

Women after prison: project

Monash University Dept of Social Work: Chris Trotter, Rosemary Sheehan

University of Stirling (Scotland): Prof Gill McIvor

Catholic Social Services: Management Committee

Australian Research Council

Women and Welfare After Prison

- Aim of project to identify services used by female prisoners following their return to the community and the potential of these services to reduce women's risk of re-offending
- Examine these services are seen by women, their supervisors and service providers as meeting their needs
- Identify barriers to using services and gaps in service provision
- Assess the impact of services upon women's circumstances and welfare.

Women in prison

- Backgrounds characterised by experiences of abuse, drug misuse, poor educational attainment, poverty, psychological distress and self-harm.
- Men share many of these characteristics, yet problems for women generally more acute
- Female offending presents less of a threat to public safety (Loucks, 1998).
- Women prisoners more likely to have a history of physical/sexual abuse
- More likely to self-harm
- Imprisonment weakens or destroys women's existing ties to the community
- Fragments and often weakens ties with their children

Re-offending

- Risk of re-offending strongly influenced by the social situation and circumstances the person returns to on release.
- On release from prison, women need a range of supports and services to assist re-settlement, promote social inclusion and decrease risk of further offending.
- Supports include drug treatment or psychiatric treatment, employment services, housing programs, family support services, financial counselling, domestic violence services, sexual assault services and health services. They may also be involved with child protection if they have children.

Do services make a difference?

Little is known about the services accessed by women following a prison sentence, their perceived relevance and effectiveness and their ability to impact positively upon recidivism.

Nor have the barriers to accessing services been explored.

Increase in women's offending

- Men commit more crime than women
- Yet recent increases in most western jurisdictions in numbers of women imprisoned for offences, the mean length of sentences imposed upon them, and the average daily female prison population.
- Between 1994 and 2000, the number of women imprisoned by courts in Victoria increased by 58 per cent, compared with an increase of only 19 per cent in the numbers of men imprisoned over the same period (Department of Justice, Victoria, 2001).

Programs to reduce offending

- Increasingly emphasis is placed providing in prisons programs that encourage offenders to address their offending behaviour and the problems, needs or behaviours that contribute to it.
- However, it appears that interventions provided in the community are more effective than those delivered in a prison setting
- If the benefits derived from participation in prison-based programs are to be maintained, offenders need access to similar programs in the community when they are released

Features of successful programmes

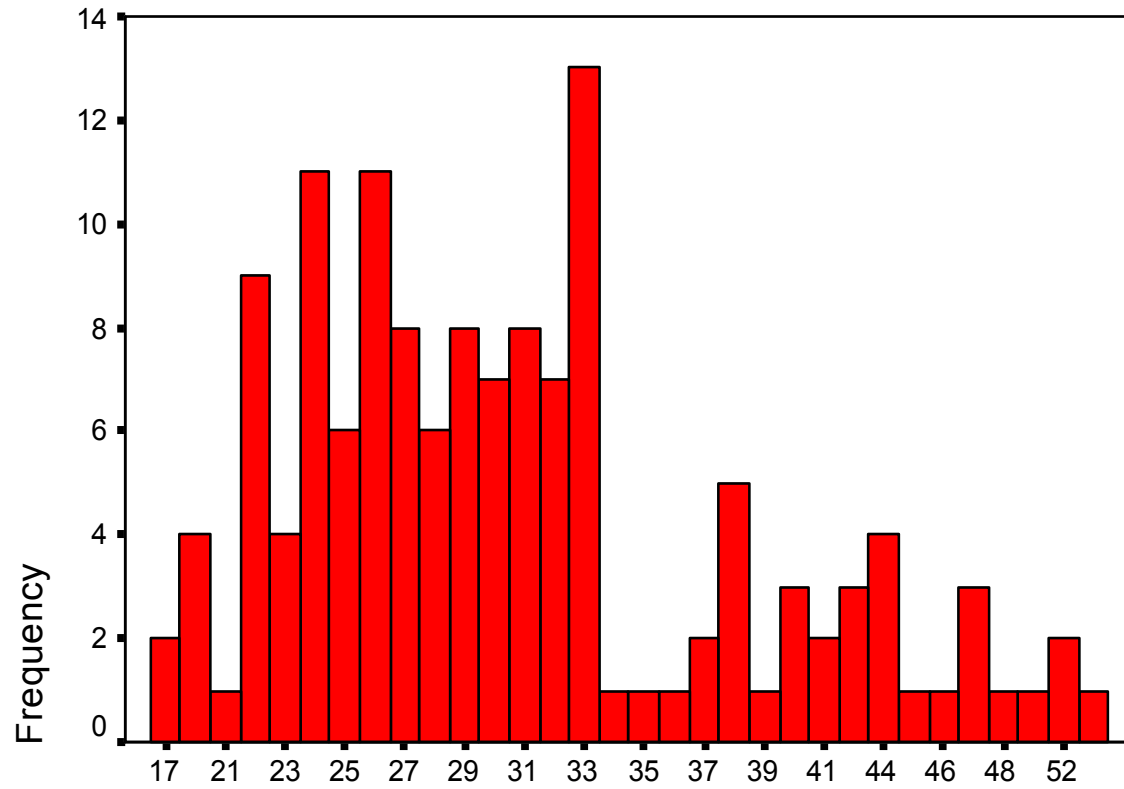
- Work with client definitions of problems
- Present an optimistic view to offenders of their potential for rehabilitation
- Address a wide range of problems which are related to the person's offending (e.g. drugs, employment, anger)
- Are accessible at times individuals need them
- Focus on skill development (including social skills) or practical issues
- Have a holistic approach to client issues rather than a focus on specific problems or symptoms (Trotter 1999)

Participants in study

- 139 women interviewed in prison
- 83 women interviewed 1-3 months after release
- 69 interviewed 1 year after release
- 37 workers interviewed, including 18 parole officers or workers seeing client as part of parole (e.g. drug treatment)

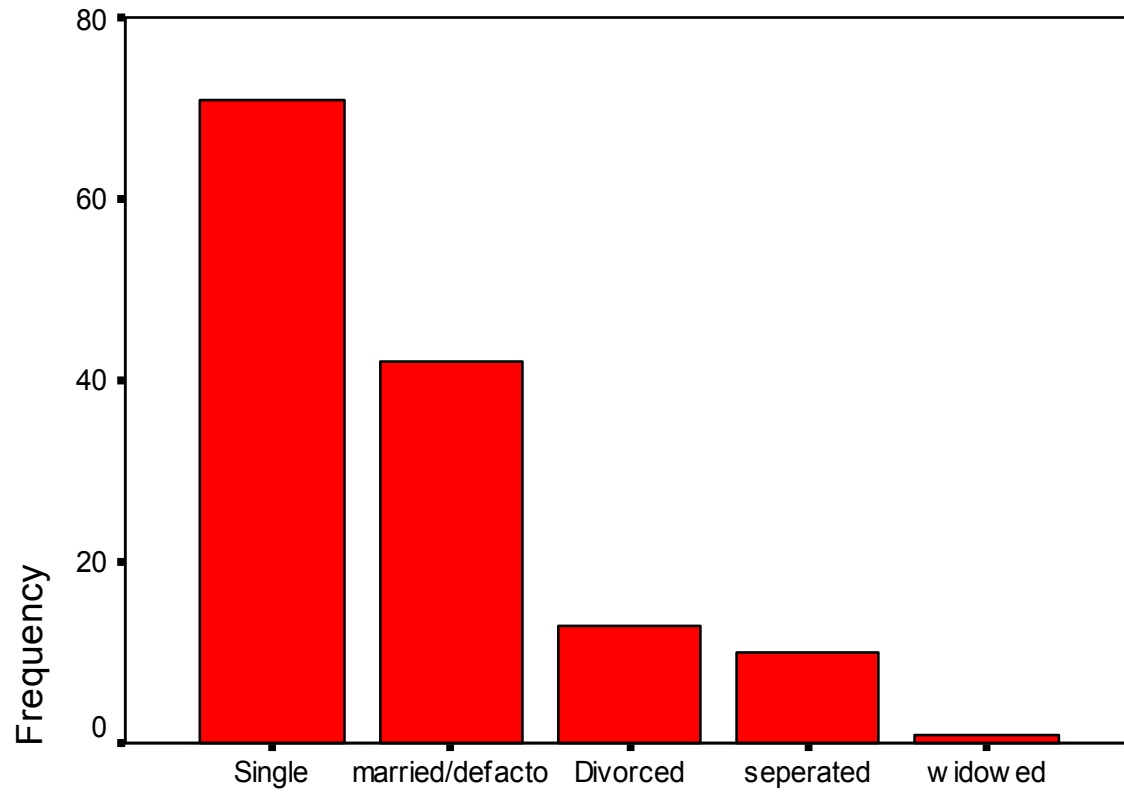
Study findings

Date of Birth



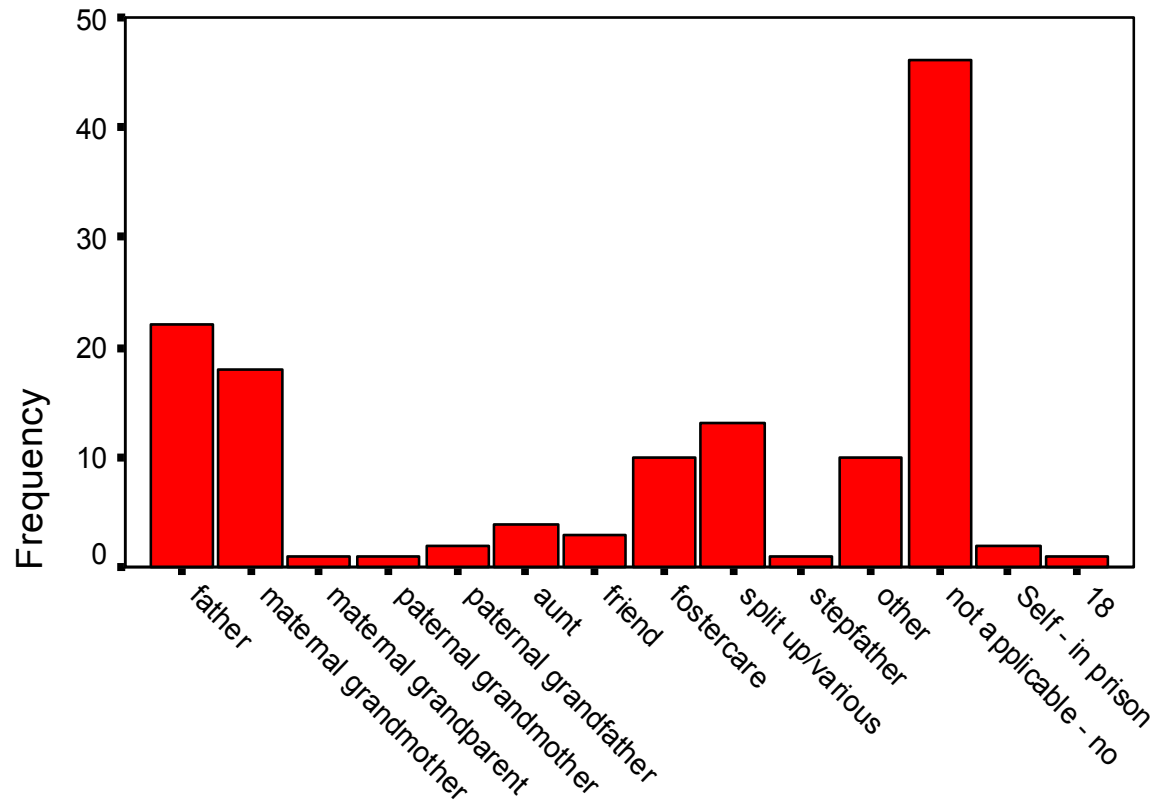
Date of Birth

Family Status



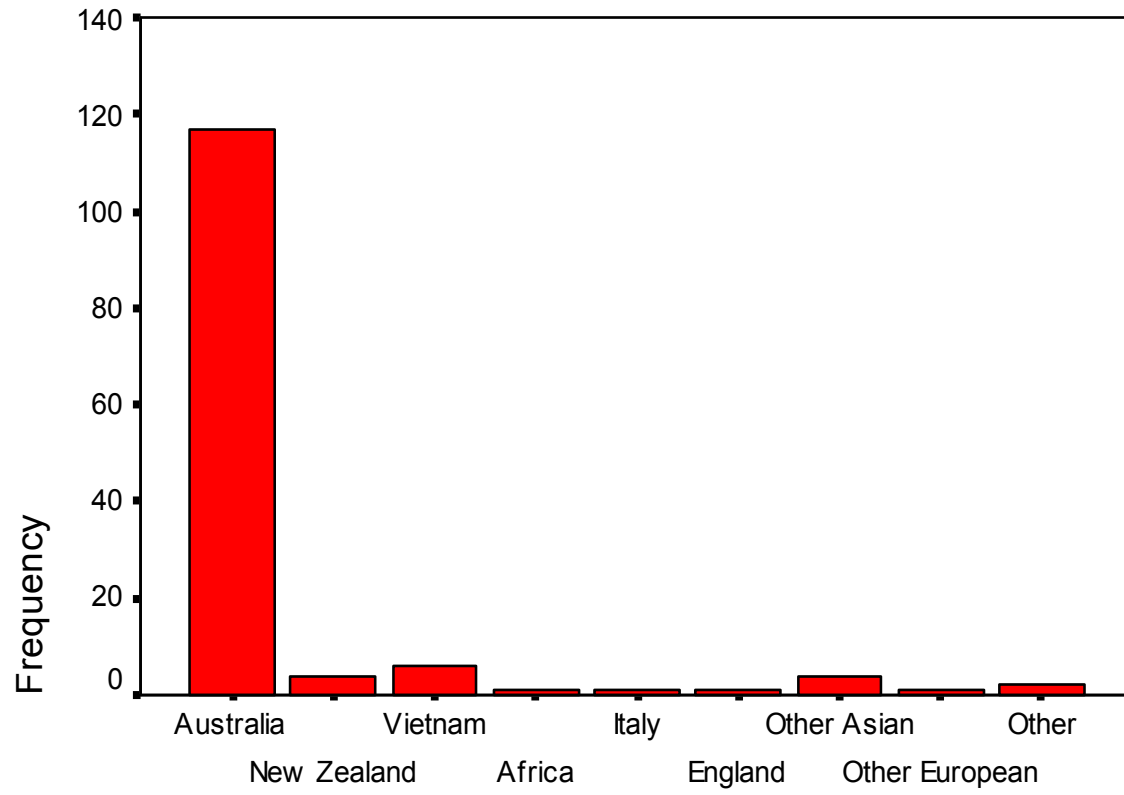
Family Status

