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# Pseudo-Families as a Way of Coping with Incarceration by Female Offenders: An Explorative Study of Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg Female Correctional Centres in the Gauteng Province of South Africa

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(Submitted 2 November 2022; revised 10 December 2022; accepted 27 December 2022; first published online 01 March 2023)

## Abstract

This research sought to study how women cope with incarceration by exploring the pseudo-family phenomenon in female correctional centres, specifically in Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the phenomenon. The research participants were selected through non-probability sampling, namely purposive, convenience and snowball methods. At the Kgoši Mampuru II centre, 21 offenders and seven officials were interviewed, while 15 offenders and six officials were interviewed at Johannesburg. In total, 36 offenders and 13 officials, including the two heads, were interviewed from both centres. The researchers chose theories on the sociology of corrections, specifically the deprivation and importation models, due to their suitability to explain the phenomenon under investigation. This study found that: (1) pseudo-families are structures or relationships that resemble families in general society; and (2) female offenders are motivated to join pseudo-families due to the need for protection, the need for belonging and comfort, and for smuggling contraband.

**Keywords** women, female offenders, pains of imprisonment, safety, security, security threat groups, pseudo-families

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## INTRODUCTION

The belief that crime is a predominately male phenomenon and that males dominate the world of crime has been rebuffed recently. Based on such reason, the subject of female criminality has not received tremendous attention, thus making research on women committing crimes scanty in the literature at the time of writing this research paper. The difference in the rate of male and female crime is related to the sex difference and gender-related roles, as males are generally stronger physically than females and tend to be more daring and violent compared to their physically “weaker” female counterparts. Socially, males are considered rude and very aggressive, whereas females are less aggressive and more feminine. Historically, males were the family’s sole breadwinners, thus having to perform vocational duties at home or away from their homes. They may therefore be placed in situations where they are persuaded to select between engaging in either legal or illegal jobs or activities to secure money and fame, and achieve their goals.

In recent years, people, including females, have been given freedom, which might have lured many females to partaking in crimes, thereby being arrested and sentenced to imprisonment. Such developments have also made women be in public spaces nowadays. According to the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) (2021:56), as of March 2021, in South Africa the population of sentenced inmates who were youth (18–20 years) and adults aged 21 years and older was 93,066; of these, 89,241 were male, while 2126 were female. This means that during 2020/2021, female offenders contributed 2.28% to the overall population of sentenced offenders in South Africa. This is slightly decreased compared to the 2019/2020 reporting period, when females made up 2.46% of the convicted offender population. This decrease in the number of female offenders<sup>1</sup> could be attributed to the early release of low-risk offenders through either the Special Remission of Sentence (SRS) programme in 2019 or due to the 2020 COVID-19 Special Parole Dispensation (SPD) programme (Department of Correctional Services 2021:59). The SPD programme was implemented to decrease the spread of the coronavirus in many South African correctional centres that were before the pandemic already overcrowded correctional centres. The Department of Correctional Services (2021:59) revealed that during the COVID-19 (SPD) programme, 8671 probationers and parolees, comprising both males and females, were released. Even though the above percentage of sentenced female offenders seems small, it is quite significant compared to the fact that historically females were hardly found in correctional centres. The above claim supports Wendy Sawyer’s argument (Sawyer 2018:1) that women have become the fastest-growing segment of the population. When writing this research paper, the latest statistics covering 2021/2022 about the number of women offenders at South African prisons were unavailable.

Meanwhile, this research sought to study how women cope with incarceration by exploring the pseudo-family phenomenon in female correctional centres. Female offenders develop this type of family within their correctional facility as a coping method to suppress any discomfort and pain they are experiencing while in detention or incarceration. The main purpose of this family is for emotional and

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<sup>1</sup>It is important to note that the number of sentenced male offenders also decreased due to the SRS and COVID-19 SPD programmes.

economic support, and most importantly, protection from fellow inmates who are ruthless and power-hungry (Forsyth and Evans 2003:5–7).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Female offenders often feel abandoned by and isolated from their immediate families, relatives and friends and, as such, they turn to a correctional family to help them deal with and cope with the stress of incarceration. Unlike in male correctional centres, pseudo-families are not gang affiliations but symbolize offenders' own families (Heitmann 2007:5–6). Within the pseudo-family, there are parents, children and siblings, as well as extended family members such as aunts, uncles or grandparents (Heitmann 2007:5–6; Marston 2016:1). Forsyth and Evans (2003:5–7) explain that pseudo-families are not power hungry but participate in supportive social networks and that members are less likely to have relationships based on coercive power structures. Normally, these relationships are not sexual in nature, but some do form for sexual reasons (Forsyth & Evans 2003:5–7). There are two prominent roles in a pseudo-family, namely, a mother and a father. The matriarch plays a prominent and important role as she gives advice and listens to the entire group. The mother possesses the following traits (Marston 2016:1):

- She is older;
- She has been incarcerated for a long period;
- She has good listening skills;
- She provides advice and guidance; and
- She is nurturing.

