, but increased from 2006 (n=597).

The race of Maine’s women offenders is predominantly white (96.4%). Almost half of the Maine women probationers were single (45.1%). More than half of the women were between the ages of 17 and 34 years old (57.6%). The mean age at entry into probation was 34 years old.

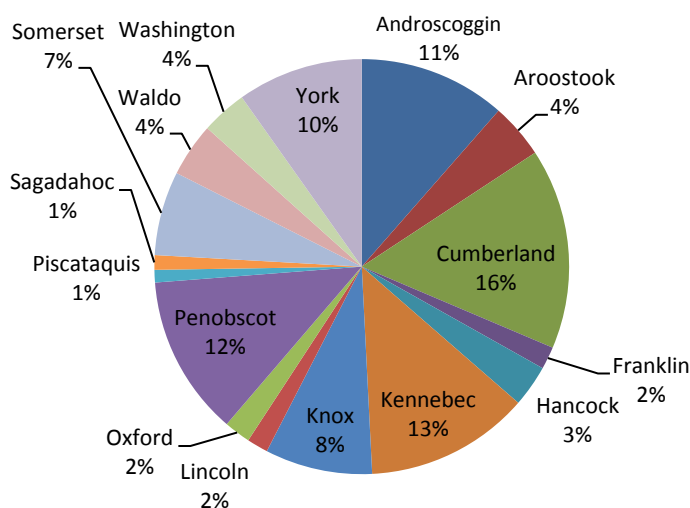
Almost half of the women were unemployed (44.4%) and only 26% were employed full-time. Almost half (48.5%) of the women had a High School Diploma or GED, while 41.6% of the women had not completed a High School education. Only 9.9% had some college or higher.

Nearly (62.1%) two-thirds of the women in this sample resided in one of five counties: Cumberland (n=303), Kennebec (n=248), Penobscot (n=242), Androscoggin (n=222), or York (n=190).

**Table 1: 2007 – 2009  
Sample Demographics**

Cohort	N=1939	%
2007	671	34.6%
2008	624	32.2%
2009	644	33.2%
Race	N=1895	%
Asian	4	0.2%
Black or African American	24	1.3%
Native American	39	2.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.1%
White	1827	96.4%
Marital Status	N=1939	%
Single	875	45.1%
Married	329	17.0%
Divorced/ Widowed/ Separated	505	26.0%
Other/ Unknown	230	11.9%
Employment Status	N=1464	%
Full Time employed	381	26.0%
Part Time employed	178	12.2%
Self employed	15	1.0%
Unemployed	650	44.4%
Other	53	3.6%
Not in the Labor Force	187	12.8%
Education Level	N=1306	%
Up to 8th grade	82	6.3%
Some High School	461	35.3%
High School Diploma/ GED	633	48.5%
Some College	85	6.5%
Bachelor or higher degree	45	3.4%
Age	N=1939	%
17- 24	469	24.2%
25 - 34	647	33.4%
35 - 44	478	24.7%
45 - 54	279	14.4%
55 - 64	58	3.0%
65+	8	0.4%
Mean age	<b>34</b>	

**Figure 1: Returning County of Maine  
Women Probationers**



## Criminal History/ Offense Patterns

The mean age at first arrest was 24 years old (n=1850), which was the same as the 2004-2006 sample. The range of ages at first arrest was quite varied. The youngest was 8 years old and the oldest was 70 years old at first arrest.

On average the women in the 2007-2009 sample had 3 prior offenses (mean=3.58). The number of prior offenses ranged from 0-75, meaning that while some women had no criminal history, some had as many as 75 prior offenses. About one quarter (24.58%) of the women offenders were under the age of 18 at first arrest, thus indicating that they had experience with the juvenile justice system.