Who children are living with



Who children are living with

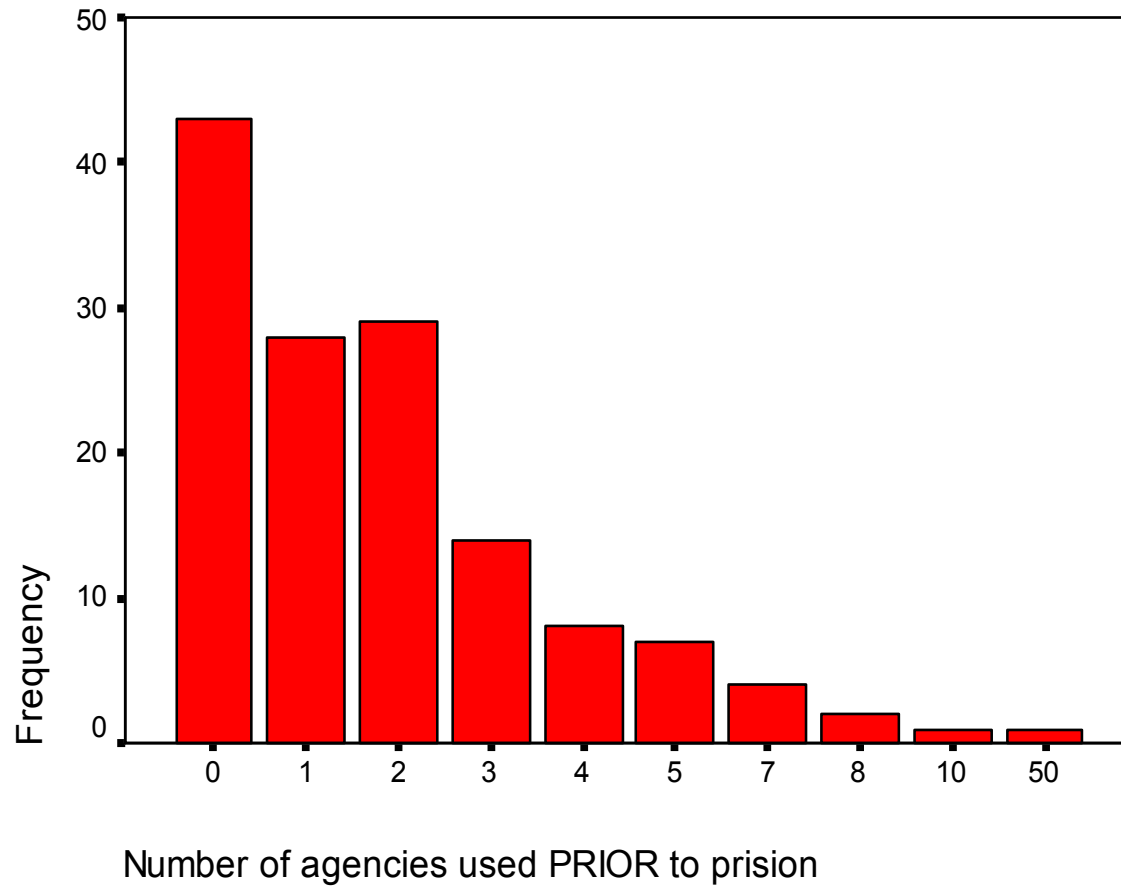
Country of birth



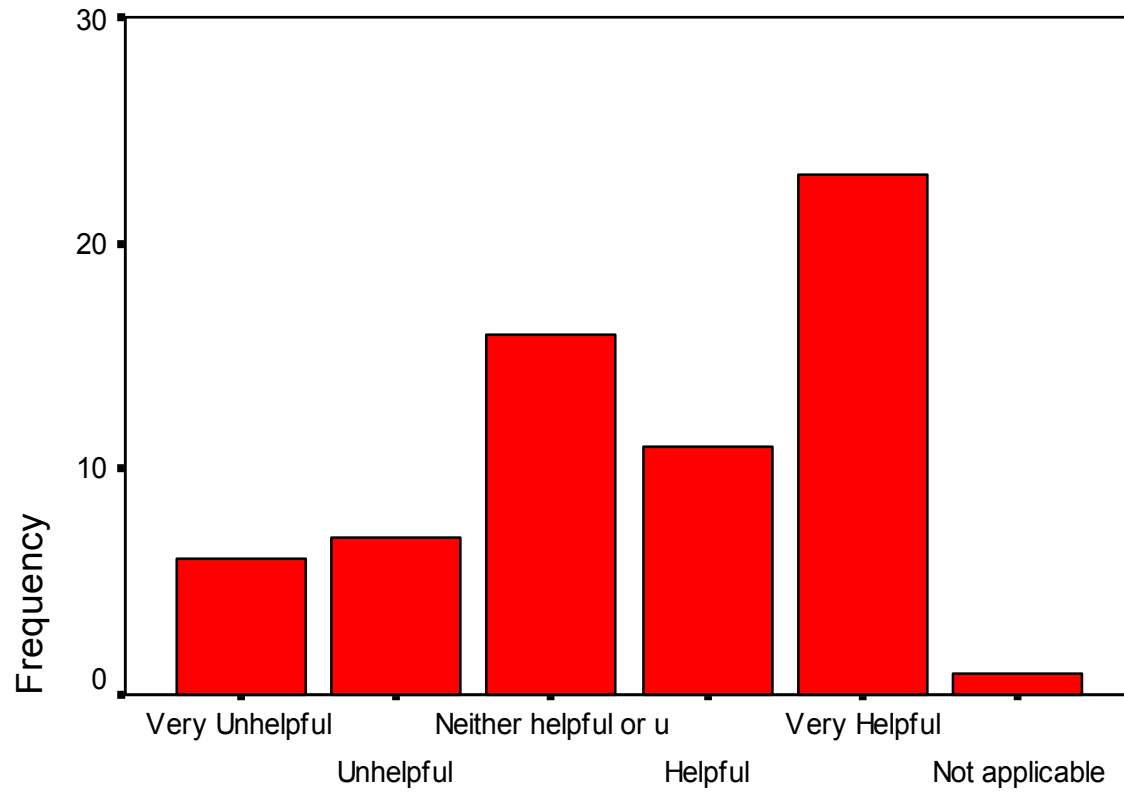
Country of birth

Prison programs

Number of agencies used PRIOR to prison

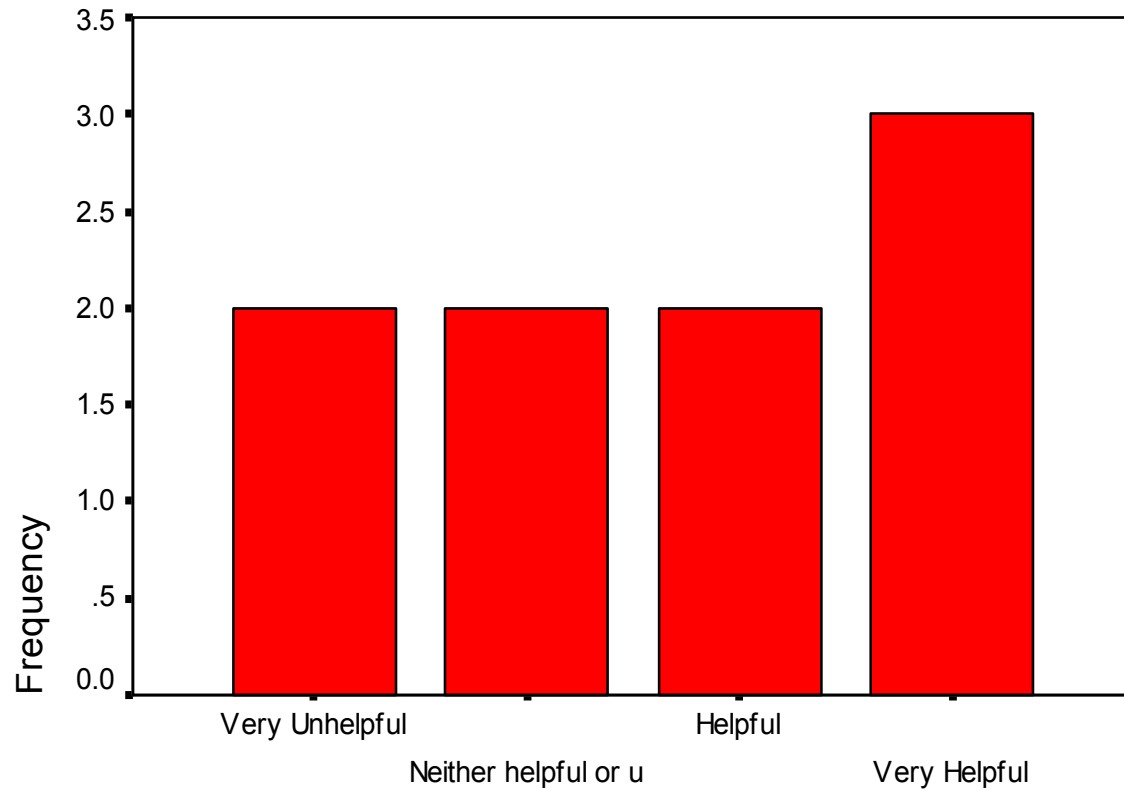


Program - Accommodaiton - How helpful was t



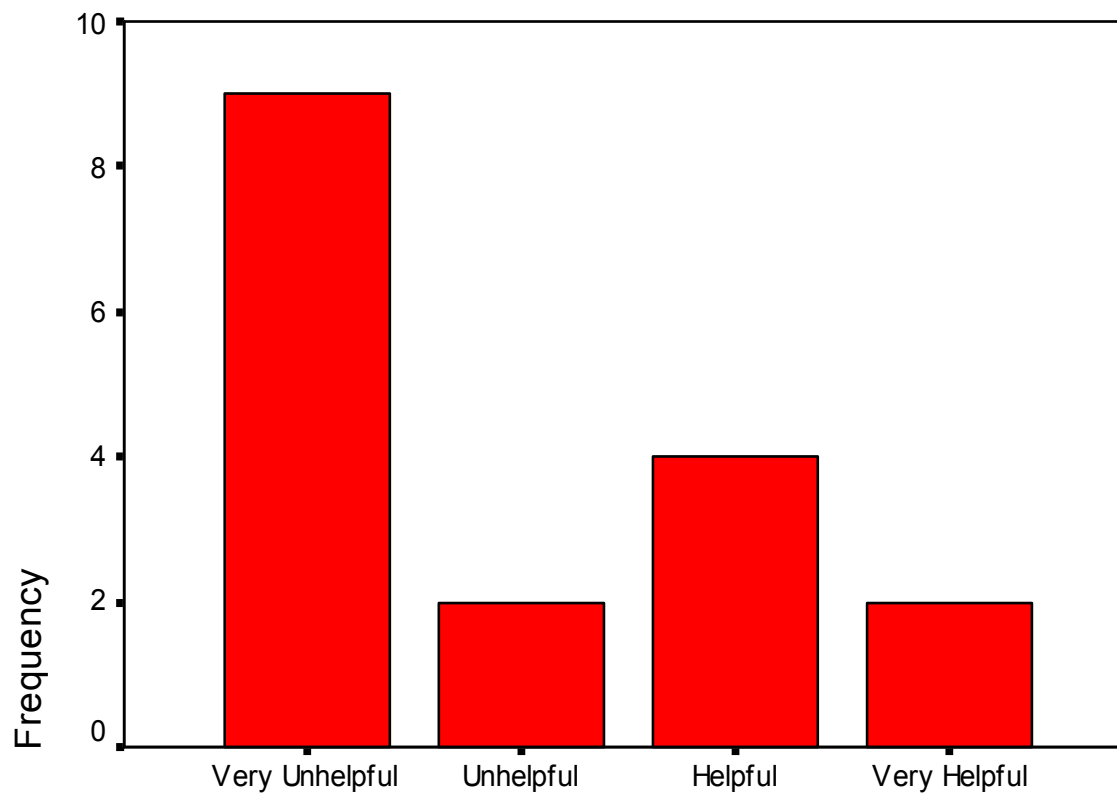