The father is usually the dominant female offender who offers protection to the family in exchange for sexual favours (Forsyth and Evans 2003:5–7). Furthermore, the macho role of a father or husband is often taken up by a female offender who appears to be more belligerent (Marston 2016:1). Like in the “traditional” family unit, the mother and father in a pseudo-family assume an emotional and sexual relationship with each other. The other roles in the pseudo-family are children and extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles who will play a role as caregivers and keep the family stable by mentoring, teaching, and transferring skills to other family members within the pseudo-family (Heitmann 2007:5–6; Marston 2016:1).

### *Pseudo-Family Types*

There are four main types of pseudo-families: lesbianism; pseudo-homosexuality; the mother–daughter group; and friendship. Each of these types is highlighted below.

#### *Lesbianism*

Members of this pseudo-family were engaged in homosexual relationships before incarceration and thus continue engaging in homosexual relationships inside the

correctional centre (Heitmann 2007:85). This pseudo-family consists of members who are exclusively lesbian by nature.

#### *Pseudo-Homosexuality*

The homosexual part of this group is characterized by kissing each other and engaging in sexual activities. They also tend to use pet names when referring to each other. Since this group of incarcerated women no longer have an opportunity for heterosexual relationships, they thereby opt for homosexuality (Heitmann 2007:85).

#### *The Mother–Daughter Group*

This category consists of members whose roles mirror the “traditional” family structure. The mother is usually a woman who speaks softly and cares for the children in the family.

#### *Friendship*

This type can be described as a non-hostile type of pseudo-family within the correctional facility, as friendship pseudo-family members form friendships with each other and strive to abide by correctional policies and procedures (Heitmann 2007:85).

#### ***Motivation for Being Part of a Pseudo-Family***

Some scholars have investigated the motivation behind being in a pseudo-family. Beer et al. (2007:1) and Bedard (2009:1), for instance, claim that pseudo-families are established based on multiple reasons, including emotional support, devising coping mechanisms for loneliness, building and enjoying companionship, economic aid and protection. According to Marston (2016:1), the provision of material and emotional support is common as a coping method for women to navigate the unnatural and painful correctional environment. Companionship and comfort are the most significant aspects of family membership since females prefer to self-regulate their emotional state and share emotions with selected close friends (Forsyth and Evans 2003:5–7). Relatedly, Bedard (2009:1) affirms that women tend to be more social than men. This claim in this context suggests that incarceration may be devastating and stressful for female offenders, having a negative impact on their mental health. Resultantly, being part of a community is one coping mechanism that these female offenders adopt. The formation of a family structure thus provides women with a support system inside the correctional facility (Bedard 2009:1). Some benefits are accruable due to being part of a pseudo-family, and they include having people to relate with and to seek advice from and by so doing enables offenders to master surviving strategies in a correctional environment from fellow offenders (Bedard 2009:1). Based on what Jones (1986:9) has stated, the pain of incarceration becomes less severe and bearable when offenders are united. Moreover, in comparison to male offenders who have a higher number of centres, incarcerated females are often housed farther from their homes and thereby experience isolation from family, friends, and life outside of the correctional environment (Beer et al. 2007:1). “Of

the 243 prisons in [South Africa], only 22 provide for female inmates” (Hopkins 2017). Therefore, a cohesive offender population provides the offender with an influential social group with which she can identify (Jones 1986:9). Marston (2016:1) further mentions that:

the rationality hinges on the basic fact that all humans are social animals. To endure humiliation, helplessness, and deprivation in prison, these pseudo-families can provide some sense of normalcy and stability. Pseudo-families, like gangs, fulfil needs that the formal prison institution can't provide them.

Additionally, Bedard (2009:1) and Marston (2016:1) believe that these families co-exist and provide comfort and protection for female offenders. Another reason for these families is the ability or chances to distribute contraband among the family members and protect one another from intimidation and being forced to share their resources (Forsyth and Evans 2003:5–7).

### **Theoretical Explanation**

#### *Deprivation Model*

As developed by Gresham Sykes (1958), the deprivation model is based on the assumption that while offenders are trying to withstand their confinement, oppressive conditions within the correctional environment manifest in violent responses from these offenders (Tasca, Griffin, and Rodriguez 2010:237). Observably, being in prison has its inherited pains, especially those emanating from the conditions of the correctional environments, such as loss of liberty, loss of goods and services, deprivation of heterosexual contact, lack of autonomy and the denial of security, which shape behaviour within the correctional society (Hensley, Tewksbury, and Koscheski 2002:126; Rocheleau 2013:4; Tasca et al. 2010:237).

The pains that incarcerated male and female offenders experience due to imprisonment differ somewhat. While both sexes suffer a loss of self-image, boredom due to a daily routine, restrictions and retribution for violating rules and separation from society, women tend to experience companionship and separation from their families as major losses (Chui 2010:1). Hensley et al. (2002:126) have expounded that the occurrence, formation and inclusion into a “make-believe”<sup>2</sup> family attests to how incarcerated women lose their identity and support. As a result, homosexual relationships develop from these emotional and physiological needs that include, among others, feelings of being wanted, being appreciated by others, emotions of fondness for and by others, monetary qualms, sexual affection, and feelings of wanting to be accepted by others (Hensley et al. 2002:126). Meanwhile, Huey (2008:13) has explained the five principles of deprivation, as shown below.

*Deprivation of Liberty.* This model contends that whenever offenders lose their liberty, the feeling of being degraded usually sets in, thus diminishing their concern for others (Tasca et al. 2010:237). One of the reasons why incarceration is common is purposely limiting or restricting liberty. At many correctional centres, offenders are usually exposed to various control measures such as fixed units, cells and

<sup>2</sup>“Make-believe” refers to pretending that what is not real is real.

checkpoints. Shammass (2017:1) contends that correctional facilities further deprive offenders of their liberty by limiting their use of telephones to certain hours of the day, monitoring their calls or restricting telephone calls to a certain time per week. Incarceration thus strips offenders of the freedom to spend time with their relatives and acquaintances whenever they feel such need.

*Deprivation of Autonomy.* Deprivation of autonomy in this context suggests that incarcerated offenders lose the ability to make basic decisions about their daily lives, such as when to sleep and wake up, how to pass the time, when and where to go, or what or who to see within the restricted correctional corridors (Huey 2008:15). The depersonalization and stigmatization of going through the criminal justice process and then admission into the penitentiary system together with coercion exerted on offenders by correctional officials to maintain social control in the centre have all been found capable of limiting offenders' sense of autonomy (Thomas 1977:2). Similarly, the deprivation of goods and services within the correctional settings also influences and generate violent responses among offenders as many may be involved in taking others' belongings which they lack but need for survival (Tasca et al. 2010:237).

*Deprivation of Goods and Services.* Due to the overcrowded state of many South African correctional centres, most offenders lack the most basic goods and services. Huey (2008:14) has also noted that offenders have limited access to the so-called necessities of life, such as food, shelter, medical help and exercise. Moreover, offenders are deprived of numerous things widely available to the general public (Huey 2008:14). This means that offenders experience scarcity of materials such as tobacco, alcohol, varied nutritious foods, unique clothing, furniture and privacy. Generally, offenders are stripped of their goods and services through the inability to purchase materials on their own. These offenders, therefore, no longer enjoy a multitude of consumer goods (Shammass 2017:1). Furthermore, offenders depend on the correctional staff members to meet their basic needs that include being taken to the kitchen, being taken to the doctor or hospital when they are ill, being educated, and purchasing toiletries.

*Deprivation of Heterosexual Relationships.* Notably, incarceration has brought about the absence of voluntary sexual and heterosexual relationships in many correctional centres, including South Africa. That situation alone has been spotted as one of the known deprivations that offenders grapple with in their respective prisons. According to Sykes (1958:22), the loss of heterosexual activity within correctional facilities over long periods is another deprivation that may lead to frustration. To females, companionship is important as it forms part of personal identity; therefore, denying these relationships leads to decreased happiness. While there is a high tendency of violence, which may emerge unpredictably among offenders inside prison, incarcerated offenders are still deprived of security due to their confinement (Tasca et al. 2010:237). The pains of imprisonment create high levels of stress and frustration for offenders, which, in turn, may lead to violent misconduct by offenders in their efforts to adapt to correctional life (Tasca et al. 2010:237).

Importantly, the deprivation model explains how the corrections environment influences offenders' behaviour that leads to frustration and aggression as ways of coping with the pains of imprisonment. Incarcerated offenders are further denied their autonomous decision-making powers and are subjected to intense isolation.

The practice of spatial confinement for a long time may also lead to its own set of frustrations and deprivations.

### *The Importation Model*

The importation model assumes that external behavioural patterns and values are capable of being imported into the correctional centre from the outside (Huey 2008:25). Furthermore, offenders who experienced violence in their homes during their upbringing view violence as an appropriate response to conflict and misunderstandings (Dye 2010:1; Tasca et al. 2010:236). This perspective criticizes the deprivation model as being overly narrow and ignoring the characteristics of offenders, which largely determine behaviour within the correctional settings (Huey 2008:25). The importation model posits that behaviour, social and cultural experiences, race, class, sex roles, expectations, and a history of imprisonment have potential to influence offenders' behaviour within the correctional centre (Huey 2008:25).

Additionally, offenders who believe in violent behaviours as a way of dealing with issues are more likely to participate in interpersonal violence than offenders with less violent character traits (DeLisi, Berg, and Hochstetler 2004:1; Hensley et al. 2002:126; Tasca et al. 2010:236). It is logical to state that behaviours already developed in communities promote the behavioural patterns of offenders while in prison. For instance, the emotional and sexual needs that women import into correctional centres vary due to what they have experienced in their respective communities. Likewise, offenders who engage in homosexual relationships before incarceration continue such practices inside the correctional centre. Sexuality or sexual orientation is thus one of the behaviours that follows the offenders from their respective communities into the penitentiary centre (Hensley et al. 2002:126–7). In addition, the roles of each member (i.e. wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, grandmother) within pseudo-families are viewed as a way of allowing female offenders to function as they did outside the correctional centre (Hensley et al. 2002:126). Hensley et al. (2002:126) further indicated that relationships created within correctional centres by incarcerated offenders must be viewed as vital in addressing these offenders' social, psychological and physical needs. In addition, pseudo-families or kinship networks for female offenders inside prison are considered "proxy" families (Hensley et al. 2002:126). The application of the importation model plays a major role in creating the formation and continuation of pseudo-families within correctional facilities in South Africa and abroad. The importation model argues that how an offender adapts or responds to the pains of imprisonment is linked to their past experiences, which are imported into the correctional environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is explorative, using a qualitative research approach. There were 49 research participants, and they comprised offenders and correctional officials from two female correctional centres, Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg, in the Gauteng province of South Africa. In all, 21 offenders and seven officials were recruited and interviewed at Kgoši Mampuru II, while 15 offenders and six officials were recruited at Johannesburg. The head of each correctional centre was

interviewed among those recruited as officials. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the correctional officials, while convenience and snowball techniques were used to sample the participating offenders. The use of convenience and snowball sampling techniques means that any offender who was incarcerated in the two centres at the time that the research was being conducted had the opportunity to participate in the study. In addition, the inclusion criteria used for the offender population were accessibility, availability and geographical proximity.

Furthermore, purposive sampling was suitable for the correctional officials because they were purposefully selected based on their first-hand experience with the phenomenon being investigated. Data collection for both units of analysis took place using semi-structured interviews, which the first author conducted in May and June 2018. At the same time, thematic analysis was utilized to dissect the data. The credibility of this research was ensured using data triangulation, where data from different sources, as explained above, were compared. Finally, thematic analysis was utilized to dissect the data.

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

### *Knowledge of the Pseudo-Family Phenomenon*

To find out if the participants (offenders and correctional officials) had knowledge of the pseudo-family phenomenon and if it existed in their specific correctional centre, a question was asked whether they knew what a pseudo-family was. Only 20 out of the 49 participants indicated that they knew and fully understood the pseudo-family phenomenon and what it entailed. Seven offenders (coded as 01, 02, 05, 14, 21, 23 and 34) explained that, in their opinion, a pseudo-family is a group of offenders who stay together and care for each other. These offenders emphasized that members of a pseudo-family are not blood relatives:

This kind of family spends the rest of their sentences sharing ideas, opinions and belongings. For this solidarity, when one of the group members receives a visit, it belongs to the entire group, not solely the receiver. By so doing, everyone within the group feels welcomed and comforted. (Offender 01, Kgoši Mampuru II)

Offenders 04, 07, 31, 35 and 36 maintained that a pseudo-family is a group of offenders who protect each other from violent and abusive offenders:

It is the group's responsibility to ensure that everyone is well protected and taken care of, particularly against violent offenders who threaten and violate other people's rights. It is within our rights to safeguard everyone who belongs to this group. (Offender 36, Johannesburg)

Additionally, officials referred to as 01, 02, 03, 07, 09, 12 and 13 explained that in their view, pseudo-families are gangs found in female correctional centres where members' common interests exist. Officials coded as 04, 05, 06, 08, 10 and 11 further mentioned that pseudo-families are like families outside the



correctional centres consisting of parents and children. Officials labelled 07 and 12 added the following:

One has to take into account that these offenders are here for long sentences and, as such, [it] is imperative to find a home right here inside where she will be able to adjust to norms and standards of that particular group and feel being part of humanity since they left their biological families outside. (Official 07, Kgoši Mampuru II)

These families share the same thoughts, attitudes and beliefs and have a common understanding of life, particularly within the correctional centre. (Official 12, Johannesburg)

The above views corroborate what is found in the literature regarding explaining a pseudo-family. As expounded above, pseudo-families are structures or relationships formed between women in the correctional environment made to replicate real families in society. Furthermore, such families play roles as parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles. However, the responses provided by the seven officials cited above defined the term “pseudo-family” as a correctional gang formed by female offenders. This is supported by Marston (2016:1), who opined that pseudo-families in female correctional centres are a female version of the gangs in the male correctional centres as their motives and desire are the same (i.e. provision of a sense of normalcy, acceptance, protection and stability). When the participants were asked if pseudo-families exist in Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg correctional centres, all the 19 participants who responded to this question affirmed such existence with “yes”.

### ***The Structure of Pseudo-Families***

When participants were asked about the pseudo-family structure, 13 offenders believed it resembled a committee consisting of a group leader and a deputy leader who share the same responsibilities. Nine other offenders affirmed that the pseudo-family is an extension of the family, which offenders had outside the prison, with a father as the head of the family and a mother who takes care of the family (i.e. the father and children). On the other hand, three offenders stated that their group does not have any structure or rules and each member of the group “does as she pleases”. The following verbatim responses highlight the above findings:

In our group, we have a structure that resembles that of a committee, which is composed as follows: a group leader whose responsibility is to ensure peace and harmony in our family, a deputy leader who shares the same responsibilities as the group leader. When it is time for her to be released, transferred or died, the deputy takes over without any votes cast. (Offender 02, Kgoši Mampuru II)

Our family is very special as it represents the family which we left in the outside world, and it is as follows: we have a group leader who is our mastermind. She plays a father figure role by providing for and guiding the family. This offender should have been in a correctional centre for more than seven years. A mother

who took care of her children by making sure that everyone, including those who do not have visitors during the weekend or holidays, is at liberty to enjoy the food and beverages shared within the group, children whose role is to respect the elders and programmes of the institution. We know that late at night, at around six o'clock pm, no one is allowed to have the remote control of the television in our cell except our father. The rest of us will be washing dishes and preparing food for the family. (Offender 01, Kgoši Mampuru II)

The above verbatim responses are in accordance with some claims already explained in the literature and under the importation model above. As found in the literature and this study, pseudo-families in female correctional centres are an extension of the family outside the penitentiary centre. The pseudo-family roles match the "typical" roles played by real nuclear families (i.e. mother, father and children). Similarly, the above responses also substantiate the literature about the characteristics of a mother and a father. For instance, mothers have been key role players and thereby assigned the responsibilities of nurturing, while fathers are expected to lead and secure the family. Children's responsibilities include carrying out the commands of their parents, doing some chores at home, respecting their elders, and participating in the programmes offered by the DCS.

In our group, we do not have a structure, and we do not have a committee to guide us. We do whatever we want, and no one will come to me and remind me of behaving acceptably except the correctional officials. (Offender 19, Kgoši Mampuru II)

The above response negates what the literature indicates and the preceding undertakings made by other offenders when answering this question. The response may imply that the respondent was not part of a pseudo-family; hence her opinion that her group did not have any structure.

Regarding the structure of pseudo-families, officials coded as 03, 07, 08, 09, 12 and 13 attested that, even though it is not easy to identify pseudo-families; they knew they existed and have some structure:

Pseudo-families live their lives behind closed doors and, as such, make it very difficult to know their norms and operations. One thing for sure is that they have an existing structure which the group leader leads, and they have to respect and obey such leader. (Official 03, Kgoši Mampuru II)

We are here 24 hours, so we are aware that pseudo-families have a structure composed of well-mannered individuals who ensure that every offender follows the norms and values set out by the correctional facility. We need to know that every organization has its structure; otherwise, it will collapse sooner or later since it will not have direction. (Official 12, Johannesburg)

As pertained to a question about the responsibilities of each family member, the respondents reeled out their lived experiences, which are captured in their responses below:

Everyone in our unit has her roles and responsibilities to fulfil ... I am a housekeeper solely responsible for cleaning the dishes and ensuring that everyone is served, particularly during the night. (Offender 13, Kgoši Mampuru II)

I am a recruiter ... responsible for recruiting new members to join our group. When you are admitted to the correctional centre for the first time, you become confused, heartbroken and in pain, so it is my responsibility to comfort you and make you feel welcome by joining our fellowship movement. (Offender 07, Kgoši Mampuru II)

I am a protector, and my main responsibility is to protect everyone ranging from officials down to offenders. Everyone knows that I like peace and order at all times. (Offender 05, Kgoši Mampuru II)

It is deducible from the first response that the role of a mother is based on social gender roles in which a mother or woman is expected to primarily focus on house chores, nurturing, and providing comfort and care for everyone in the household, as explained in the Literature Review section above. The second response describes separation from loved ones as one of the pains endured by female offenders while incarcerated. Based on the above-mentioned situation, female offenders must join pseudo-families for friendship/companionship and well-being. The last response depicts a father's role, the protector, and aligns with what was explained in the Literature Review section. However, in some African cultures, a mother can also be regarded as a protector. In Setswana (one of the 11 official languages in South Africa), the phrase: "*Mma ngwana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng*" translates into "A mother holds the knife by the blade (the sharpest part of the knife)", meaning that a mother will do anything in her power to protect her children from danger. The last response further emphasizes comfort and protection as motivations for joining pseudo-families, as also reported by Bedard (2009:1) and Marston (2016:1).

### **Types of Pseudo-Families**

The participants (offenders) were asked if there are different types of pseudo-families, and those who answered "yes" were asked further to name them and provide a description for each. Based on the responses provided by the respondents (i.e. offenders who participated in this study), the sub-types of pseudo-families identified were lesbians, drug lords, spiritual healers, foreign nationals, and *eet-en-lê*.

#### *Lesbians*

Offenders who were part of this pseudo-family were said to be sexually, emotionally and romantically attracted to other offenders of their same gender. According to the literature, lesbianism and pseudo-homosexuality are two pseudo-family groups. However, in the current research, it was not revealed whether those classed as lesbian were homosexual before their incarceration or whether their homosexual relationships emanated from the deprivation of heterosexual relationships within the correctional centres and were corroborated by the deprivation model. In addition, those offenders/participants who belonged to this group were then asked if they were living this type of life before incarceration, and only one participant indicated

that she was not a lesbian before, but for the sake of survival, she “became” one in the correctional centre. The finding above shows that many participants were lesbians before being incarcerated. Thereby it attests to the importation model’s claim that the way an incarcerated offender behaves inside a correctional centre is transported from the outside into the correctional environment. Hensley et al. (2002:126–7) have asserted that many sexual needs that offenders import into correctional centres vary from one offender to the other.

### *Drug Lords*

The drug lords oversee a smaller group of offenders involved in illegal drug trading. It was reported that this group sells illicit drugs such as mandrax, cocaine, *nyaope*<sup>3</sup> and cannabis/*dagga*. Moreover, items such as sweets, cigarettes, bath soaps and body lotions are sold in mini shops within the centre. One participant (offender) who identified herself as being active in this category (i.e. the drug lords’ pseudo-family) responded as shown below:

Everyone respects us here, and we also respect the rules, but if things are not going our way, we can put everything to a stand-still. During searches, that is where we experience challenges. Officials will confiscate our items such as sweets, cigarettes and *dagga*. (Offender 29, Johannesburg)

### *Spiritual Healers*

This group consists of offenders who are identified with Christianity and claim to adhere to the doctrines of this religion. The focus of this group is to help each other cope with various situations or conditions of imprisonment by admonishing and uplifting each other by sharing Bible verses, hosting church services, and other religious activities such as spiritual dance. Members of this group are said to be at liberty to join any movement of their choice. As obtainable outside the prison, there are rules governing this pseudo-family as indicated by all offender participants from the Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg correctional centres affiliated with the group. The rules are as follows:

There is freedom of speech and no secrets.

Members are not allowed to provoke one another and other offenders.

When a group member or another offender is found possessing an unauthorized article, the spiritual group leader will take it and report it to a correctional officer.

No sexual or homosexual relationships are permitted among group members.

A member of this group is not allowed to be involved in illegal activities.

Smoking is strictly prohibited.

<sup>3</sup>*Nyaope* is a drug used mostly by South African youth. It is a mixture of heroin and *dagga* (cannabis), sugar, baby powder, bicarbonate of soda, washing powder, pool cleaner and rat poison.

To a certain degree, spiritual healers report illegal activities and oversee adherence to the centre's rules. The role played by the spiritual healers in a pseudo-family can also be linked to snitching.

### *Foreign Nationals*

The foreign-national pseudo-family comprises female offenders who are not South African by birth. These offenders were under enormous frustration and strain, so they formed this group to support each other and build resilience. Furthermore, these offenders feel that the South African government is side-lining them by not providing them with resources to deal with the daily challenges of imprisonment, such as the deprivation of goods and services discussed under the deprivation model above.

As foreigners, we are treated differently from South Africans; hence this morning, we were singing while showering so that God could hear our voice and help us. We need someone from above to come and assist us with our problems. (Offender 18, Kgoši Mampuru II)

### *Eet-en-lê*

*Eet-en-lê*, directly translated from Afrikaans (one of the 11 official languages in South Africa), means "eat and sleep". The *eet-en-lê* group can be likened to the friendship pseudo-family discussed in the Literature Review section, and Heitmann (2007:85) defined it as those who do not harm anyone or defy the rules. What this group stands for is captured in the verbatim response below:

To be honest, these individuals do not [join] any movement here in this centre. They wake up and get their breakfast. When you give them work, they are very lazy, and you will recall them and replace them with another offender. Yes, they are not troublesome and do not disturb any day programme, but they are lazy. They just eat and sleep. (Official 07, Kgoši Mampuru II)

Notably, the four pseudo-family types, namely drug lords, spiritual healers, foreign nationals and *eet-en-lê*, were found in this study, and no previous studies have recorded such groups in the context of this topic, thus making these groups unique to this current study.

### *Reasons for Being Part of a Pseudo-Family*

When participants were asked why female offenders become part of pseudo-families, most of them stated that such families provide emotional and economic support, protection, comfort and need for companionship. Offenders who participated in this research echoed what was earlier reiterated in the literature and discussed in this study. The verbatim response given by Offender 24 is captured below:

It provides a sense of belonging as some of us are rejected by our biological parents and respective families. (Offender 24, Johannesburg)

The above response reiterates the view held by Hensley et al. (2002:126) about the importation that some offenders (especially those who play the daughter and sister roles) have brought to prison, and that has made them become active members of a pseudo-family to fill up a void caused by the lack of cohesion and connection with their blood families. Reiterating the above finding, Offender 04 affirmed that:

It protects officials and fellow offenders and, simultaneously, promotes relationships amongst ourselves. (Offender 04, Kgoši Mampuru II)

This response focuses on the need for companionship and protection for joining pseudo-families. One notable reason for incarcerating offenders is to protect the community from potential crimes, but offenders feel unsafe in correctional centres. Based on such situations, offenders are taking solace in becoming part of pseudo-families to protect themselves from both offenders and correctional officers. Where the latter is concerned, abuse by correctional officers is one of the specific issues affecting incarcerated female offenders, as the power dynamics in a correctional environment constantly remind offenders that they have no autonomy over their bodies and their well-being. The deprivation model also emphasizes these issues. This model clarifies that the loss of independence by offenders because of being controlled by correctional officials daily has led some offenders to develop feelings of helplessness that cause them to act aggressively towards officials and other offenders. Another point emphasized by Offender 04 is the formation of pseudo-families to promote relationships among female offenders. This may be attributed to the lack of heterosexual relationships due to incarceration, as expounded on in the Literature Review section above. Some scholars have also affirmed the reasons for such relationships. For instance, Bloom and Covington (1998:1) have opined that women pursue a sense of connection to others based on support and mutuality in a relationship. It is therefore deducible that relationships and connections with other people provide one with a sense of safety and security. However, the negative aspect of such associations, as attested to by Offender 06 from Kgoši Mampuru II correctional centre, is presented below:

As a group, we can conduct illegal activities, such as hiding cell phones, money, and drugs from officials, because we know that we are not allowed to have such items. It is within my jurisdiction to make sure that everyone in my cell is safe and no one is compromised either by a fellow offender or official. (Offender 06, Kgoši Mampuru II)

Based on the above response, pseudo-families can, to a certain extent, also be classified as a security threat group. A security threat group is a collection of offenders whose misconduct constitutes threats to security and orderliness in the correctional centre. This is visible in the response above since the offender highlighted various illegal activities like contraband smuggling and even more so based on Offender 06's response above that she has been in the drug business and is now a drug lord in charge of a pseudo-family that deals in drugs and other illegal smuggled goods at their correctional centre.

We fight for better living conditions. (Offender 08, Kgoši Mampuru II)

The above response can be linked to the pain of imprisonment brought about by the deprivation of goods and services and the deprivation of security.

We support and comfort each other during difficult times like when one loses her family member outside. (Offender 26, Johannesburg)

Concerning the first verbatim response at the beginning of this section, this undertaking emphasizes comfort as one of the primary reasons for being part of a pseudo-family. Also highlighted is advice from pseudo-family members to deal with problems encountered by a family outside the correctional centre.

### ***Conclusion of Findings and Interpretation***

From the above findings and discussion, it is evident that pseudo-families are established in female correctional centres as a coping mechanism to deal with various difficulties that incarcerated women face in the penitentiary environment. Furthermore, pseudo-families represent offenders' families outside the correctional centres and are primarily formed for economic and emotional support, companionship and protection. Relatedly, female offenders also join pseudo-families to protect themselves from their fellow offenders and correctional officials.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended for the DCS to identify the specific pains of imprisonment experienced by female offenders which contribute to serious misconduct or violence and to mitigate these pains as a way of helping offenders cope within the correctional environment.

In addition, preventative measures listed in the literature cover the issues of correctional gangsterism in general and in the male centres; they do not specifically highlight the pseudo-family phenomenon. It is therefore recommended that measures relating specifically to pseudo-families be developed.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research found that a pseudo-family is a mechanism used by female offenders to cope with the pains and other nasty situations of imprisonment. It was also discovered that pseudo-families exist in the two female correctional centres (i.e. in Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg), which were the focus of this study. The study also established that pseudo-families comprise groups of offenders who form structures that depict "traditional" family units, as found in society, and consisting of various role players such as mothers, fathers, siblings, uncles, aunts and grandparents. As established in the literature and confirmed by participants in this study, pseudo-families are formed purposely for comfort, companionship and protection; however, they are also considered a threat to correctional security due to violence and illegal activities like smuggling of contraband, selling and using narcotics and other criminal acts being perpetrated by some offenders on their fellow offenders, and on correctional officials.

**Acknowledgements.** We would like to thank the Johannesburg and Kgoši Mampuru II Correctional Centres for allowing this research to take place in their centres. We also extend our gratitude to the incarcerated female offenders who participated in this research.

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## TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS

### Abstracto

Esta investigación buscó estudiar cómo las mujeres enfrentan el encarcelamiento explorando el fenómeno de la pseudofamilia en los centros correccionales femeninos, específicamente en Kgoši Mampuru II y Johannesburgo en la provincia de Gauteng en Sudáfrica. El estudio empleó un enfoque de investigación cualitativa para investigar el fenómeno. Los participantes de la investigación fueron seleccionados a través de un muestreo no probabilístico, es decir, métodos intencionales, de conveniencia y de bola de nieve. Veintiún delincuentes y siete funcionarios fueron entrevistados en el Kgoši Mampuru II, mientras que 15 delincuentes y seis funcionarios fueron entrevistados en Johannesburgo. En total, se entrevistó a 36 infractores y 13 funcionarios, incluidos los dos responsables, de ambos centros. Los investigadores eligieron teorías sobre la sociología de las correcciones, en concreto el modelo de privación e Importación, por su idoneidad para explicar el fenómeno investigado. Este estudio encontró que: (1) las pseudo-familias son estructuras o relaciones que se asemejan a las familias en la sociedad en general; y (2) las mujeres delincuentes están motivadas a unirse a pseudofamilias debido a la necesidad de protección, la necesidad de pertenencia y comodidad; y por contrabando.

