Drugs, poverty & coercion: Women incarcerated in Latin America

Marie Nougier, IDPC
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• IDPC is a global network of more than 170 NGOs
• Promoting NGO engagement in drug policy debates
• Promoting more humane drug policies
Drug laws are devastating the lives of women across the Americas. Most are sole providers for their families, and their imprisonment leaves dependents without support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Women Incarcerated for Drug Crimes</th>
<th>Percentage of Women Incarcerated for Drug Crimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>16,489</td>
<td>60.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>3,830</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>75.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1,889</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Federal 528</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local 1,547</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2,679</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Profile of women incarcerated

- Low-level, non-violent, first time offenders
- Single mothers of several children
- Low levels of formal education
- Coercion by male partners
MOTHER BEHIND BARS

Sentence: 5 years, 4 months for selling small quantities of drugs from her home.
Women’s incarceration: A triple stigma

• Disproportionate prison sentences
• Stigmatised and condemned by society
• The criminal record as a barrier to social reintegration

Jenny, sentenced for 5 years and 4 months for attempting to bring drugs into a prison. Released after 4 months, but…
Working group of experts
Our objectives

- Reduce the number of women in prison & reform harmful drug policies
- Show why this problem is important and needs to be urgently addressed
- Bring affected women to the table
Showing the ‘human face’

I AM NOT A CRIMINAL
6 years for bringing drugs into a prison.

KIDNAPPED AND COERCED
Liliana is Venezuelan and is being detained at an Argentine federal prison. She has two children in Venezuela.

HOW WOULD IT BE IF WE HAD OPPORTUNITIES?
6 years, 4 months for a drug offense

CAUGHT IN A VICIOUS CYCLE
Current sentence: 6 years, 6 months for selling drugs.
Regional guide for policy reform

- Objective: Offer recommendations on alternative policy options
- Focus on: drug policy reform, alternatives to incarceration, cultivation, social inclusion, pregnant women, and data collection
Recommendations for reform

• Need more data on scale & impact of incarceration of women for drug offences
• Decriminalise drug use
• Ensure proportionality of sentencing & the use of mitigating factors
• Promote alternatives to incarceration – **prison to be used only as a last resort**
• Focus on the underlying causes of involvement in the drug trade
• Focus on policies supporting women post incarceration
Moving towards reform: Costa Rica

- 2011: 75% of women in prison for drug offences
- 2013: Review of drug legislation to reduce penalties for women smuggling drugs in male prisons
- 2014: Launch of support network for vulnerable women
- 2017: Removal of criminal records for vulnerable women
Thank you

mnouguier@idpc.net

www.idpc.net

Learn more about the project: