BREADWINNERS BEHIND BARS: EXPLORING THE NARRATIVES OF INCARCERATED FEMALE BREADWINNERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Similarly to their overseas counterparts, incarcerated South African women are overrepresented among the poor, have less access to education and assume the principal burden of care and unpaid labour in the home. They are also mothers who provide and care for their children, often on their own, as female breadwinners. Yet little research exists on their lived experiences, with the dearth of research pertaining to incarcerated women not concerned with their role of breadwinning or motherhood. This qualitative, psychological feminist study endeavoured to document the narratives of a group of 17 women who are incarcerated in a correctional centre in South Africa. Data collected through life history interviews allowed for a gender-sensitive analysis of the unique challenges incarcerated women in South Africa face, and in their own words, elucidated how the gendered role of female breadwinners played a part in their incarceration. The role of female breadwinners did not act as a sole stressor, but rather occurred within a context of complex social factors that included the feminisation of poverty, gendered division of labour, as well as gender-based violence (GBV). As explicated through the women's pathways narratives, this confluence of factors, coupled with fulfilling the dual roles of primary provider and caregiver, contributed towards their path to incarceration.

Keywords: *Female breadwinner; incarceration; gender; feminism; life histories; South Africa.*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The population of female breadwinners in South Africa is a steadily growing population, (Madhavan & Schatz, 2007: 85-86; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018: 83; Parry & Segalo, 2017:183; Posel & Rogan, 2012: 97), yet little research exists on the lived experiences of female breadwinners in South Africa. Global studies on the topic (Flatø, Muttarak & Pelser, 2017: 42; Ranganathan, Stern, Knight, Muvhango, Molebatsi, Polzer-Ngwato, Lees & Stöckl, 2021: 719), indicate that these households are generally much poorer than the traditional male breadwinner households, and that these women are over-represented in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, with the wage gap between male and female earnings persisting (Falola, Fakayode, Kayode & Amusa, 2020: 168; Mumporeze, 2020: 48; Ozoemena, 2018: 19-21). Additionally, Statistics South Africa reports that female breadwinner households in South Africa are:

> "…predominantly responsible for all tasks related to domesticity, including provision for and the care of children and extended family members, and, on average, contain a larger proportion of children, with a larger burden of support for extended family members" (Statistics South Africa, 2013: ii, as cited in Parry & Gordon, 2020: 798).

Similarly, in South Africa the population of women in conflict with the law is growing, but little research is concerned with their lived experiences (Artz, Hoffman-Wanderer & Moult, 2012: 3-5; Haffejee, Vetten & Greyling, 2005: 40-41; Luyt, 2010: 89; Parry, 2022: 275;

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Qhogwana, 2020: 692-693). The South African Department of Correctional Services reported that, as at 31 March 2022, there were 2 334 sentenced and 1 390 unsentenced women in correctional facilities across the country, which, in a total carceral population of 143 223, makes up less than three percent of the entire South African incarcerated population (Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2022: 68).

These women are not only defined by their carceral state, but they also represent a vulnerable gendered minority of an already relegated community. Incarcerated women are also more likely than incarcerated men to be the primary caregivers to their children and the only caregiver as single parents, who then attempt to 'mother from the inside' with inadequate services to do so (Enos, 2000:13). It is within the broader context of a research study with the objective of understanding women's pathways to incarceration, that this research paper explicates the lived experiences of female breadwinners and the effect the role has played in their detention. The roles of primary provider and mother are significant experiences, with previous studies identifying most women in conflict with the law as single mothers and primary breadwinners in their homes (Artz & Rotmann, 2015: 4; Moe & Ferraro, 2006: 137; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2015: 195-197; United Nations Criminal Justice Handbook Series, 2014: 17; Yingling, 2016: 183). However, for the women interviewed, the role of being a female breadwinner did not act as a sole stressor, but rather within a context of complex social factors that include the feminisation of poverty; gender-based violence (GBV); and the gendered division of labour. These are elucidated on in brief to contextualise the specific South African research findings to follow.

Feminisation of poverty and female breadwinners in South Africa

South Africa as a country faces many challenges, most of which disproportionately affect women. Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey for the second quarter of 2022 (2023: np) states that 47 percent of South African women are recorded as economically inactive, meaning almost half of women in South Africa are out of the labour force compared to 35,6 percent of men. For the thousands of women living in the country's rural areas, the situation is even more dire. Crippled by the growing unemployment and a lack of adequate social security, the denial of basic services has seen many of these women forced to shoulder the burden of survival through the responsibility of taking care of the household through unpaid labour (Statistics South Africa, 2013: 62). Unpaid labour includes all non-remunerated work activities occurring in the household, as well as unpaid care work, which is any activity devoted to those who cannot care for themselves (Antonopoulos, 2009: 2). This deficiency in society's recognition of so called 'women's work' is demonstrated in the 2015 Report on the Status of Women in the South African Economy (Department of Women, 2015: 10), which states that rural, black women between the ages of 30 and 45 face particularly strong demands on their time, spending more than eight hours on average per day in domestic activities when access to basic services, such as: electricity and running water, are not available. In a society structured under the notions of patriarchy, it is a woman's responsibility to take care of all things relating to the home and the welfare of her family, a gendered, homemaking role which patriarchal economies have never valued through fiscal compensation (Benjamin, 2007: 198-200).

For those South African women able to find employment, research (Statistics South Africa, 2015: np; Boutron & Constant, 2013: 179) indicates that their returns to education are lower, the gender-based wage gap endures and occupational exclusion positioning them in gendered trades further exacerbate the existing inequalities. The feminisation of poverty means that women, particularly female-headed households, are generally much poorer than men and that women are over-represented in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, with the wage gap between male and female earnings persisting (Bhorat, van der Westhuizen & Jacobs, 2009: 11-12).

Furthermore, female breadwinner households do not only, on average, contain a larger proportion of children, but the burden of support for extended family members is also larger in these households (Statistics South Africa, 2013: 64). This undervaluation of the female labour force contributions go hand in hand with society's lack of recognition of unpaid work, which is viewed as an inclination naturally arising in the female disposition and not requiring any skills.

A lack of adequate income may also compromise the health of these women and their children, as well as their access to services, forsaking them to situations where their physical safety may be threatened. This is a serious concern as research has found that the disruption of traditional gender norms, which occurs in the homes of female breadwinners, often results in violence and abuse (Baloyi, 2021: 105; Parry & Segalo, 2017: 188; Ranganathan, et al, 2021: 730). Research conducted on the lived experiences of South African female breadwinners revealed a combative environment where male partners of these women, who are fulfilling the non-traditional gender role, feel justified to commit acts of violence against them as their masculine identity is threatened (Parry & Segalo, 2017: 188). Sadly, in addition to these challenges thrust upon the women who assumed the traditionally male role of primary provider, research has revealed that the position had not led to more egalitarian gender relations either. Rather it predisposes a woman to resistance and aggression regarding their defiance of male authority when men were perceived to no longer be upholding their share of the patriarchal bargain, and women feeling that their roles were underrated in economic terms and their work demoted to being domestic and unpaid (Rice, 2016: 30).

Gendered vulnerabilities of incarcerated female breadwinners

Poverty and poly-victimisation pathways figure prominently in any adequate explanation of the dramatic increases in the population of women in conflict with the law (Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney & Martinez Jr, 2012: 2405-2409; National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), 2017: 2-5; Sudbury, 2005: 27), both in South Africa and abroad. A report compiled by Townhead in 2007 for the UN, stated that typically, these women are young, unemployed mothers with low levels of education who stem from economically and socially disadvantaged segments of society. "Many have histories of alcohol and substance abuse. A disproportionate proportion of incarcerated women have experienced violence or sexual abuse" (Townhead, 2007: 16).

These discriminating factors are exacerbated when looking at the population of women in conflict with the law in the Global South. A study conducted by Bailey (2013: 121-135) with twelve participants in Barbados, confirmed that gendered entrapment through poverty was the primary motivation cited by women for their offending behaviour. Correspondingly, in her article that examines factors that have contributed to the growing rates of incarceration of women in Sierra Leone, Mahtani (2013: 243-264) states that these share commonalities with international instances of women in corrections. Most of the incarcerated women in the country are: "…illiterate and poor, have a background of physical and emotional abuse, have mental health problems, and have committed minor offenses" (Mahtani, 2013: 248). Poverty is described as a double burden for women as instances of female-headed households increase, compelling many women into commercial sex work, theft and drug peddling to support themselves and their families (Mahtani, 2013: 249). Within the South African context, researchers (Agboola & Rabe, 2018: 16; Artz & Hoffman-Wanderer, 2017: 6; Pretorius & Botha, 2009: 243-248; Steyn & Booyens, 2017: 35-49) have found that the need to care for and protect children, in the context of poverty, poor education and abuse, acts as: "…both a constraint that limited women's ability to make good choices as well as a catalyst for action with both positive and negative effects" (Artz et al, 2012:16).

Concerningly, the high levels of trauma experienced by incarcerated women through instances of violence and abuse was a common discourse uncovered in local research (Agboola & Rabe, 2018: 4; Hesselink & Pearl, 2015: 339-341; Parry, 2022: 786-787; Qhogwana, 2020: 701) and studies abroad (Bower, 2014: 107-109; Gehring, 2018: 4-9; National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women (NRCJIW], 2016: np; Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014: 192-195). This was of such importance that it was highlighted in a UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women in 2013. The document specifically highlights the strong link between violence against women and their incarceration, stating that: "…evidence from different countries suggests that incarcerated women have been victims of violence at a much higher rate prior to entering prison than is acknowledged by the legal system generally" (UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, 2013: 4). Often, these women view relationships or marriage as having the potential to alleviate their destitution, only to find that the men they turned to as saviours become abusive and violent, wanting to control them. In certain instances, this survival mode is criminalised when it takes the form of revolutions of debt, theft, fraud and substance abuse or trafficking. As will be seen through the women's narratives to follow, a confluence of factors, which included gendered vulnerabilities imposed by a patriarchal society, coupled with fulfilling the dual roles of provider and caregiver, contributed to these women's incarceration.

FEMINIST FRAMEWORK AND PATHWAYS RESEARCH

Essentially, feminist theories relating to women in conflict with the law call for gender-sensitive understandings of women's experiences of incarceration, as well as their social circumstances prior to incarceration to respond to their needs and establish gender-responsive interventions. As already discussed, women constitute a very small portion of the total incarcerated populations worldwide and as such it was only as late as the 20th century that feminist criminology began to challenge: "…the overall masculinist nature of theories of crime, deviance, and social control by calling attention to the repeated omission and misrepresentation of women in criminological theory and research" (Chesney-Lind, 2006: 7). The theories which related to the offenses perpetrated by women in conflict with the law were frequently developed through the study of male samples, and important contributors to women's pathways to offending were often overlooked or excluded (Gehring, 2018: 1-2). Born from the need to challenge the mainstream, masculine dominated perspectives of women in conflict with the law, Daly's 1992 research took a narrative approach to understanding women's pathways to offending, an approach that was unique in that it challenged the idea that criminological theories were gender neutral (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014: 193). Although her feminist pathways framework was a fundamental step towards recognising that unique, gendered, life circumstances lead women to commit offences, it was limited in that it was developed and tested primarily in the United States, leaving its applicability within the context of other cultures, societies and countries questionable (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2015: 196). Subsequent studies conducted across the globe by researchers that include: Artz et al (2012: 3-8); Boutron and Constant (2013: 177-195); Gehring (2018: 3-4); Mahtani (2013: 243-264); and Yenjela (2015: 135-145), have validated the principles of Daly's pathways research, albeit with a broader inclusion of defining social characteristics that include various sites of oppression such as gender, race, class, nationality, age and so on. Regardless, the fundamental undertaking of feminist pathways research remains to uncover key issues that are central to women's pathways to incarceration, within the: "…broad life disadvantages and social circumstances that put women at risk of on-going criminal involvement, many of which are fundamentally gendered experiences" (Yingling, 2016:181). To that end, this study endeavoured to build on the foundation laid by previous feminist pathways researchers and explore whether the gendered

role of female breadwinners played a part in the pathways narratives of a group of women incarcerated in a South African correctional facility.

METHOD

The methodology of this study was informed by feminist pathways perspectives, which have long recognised that augmented, gender specific examination is needed to include various factors contributing to the motivations and experiences of incarcerated women (Erez & Berko, 2010: 160-168; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013: 1-22; Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014: 191-197). Since feminist research is primarily concerned with individual life experiences, this study placed emphasis on capturing participants' voices in order to situate their lived experiences within their social circumstances. As is standard in feminist pathways research with women in conflict with the law, the data collected explores a particular turning point in a woman's life that she identifies as central to her pathway to incarceration. It is then through the collaborative efforts of the researcher and participants to contextualise these moments of significance to the participants personal narratives and situate these within identified impacts of broader social dynamic forces that are gendered (Ojermark, 2007:16). This study utilised a retrospective data collection tool often used in pathways research, life history interviews, to inquire about the women's experiences prior to their incarceration. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews resulted in abundance of data which reach saturation with sample group of 17 participants. The pathways narratives were analysed using feminist narrative inquiry, a qualitative and interpretative research design which recognises the intersubjectivity between researcher and participant in the mutual creation of data as "a complex and dynamic research process that involves asking, listening, reading, looking for, identifying, locating, co-creating, re-presenting, and interpreting stories." (Hilfinger Messias & DeJoseph, 2004: 48). This intimate engagement with the data resulted in codes emerging which revealed the inimitable South African context in which these women's narratives were created. Consequently, narrative analysis of the transcribed interviews elucidated the participants' views of reality. It also fulfilled an emancipatory purpose, focusing on participants' life events, in their own spoken words, as counter narratives for disregarded populations. However, for the research study to be truly ethical it needed to take into account the research setting in a carceral centre, which presented its own unique challenges and concerns, as well as the needs of the women involved as well. Consequently, all ethical considerations were safeguarded through the successful application for the research project through two Research Ethics Committees (REC) that advocate the rights and autonomy of women in conflict with the law.

Participants

Through a collaborative process, the research study endeavoured to facilitate openness within the environment and create ethical conditions that were unfavourable for the exploitation of the already marginalised group of women, allowing their voices and experiences to come to the fore. The process of conducting face-to-face interviews while being present in the participants' lived setting enriched my internalisation and understanding of the contextual factors that framed their behaviour. The seventeen women interviewed were housed in one of the eight women's only correctional facilities in South Africa and emanated from various provinces of the country. Prospective participants of the study were informed as to the nature of the research through a briefing session at the correctional facility, which provided the women an opportunity to ask questions and consider whether or not they wanted to participate in the research. It was made clear during the consent process that participation would not necessarily place them in a favourable light with the authorities, nor that refusal to participate would be

detrimental to them. All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis with signed consent forms and participants were asked to select a pseudonym that corresponded to their identity while ensuring their anonymity. The first woman who agreed to be interviewed, came from Bolivia in South America, and while the remaining participants were all South African, they came from various South African provinces that ranged from Gauteng, to KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, and the Free State. As is appropriate for qualitative sampling, incarcerated women of various ages, racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as various lengths of incarceration periods and convictions, were selected through purposive sampling to enable in-depth exploration of issues. Participants were purposively selected through the criterion as mothers to elicit relevant and information rich narratives for review.

The age of the selected, already sentenced women interviewed ranged from 23 to 53 years old, with an average age of 35 years of age. With regards to race, the majority of the study's interviewees were black (n=6) and coloured women (n=5), totalling almost 65 percent of the participants, followed by 5 white participants and one participant who, before mentioned, was a foreign national. As stated by the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), many foreign nationals are held in South African correctional facilities (2019: 34), a population that I felt could not be ignored during the research process. All seventeen women were mothers who, on average, had two children before they were arrested, and one participant who was pregnant with her third child at the time of her incarceration and interview. Furthermore, three of the women had taken in the children of their relatives or husband's previous marriages, to raise as their own. The vast majority (n=13) were the breadwinners for their children, and most were single, with six women having never married, six divorced, one separated and two widowed. Only two of the women were still married. Excerpts from selected transcripts, with participant pseudonyms, are used in the results section to explicate the incarcerated women's breadwinning experiences, the societal impacts thereon and their understandings thereof.