**Palabras clave** mujer, delincuentes, penas de prisión, seguridad, grupos de amenaza a la seguridad, pseudofamilias

### Abstrait

Cette recherche visait à étudier comment les femmes font face à l'incarcération en explorant le phénomène de la pseudo-famille dans les centres correctionnels pour femmes, en particulier à Kgoši Mampuru II et à Johannesburg dans la province de Gauteng en Afrique du Sud. L'étude a utilisé une approche de recherche qualitative pour étudier le phénomène. Les participants à la recherche ont été sélectionnés par échantillonnage non probabiliste, à savoir les méthodes raisonnées, de commodité et de boule de neige. Vingt et un délinquants et sept fonctionnaires ont été interrogés au Kgoši Mampuru II, tandis que 15 délinquants et six fonctionnaires ont été interrogés à Johannesburg. Au total, 36 délinquants et 13 fonctionnaires, dont les deux responsables, ont été interrogés dans les deux centres. Les chercheurs ont choisi des théories sur la sociologie des services correctionnels, en particulier le modèle de la privation et de l'importation, en raison de leur aptitude à expliquer le phénomène étudié. Cette étude a révélé que : (1) les pseudo-familles sont des structures ou des relations qui ressemblent aux familles dans la société en général ; et (2) les délinquantes sont motivées à rejoindre des pseudo-familles en raison du besoin de protection, d'appartenance et de confort ; et pour trafic de contrebande.

**Mots-clés** femmes, délinquantes, peines d'emprisonnement, sûreté, sécurité, groupes menaçant la sécurité, pseudo-familles

### 抽象的

这项研究旨在通过探索女性惩教中心的伪家庭现象来研究女性如何应对监禁，特别是在南非豪登省的 Kgoši Mampuru II 和约翰内斯堡。该研究采用定性研究方法调查这一现象。研究参与者是通过非概率抽样选择的，即有目的的、方便的和滚雪球的方法。21 名罪犯和 7 名官员在 Kgoši Mampuru II 接受了面谈，而 15 名罪犯和 6 名官员在约翰内斯堡接受了面谈。两个中心总共采访了 36 名罪犯和 13 名官员，包括两位负责人。研究人员选择了矫正社会学理论，特别是剥夺和进口模型，因为它们适合解释所调查的现象。本研究发现：(1) 伪家庭是类似于一般社会家庭的结构或关系；(2) 女性罪犯出于保护需要、归属感和舒适感而有加入假家庭的动机；和走私违禁品。

**关键词：** 女性，罪犯，女性罪犯，监禁的痛苦，安全，保障，安全威胁组，伪家庭。

### الملخص

سعى هذا البحث إلى دراسة كيفية تعامل النساء مع السجن من خلال استكشاف ظاهرة الأسرة الزائفة في مراكز الإصلاحات النسائية، وتحديدا في Kgoši Mampuru II و Johannesburg في مقاطعة Gauteng في جنوب إفريقيا. استخدمت الدراسة نهج بحث نوعي لتقصي الظاهرة. تم اختيار المشاركين في البحث من خلال أخذ العينات غير الاحتمالية، وهي الأساليب الاهداف والراحة وكثرة الثلج. وأجريت مقابلات مع 21 مجرما وسبعة مسؤولين في Kgoši Mampuru II ، بينما تمت مقابلة 15 مجرما وستة مسؤولين في جوهانسبرغ. وإجمالا ، تمت مقابلة 36 من المدخلين و 13 مسؤولا ، بمن فيهم الرئيسان ، من كلا المراكز. اختار الباحثون نظريات حول علم اجتماع التصحيح ، وتحديدا نموذج الحرمان والاستيراد ، لملاءمتها لشرح الظاهرة قيد البحث. وجدت هذه الدراسة أن: (1) العائلات الزائفة هي هيكل أو علاقات تشبه العلاقات في المجتمع بشكل عام. (2) تحفز المجرمات للانضمام إلى أسر زائفة بسبب الحاجة إلى الحماية والحاجة إلى الانتماء والراحة ؛ وتهرب الممنوعات.

**الكلمات الدالة:** أنثى، جنسية، مجرمة، أم سجن، أمن، أمن، مجموعة تهديد أمن، أسرة زائفة

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**Cite this article:** Munarini, T. P. and Thobane, M. S. 2022. Pseudo-Families as a Way of Coping with Incarceration by Female Offenders: An Explorative Study of Kgoši Mampuru II and Johannesburg Female Correctional Centres in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. *International Annals of Criminology* 60, 349–366. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cri.2023.3>