The number of misdemeanor offenses committed by the women in the sample increased slightly over the three year period (2007 n=276, 2008 n=252, 2009 n=289). In order of frequency, the most prevalent types of misdemeanor offenses of Maine's women offender population were assault and threatening (n=288), operating under the influence (n=162), drugs (n=157), theft (n=72), and forgery (n=22). Cumulatively, these five offenses (n=701) accounted for 85.8% of all misdemeanor offenses committed by women probationers from 2007 to 2009.

The number of felony offenses decreased slightly over the three year period (2007 n=348, 2008 n=314, 2009 n=309). In order of frequency, the most prevalent felony offenses were drugs (n=333), theft (n=262), burglary (n=86), forgery (n=62), and assault and threatening (n=47). Cumulatively these offenses (n=790) accounted for 81.4% of all felony offenses committed by women probationers from 2007 to 2009.

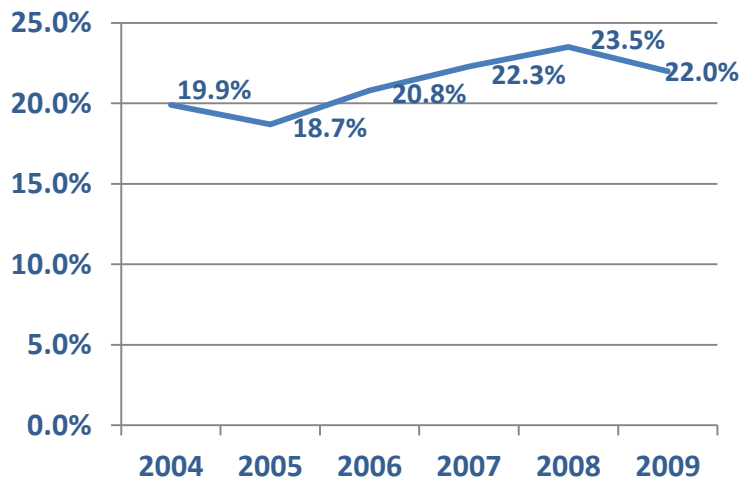
**Table 2: Criminal History/Offense Patterns, 2007-2009**

<b>Age at First Arrest</b>	
Mean	24.53
<b>Prior Offenses</b>	
Mean	3.58
<b>Number of Misdemeanor Offenses</b>	
2007	276
2008	252
2009	289
<b>Top 5 Misdemeanor Offenses</b>	
Assault and Threatening	288
Operating Under the Influence	162
Drugs	157
Theft	72
Forgery	22
<b>Number of Felony Offenses</b>	
2007	348
2008	314
2009	309
<b>Top 5 Felony Offenses</b>	
Drugs	333
Theft	262
Burglary	86
Forgery	62
Assault and Threatening	47

## Recidivism

To avoid distortion in comparison of recidivism rates due to different lengths of time spent on probation, researchers compared 1-year recidivism rates for each cohort. As Figure 2 shows, the average statewide recidivism rate has increased from 19.9% in 2004 to 22.0% in 2009.

**Figure 2: Maine's Average 1-Year Recidivism Rates**



**Table 3: 1 – Year Recidivism Rates by Risk Level and Cohort**

Risk Level		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Administrative</b>	N	24	11	5	9	11	14
	% within risk level	9.5%	7.0%	3.8%	8.0%	9.0%	10.6%
<b>Low<sup>1</sup></b>	N	*	*	25	45	52	39
	% within risk level			13.7%	19.1%	24.3%	18.7%
<b>Moderate</b>	N	38	24	32	46	44	51
	% within risk level	26.8%	22.4%	25.4%	25.4%	24.7%	29.0%
<b>High</b>	N	29	33	39	28	19	17
	% within risk level	30.5%	35.9%	46.4%	36.4%	38.8%	30.9%
<b>Maximum</b>	N	11	12	15	14	11	10
	% within risk level	40.7%	50.0%	42.9%	43.8%	54.5%	41.7%
<b>Total<sup>2</sup></b>	N	152	105	116	142	137	131
	% within cohort	19.9%	18.7%	20.8%	22.3%	23.5%	22.0%

<sup>1</sup> Low category was not added until 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Totals do not include recidivism cases with no LSI-R scores

In 2009, about one-tenth of the women in the Administrative (10.6%) risk level recidivated. Higher levels of risk correlated with higher recidivism rates, although the outcome difference between Moderate and High risk women was only 1.9% in 2009. Recidivism rates among the Maximum category have fluctuated the most from 2004-2009, ranging from 40.7%-54.5%.