FINDINGS

Similarly to the profile of women in conflict with the law as outlined by United Nations research (United Nations Criminal Justice Handbook Series, 2014: 17), the incarcerated women spoken to in this research study were young mothers who were single and working for minimum wage in the informal sector, to provide for their families. Gendered disparities in salary earned and unpaid labour augmented these pressures and responsibilities for a group of women who were already estranged from family and victimised by those they loved. Through their narratives, and in their own words to follow, the women contextualised their roles while behind bars, and elucidated their experiences of being female breadwinners, unpaid labour and GBV prior to their incarceration.

Former breadwinners behind bars

First and foremost, during the interviews the women wanted to communicate their concerns regarding their separation from their children. Before any discussion could commence on their lives before and pathways to incarceration, the women shared their trauma of being separated from their children. As most of the women who were interviewed (n=15) were mothers who were sole providers and primary caregivers to their children, they believed that alternative arrangements should have been considered by the DCS. Evelyn [chosen pseudonym], a 36-year-old mother of three who was divorced, elaborated:

> *"So, it's like… DCS, I feel that they are not doing enough for the inmates… Although they are putting out there, that they are there to rehabilitate them, in this place… I think, what they don't understand is… they think they are helping people but they are actually damaging them more. And… especially with the children! They don't see the circumstances, like, we have to pay for your crime which you did, yes! But then also look at the circumstances… like now, I'm busy, I'm fighting for an appeal… to go out, for them to look at my sentence again and to go out… but it takes time. And then in the meantime you have to fight for what is right… you have to lose the bond with your children which is difficult because you only see them once a week… and my mom tries to come in, but I tell her she mustn't come every weekend cause its money and stuff like that… So, ja… I, I personally say that… if they can look at us, where we could rather give back to the community…"*

Faith [chosen pseudonym] was aged 34, and she had recently been incarcerated, while four months pregnant with her third child, and was engaged with divorce proceedings. She also suggested alternatives to incarceration where she could pay her dues to society but remain as provider and caregiver for her children: "*I would've loved it to happen, maybe if, like…um…. The way they explained it was house arrest or something like that. So… it's okay… I just miss them* [her children]! *More than anything!*". Poignantly, her offending behaviour had also landed Faith in a situation where she could no longer provide for her family:

> *"So now I worry about that… it's like, what are they gonna do now? That means my mom… it means either she must go find a piece job or… um… that thing… the monthly child grant. Ja, she will have to do that… which would slightly assist but… It is just mainly the household* [costs] *that I'm worried about. I need to leave here in order to support, my children… and my family!"*

Albie [chosen pseudonym], a mother of two and widow at age 42, was also concerned how her incarceration would impact on her ability to provide for her family once she had served her sentence and was released:

> [Interviewer:] *And how much longer do you have on your sentence?*
> Albie: *Another six months… but its… it seems like ever. It's like I'm in this dark hole and I don't get out of here… but the thing that worries me, um… it was already difficult for me without something, like this criminal record… it were* [sic] *already difficult for me to find work, when I get out of here what's gonna happen…*
> [Interviewer:] *You are worried it will affect your ability to be a breadwinner?*
> Albie: *Exactly!"*

For two of the women, Faith and Anneke [chosen pseudonym], their lives in a correctional facility were not that different from before, as they had never really been free. They had felt trapped by the responsibilities placed upon them, often from a very early age. Anneke, who was a 54-year-old mother to three sons and stepmother to her ex-husband's two children from a previous marriage, explained how her pathway to gambling and fraud had stemmed from a pressure to provide as the only household breadwinner and caregiver, coupled with experiences of loss, abandonment and mental illness. She described how relieved, yet guilty, she felt, knowing that she could no longer fulfil the primary breadwinner role from behind bars:

> *"It was, in the beginning, it was… it was like a relief for me. That thing is just off from me… I don't have to provide anymore… because the last two years, when I was working, um… I had a salary but about my whole salary just went for* [her children] *... And, um… it was just… it feels as if you can't breathe… that… there... it is just too much… I can't provide for everything… it, it, it drives me crazy… really…"*

Regardless, all the women agreed that gender-responsive alternatives to imprisonment, such as internment in community residential centres, fine options programs, bail supervision, or probation, would have allowed them to repay their communities and society for their transgressions committed, but not penalised innocent children by separating them from their mothers and dividing their families. If women remain the primary agents for the socialisation and provision of children, then the importance of the role performed by women in raising their children needs to be stressed when considering the impact of their existence when lost to a domestic setting after their incarceration.

Pressure to provide as breadwinner as a pathway to women's incarceration

Of the participants interviewed, 13 of the 17 women described themselves as the primary breadwinner for their children, and often extended family members as well. This was attempted on meagre salaries from low paid positions that could not cover even the barest of living expenses. Their positions frequently fell into gendered careers, such as: a secretary; waitress; or cashier, where women are most often employed and paid less than male counterparts. Overall, the women (n=9) were indifferent to what the role entailed, as they had always performed said role, unthinkingly. Theresa, a widow at 48 years of age with two children, who described herself as coming from a traditional home was dismissive, even spurning her role by stating: *"the majority of the time I was the breadwinner, but he supported us… I just earned more than him…"* This was also true for Natalie and Albie, both of whom had very little familial support structures in place, as seen in their narratives regarding their experience breadwinning. Natalie, 34-year-old married mother of four, explained the reason that she was a breadwinner out of necessity:

> *"I had to! I had no choice… nobody was supporting me so I had to support myself. Most of the things were on my shoulders… My husband, he was also working…* [but] *he was not earning much… My salary covered everything. So, things were not* [good]*..."*

Albie, whose forced marriage at age 16 had ended in divorce, was slightly more circumspect regarding her responsibility as breadwinner. Rigid ideals of masculine and feminine roles had been entrenched in her identity during her childhood, as she disclosed that her parents had decided to remove her from boarding school so that she could married to an older man to provide for her family. Through her arranged, first marriage she had inadvertently become breadwinner to her parents and siblings, but after the death of her second husband, Albie described how the role was thrust upon her again:

> *"My husband believes wife is staying at home, looking after the kids… and that's what I did… for the seventeen years, and, um… it wasn't a good thing because when he passed away, he was the breadwinner, and he left me with nothing… I started to sell second-hand clothing at taxi ranks and train stations… to makes ends meet… it was very difficult for us… so then I decided to do a trip, to take, um, something illegal out of South Africa but I didn't know at that stage what it was…… and that's how I landed up here…"*

Conversely, for four of the women, the pressures of being the primary provider in the home was acknowledged as a major contributor to their incarceration. Two of the women further revealed how this pressure directly linked to their actions which led to incarceration. Faith was the first participant to elucidate her experience as a breadwinner. Neither her first boyfriend, nor soon to be ex-husband, had provided financial support or caregiving for their children. This pressure as sole provider was compounded by her responsibility towards her other family members and parents:\

> *"Everything! Everything they had! That house depended on me, even my dad would say "Oh, this month, I can't make it". He knew that, okay, she will… she will make a plan… but everyone eats, right? I had to do all the things, even though my mom is there… but um, she doesn't work… So, I always had to make a plan… even though sometimes it costed me in the sense that… taking loans… and all those things. But, at the end of the day, I've always put other people first… before I put myself."*

This pressure had resulted in her involvement in a money laundering scheme, which had resulted in her arrest:

> *"So, I thought okay. I trusted him, so I said okay. I mean, I was struggling, so… when that happened, when he did all the money laundering… um, I got that money. I had joy in it! I had joy in the sense that, I've never had so much money… And I was able to pay off all my debts. I paid everything! I even called people that I didn't… that I owed maybe, three years ago, and I was like "How much do I owe you? I will pay you." And then I tried to save money for the… for… at that time… And um, I did all of that! I had financial freedom! If my mom wanted money, I could help. So, in a main sense, I used all… my money was mainly used to help people. So, I never really got to enjoy it… I only enjoyed it because I was helping somebody else, right?"*

This contradiction of experiencing pressure to provide for your family, and then the very breadwinning actions which provided safety, food and shelter for your family resulting in incarceration, was shared by Lesedi [chosen pseudonym], aged 39. As primary provider, she had turned to fraud to support her four sons and nephew:

> *"I felt like something big was on my shoulders… you, know, just… came down, like I was carrying a very heavy iron or stone… because I lost most of the stuff. He took everything… the cars went to his girlfriends, uh, the properties, the place I was staying in… it was in arrears, they wanted to take the property, you see… And the kids are all with me. So, this guy who took my companies, he said he is gonna use some monies during imports. Then I got warned that I must be careful of the guy, and I was scared to use that company now… And then, eh, we start the other companies and we work those companies. Only to find that… we realise only when… I got a call from my niece, there are many cars by the gate, people are looking for me… they wanted to arrest me."*

Anneke shared a similar familiarity with the pressures to provide:

> *"Ja… um, I… I think it is a long, long process in getting here, but the main thing is that I gambled. I gambled a lot. And the more I lost, the more I took from work, and go gambling again. Obviously with the intention that that I will put everything back, but there's no such thing, and there's no turning point. You just… it's just… like*

> *snowballing and getting bigger, bigger, bigger… The reason why I started gambling was… because I had these three boys, and my ex-husband never paid maintenance… he never… I think it was stressful in a certain way… that you have to provide for them. And I… I made many mistakes…… If I look back at my life, I can see the mistakes that I have made, I should never have married him and … he was just never there for me, in no way. And he was irresponsible financially as well. So even since then I battled with money… I wanted to provide… and, um, it's not that I bought nice stuff for myself or go on nice holidays or… it was day to day things to live."*

Overall, the women agreed that they had taken on this provider role through securing paid employment, not by choice, but as a matter of survival. Phrases such as: "*I had to! I had no choice… nobody was supporting me, so I had to support myself. Most of the things were on my shoulders…"* shared by Natalie, and: *"Everything! Everything they had! That house depended on me…"* as proclaimed by Faith, convey the enormous pressure these women felt as the sole providers for their children and extended families. Their narratives identified this overwhelming responsibility as a key issue that was central to their pathway towards incarceration. Yet, as is commonplace in pathways research, the role of female breadwinners did not act as a sole stressor. It occurred within a multiplicity of issues in a context of complex social factors, which in this instance included gendered division of labour and GBV.

Gendered roles of unpaid labour and caregiving

Comparably to the primary breadwinner role, most of the women (n=16) explained that they were the principal caregiver towards their families and main caretakers of the home environment. Once again, these unpaid tasks were considered part of "women's work" and were referred to in an offhand manner, as simply part of the role to be played as a woman. Gale [chosen pseudonym], a 32-year-old single mother to one daughter, felt the same way. Having fallen pregnant at 19 years of age, after a one-night stand, she grew up quickly, becoming not only breadwinner but homemaker and caregiver to her daughter. She explained how: "…*it was difficult… I worked half day… so I had time to spend with her in the afternoon from two…*" leaving work early to take care of her daughter and their home. For Albie, the obligation of caring for her children and keeping the house in order was more than a responsibility, it was an embodiment of womanhood. She shared this by saying:

> *"This is the first time that I've been ever away from my children. I lived for my husband and my children. For me, um… my husband, and my children, they mustn't be ashamed to bring their friends over or whatever… everything was clean, and neat."*

However, for four of the women, the unequitable division of unpaid labour and caregiving responsibilities were considered a burden that had deprived them of opportunities to thrive and grow. Noma [chosen pseudonym], a single mother of two aged 29 years old, explained how, after she gave birth, she was simply expected to know how to care for a child and take care of the home.