Program - Accommodaiton - How helpful was the program

Program - Anger Management- How helpful was the program



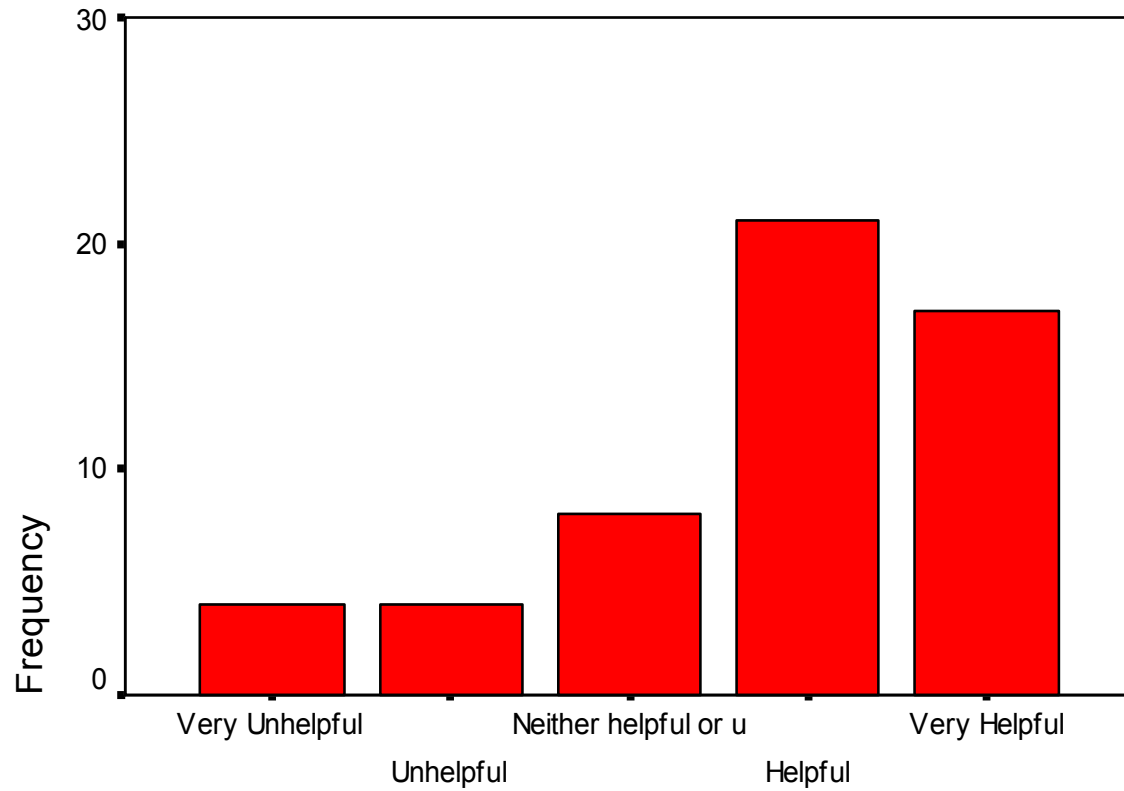
Program - Anger Management- How helpful was the program