The recidivism rates by county vary greatly. The differences between the 2004-2006 sample and the 2007-2009 sample are shown in the right column. The county with the greatest reduction in recidivism was Lincoln with a decrease of 18%. The county with the greatest increase in recidivism was Washington, with an increase of 4%. Overall the majority (10 out of 16) of the counties had decreases in recidivism rates between the two samples. One county remained the same, Hancock, and 4 counties increased.

**Table 4: 1 – Year Recidivism Rates by County**

County	2004-2006	2007-2009	Difference
Androscoggin	17%	20%	3%
Aroostook	38%	31%	-7%
Cumberland	31%	22%	-9%
Franklin	13%	15%	2%
Hancock	21%	21%	0%
Kennebec	32%	27%	-5%
Knox	30%	23%	-7%
Lincoln	40%	22%	-18%
Oxford	20%	18%	-2%
Penobscot	24%	25%	1%
Piscataquis <sup>3</sup>	*	26%	-
Sagadahoc	17%	14%	-3%
Somerset	33%	21%	-12%
Waldo	24%	21%	-3%
Washington	22%	26%	4%
York	22%	19%	-3%
<b>Total Statewide Average</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>1%</b>

<sup>3</sup> Sample size was too small to calculate for 2004-2006 sample.

## Policy Implications

In 2003, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) sponsored the groundbreaking report, *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders* by Barbara Bloom, Ph.D., Barbara Owen, Ph.D., and Stephanie Covington, Ph.D. The report established the following six guiding principles to ensure correctional agencies provide gender responsive management, supervision and treatment services for women:

- Acknowledge that gender (being female) makes a difference;
- Create an environment based on safety, respect and dignity;
- Develop policies, practices and programs incorporating the fact that women are relationship-oriented;
- Address substance abuse, trauma and mental health issues in a comprehensive, integrated and culturally relevant manner in services and supervision;
- Provide women an opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status; and
- Establish a system of community supervision and reentry with comprehensive, collaborative services.

National correctional policy has begun to change as more data becomes available on women and girls. The most recent version of the ACA policy "Public Correctional Policy on Adult and Juvenile Female Offender Services," extensively revised in 2006, reflects the NIC guiding principles and calls for "gender responsiveness in the development of services and programs for adult and juvenile female offenders." Rather than simply import services designed for males, it specifies "programs must be designed and implemented to meet the needs" of the female population.

An emphasis on implementing gender-responsive programs in the community is critical. Most women and girls under supervision are not in institutions but are assigned to probation, parole (aftercare) or other community-based programs that historically have received the least attention. Single-gender caseloads and gender-responsive policies for women and girls in community programs might help alleviate alienation of those returning to the community and they certainly can save money. The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, for example, implemented single-gender caseloads for girls more than 10 years ago, and in two years, they reduced the number of girls from Baltimore being sent to juvenile facilities by 90 percent.

However, gender-responsive services cannot be successful without the support and involvement of others. Seeking out and building alliances with academic institutions, medical and mental health organizations, other governmental agencies, individuals, and groups in our community is essential in implementing meaningful gender-responsive services for women and girls in the criminal justice system. By sharing information and program ideas, implementing the principles of gender-responsive programming, and following the policies and standards established by ACA and related organizations, we can ensure that Maine's corrections system will meet the needs of women and girls.

## Resources

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