Program - Child Protection - How helpful was t



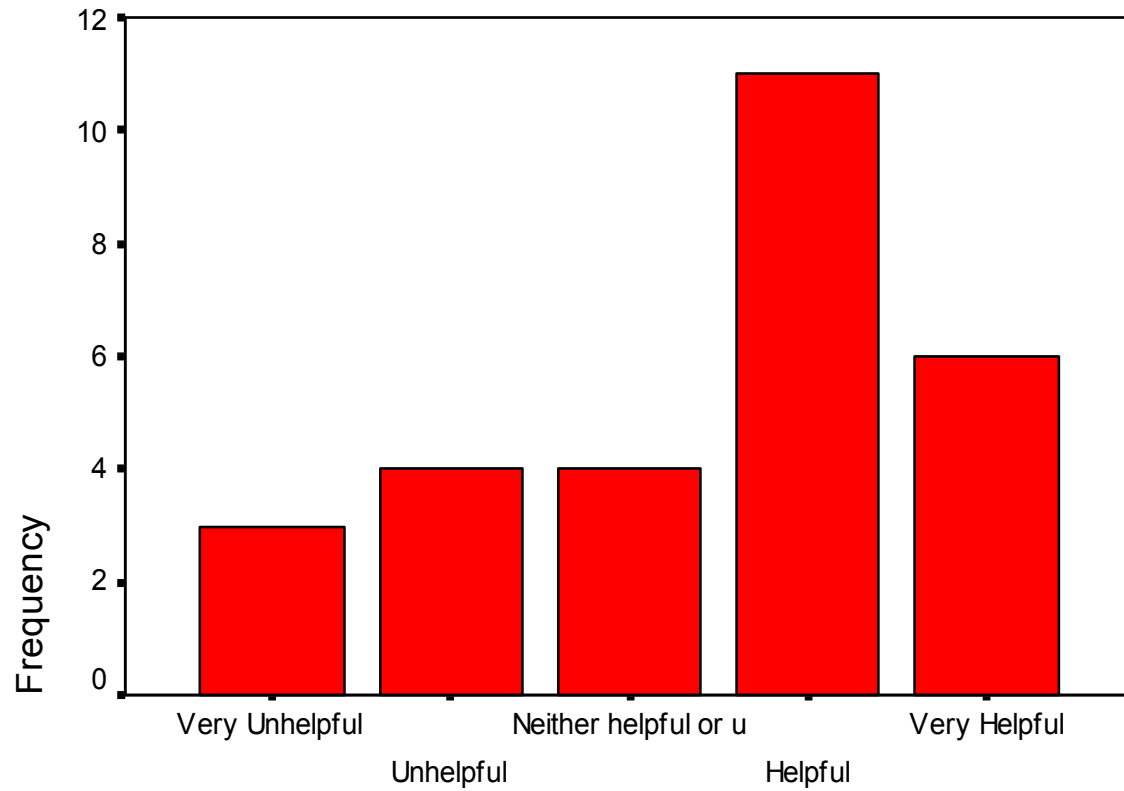
Program - Child Protection - How helpful was the program

Program - Education - How helpful was the pro



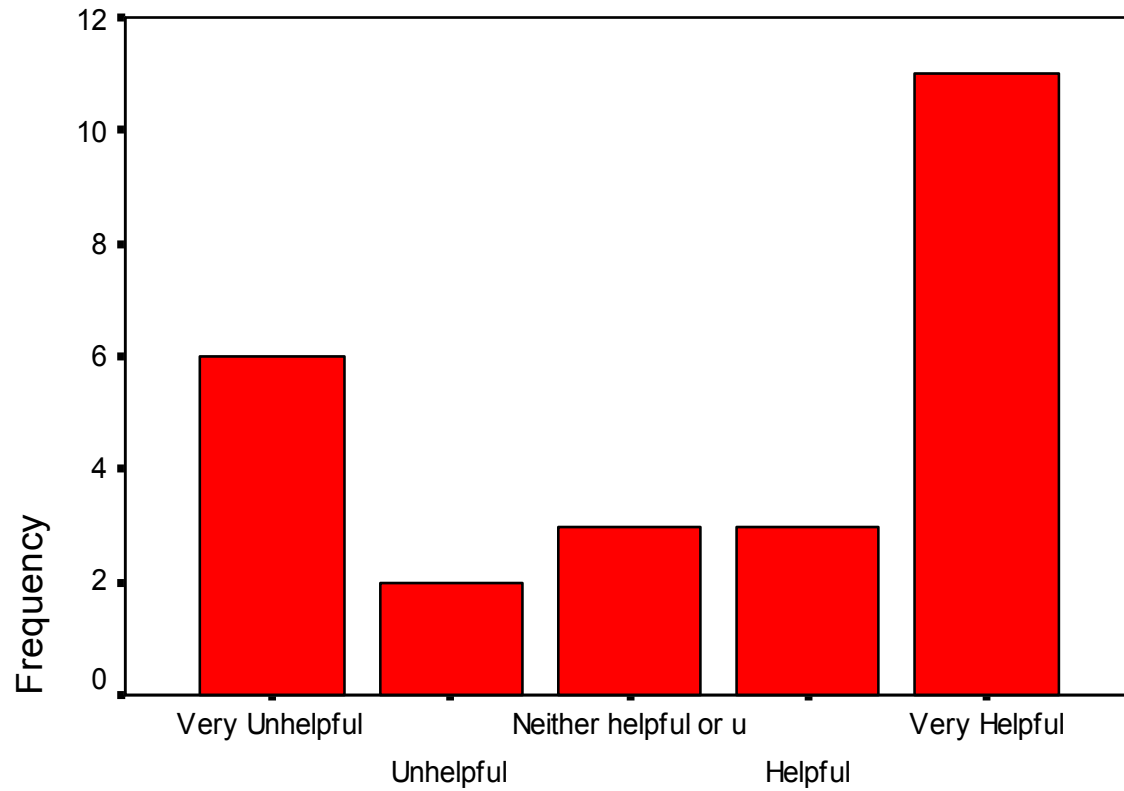
Program - Education - How helpful was the program

Program - Parenting - How helpful was the pro



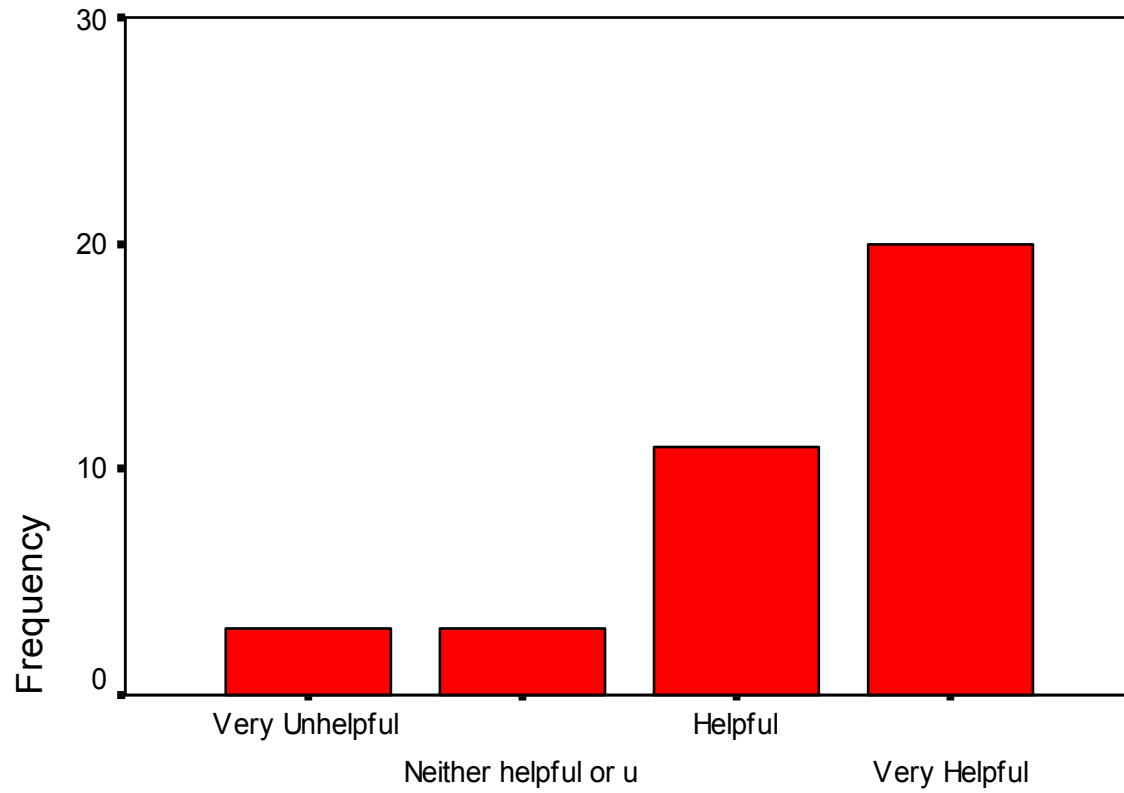
Program - Parenting - How helpful was the program

Program - Psychiartic - How helpful was the pr



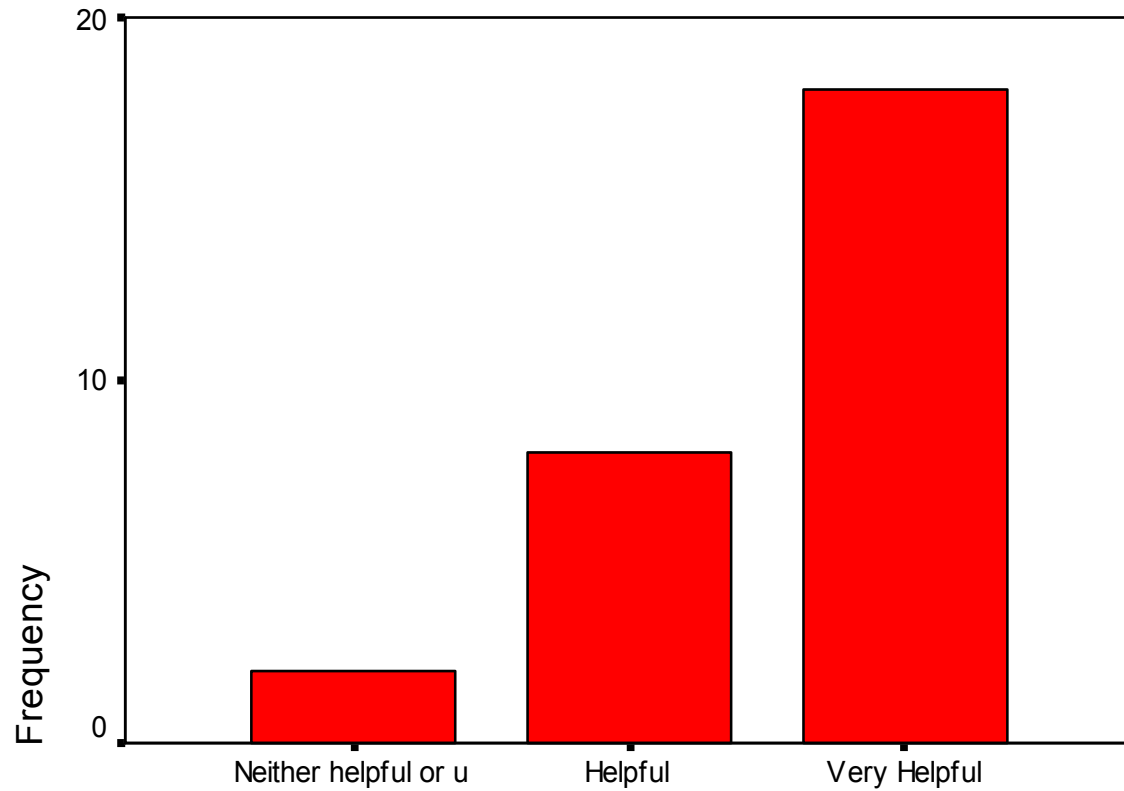
Program - Psychiartic - How helpful was the program

Program - Psychologist- How helpful was the p



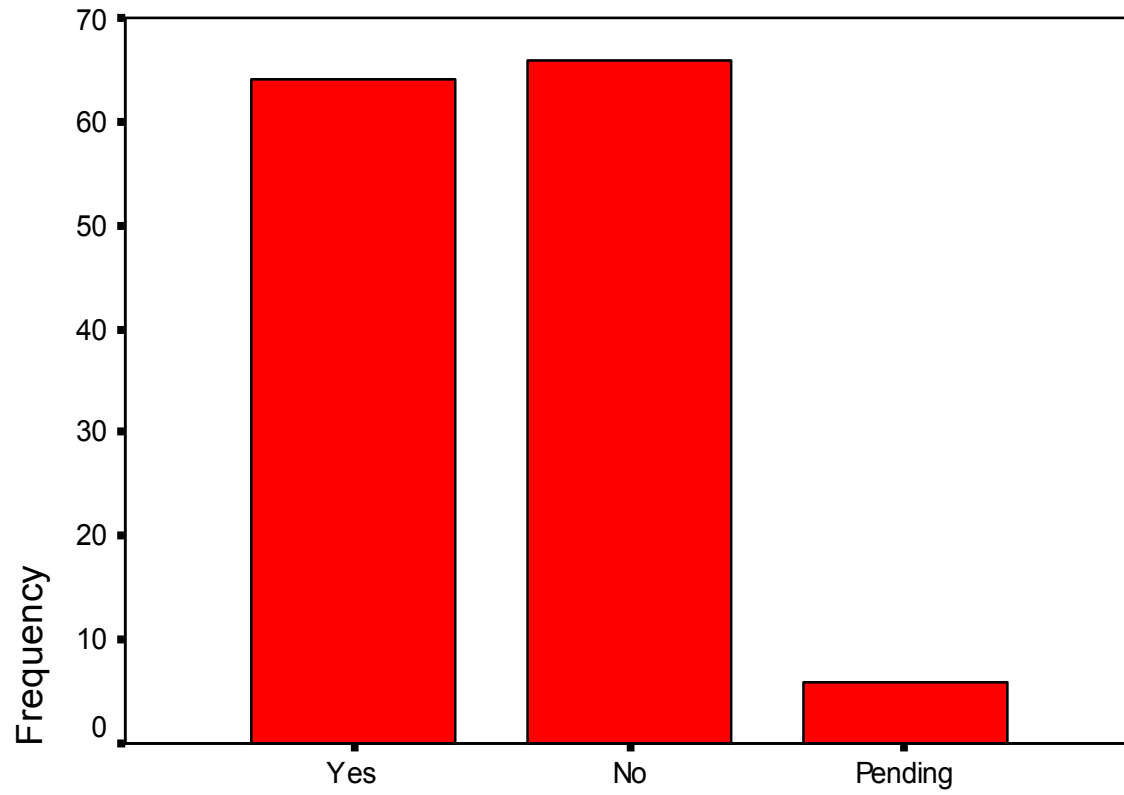
Program - Psychologist- How helpful was the program

Program - Religious - How helpful was the prog



Program - Religious - How helpful was the program

Parole granted



Parole granted

Parole granted * Any penalty imposed since release Crosstabulation

			Any penalty imposed since release		Total
			yes	no	
Parole granted	Yes	Count	8	17	25
		% within Parole granted	32.0%	68.0%	100.0%
	No	Count	20	12	32
		% within Parole granted	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
	Pending	Count	0	1	1
		% within Parole granted	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	28	30	58	
	% within Parole granted	48.3%	51.7%	100.0%	

Implications

- Direct service programmes most effective when worked with the woman to improve her individual circumstances, and restored some sense of personal agency: Parenting, Psychologist, Education, Chaplains.
- Programmes women felt less effective were more for male prisoners, e.g. anger management. Working with women offenders must be female-centric; interventions must recognise the particular needs of women in these circumstances.
- Programmes seen as unhelpful are: hard to access (psychiatric services), not therapeutic in their aim (psychiatric services, child protection), or more institutional authority managing a problem is seen as the main aim (child protection).
- Programme singled out as the most helpful was the chaplaincy programme, not just because the study was in conjunction with CSS, but because the chaplains did not come with a service goal or specific outcomes to be achieved, but sat with the women and listened and where possible gave practical assistance.
- The importance of mentoring and ongoing contact and practical assistance for women after prison is highlighted by the findings about parole.

Parole

- The importance of mentoring and ongoing contact and practical assistance for women after prison is highlighted by the findings about parole.
- 65 women were given parole, 68 were not, 6 pending.

In a sample of 60 women:

- In terms of further offending: 13 (44.8%) **on parole** had been involved in further offending
16 (55.2%) were not
- Of those **not on parole**: 23 (76.7%) were involved in further offending
- 7 (23.3%) were not involved in further offending

When asked if an penalty had been imposed since release:

- Of women **on parole**: 8 (32%) had had a penalty imposed
17 (68%) had not
- Of women **not on parole** 20 (62.5%) had had a penalty imposed
12 (37.5%) had not

Parole

Intensive parole for 3 months

Visit CCO twice per week

One day community work (unless have children or full time work)

Early visit to Centrelink (Social Security) arranged

May include cognitive behavioural programs

No parole

Fewer contacts

Met later

Comments in prison re parole

CCO –parole: He was excellent. He often commented on how well I was doing. It's good when they let you know this. I wish it were longer. It means you can get access to services that otherwise you wouldn't. It's like a privilege to have parole.

Women's responses

On substance abuse treatment : I balked at the start – I did not want to do either – but I got a lot out of them. Started out doing it for parole ... changed after about 2/3rd week. They let us interact about anything we liked – share opinions etc. No set format ... and then we'd get down to the drug issues.

What women say helps them

- The factors women said made a difference to them, when talking about their parole worker were:
 - “The worker focused on the issues that were concerning me”
 - “The worker focused on the problems as I described them”
 - “The problems we discussed were related to my offending”
 - “The worker and I together worked out how we could address my problems”
 - “The worker did what s/he said they would do”
 - “The worker challenged me when I made excuses for offending and other anti-social behaviour”
 - “The worker encouraged me when I said non criminal and positive things”
 - “The worker was punctual”
 - “The worker did practical things for me”
 - “The worker is friendly”
 - “The worker was concerned about my feelings and my understanding of my own behaviour”
 - “The worker comments on things I do well”