> *"It was… so, it wasn't easy cause I was on my own. Um, no one was there for me, to tell how to raise a child, how to feed a child… And so, I was supposed to figure it out on my own, how to do things and handle things, it wasn't easy. And after the birth, taking the child to day-care and going to school, it wasn't easy. Then get back, do the washing, it wasn't easy…"*

This gendered burden of unpaid labour and caregiving often went beyond only caring for their children, when the women were expected to care for elderly family members as well. This was the case for Palesa[chosen pseudonym], a single mom aged 28, who explained:

> *"It was very difficult, because I also had a child… a life… so… I didn't finish school, because… I stayed there and I promised my grandmother that I will assist* [her]. *I always cried. I can't do this, it's too much for me, because I am still young. Even the neighbours were complaining "This child is very young to do whatever she is doing." Every morning I would go to wash my granny, change my granny… it was like I was going to work. Every day in the morning I will take my child to the crèche, then look after my granny…"*

It can be seen in these narratives that feelings of obligation and commitment to others' well-being compels these women to perform the unpaid work that forms part of their normative gendered narrative. This role is so inextricably interrelated with the unpaid reproduction of labour which "provides a sanitary and healthy environment for everyone in the family, irrespective of age and health status that transforms raw ingredients to consumable cooked food and provides for clean and ironed clothing for all members of the household" (Antonopoulos, 2009: 5). However, it not considered work worthy of recognition or repatriation. This societal imposition of an illogical time-tax on women throughout their daily lives, especially in terms of care work, have significant and detrimental implications for their participation in the paid reproduction of labour. Palesa's narrative typified this outcome, when she shared that: "*Every morning I would go to wash my granny, change my granny… it was like I was going to work. Every day in the morning I will take my child to the crèche, then look after my granny…"*. Calling it anything but unremunerated labour deceives and placates women into believing that the primary, daily, generational reproduction and upbringing of children, essentially the social reproduction of all members of our society, is insignificant 'women's work'. Unpaid work is therefore embedded in patriarchal structures that sustain a 'gendering' status quo, which falsifies and confines a woman's potential by proclaiming that it is 'normal' and 'natural' for her to be performing most of the unpaid labour, further restricting the lived experiences of a group of women who are already sole breadwinners for their families. These hidden patriarchal subsidies revealed in the women's lived accounts, are signs of the existence of unequal power relations between men and women, which disturbingly, often result in their experiences of GBV.

The perils of providing

As mentioned earlier, research conducted on the lived experiences of South African female breadwinners who were not incarcerated, revealed a combative environment where the disruption of traditional gender norms often resulted in violence and abuse (Parry & Segalo, 2017: 188). The victimisation narrative is a prominent predictor in feminist pathways research, and this was also true for the incarcerated women spoken to in this study. Although not a sole factor in their pathway to incarceration, most of the women (15 out of 17) were survivors of abuse and victimisation. Often, this was directly linked in their pathway narratives to their female breadwinner role. Maria [chosen pseudonym], a 28-year-old foreign national from South America, mother of two and stepmother to her husband's child from a previous relationship, explained of her path to becoming a drug mule, trafficking narcotics to South Africa:

> *"My father, he does not believe the marriage must break. By no reasons! He was forcing me to keeping on…* [married to her husband] *but once, my cousin come home and she find me with marks, in the face and* [indicates arms and body]*... And my father say* [sic] *that maybe I deserve it. So, I am keeping on doing it* [marriage]*... he* [her husband] *comes home, drinking, beating me…It was very difficult. Unfortunately, the choice I have done* [smuggling drugs]*, was not a good thing, because my husband was not supportive… at all. I was the one taking care of everything, working, the kids, everything! Then he was arrested, I had more debts."*

For Zindiwe [chosen pseudonym], 28-year-old single mother to one daughter, the responsibility of being a female breadwinner had led to instances of abuse, control and conflict with her boyfriend:

> *"He became abusive when he started smoking drugs… I was in school with him… he stared drugs when I was maybe a year after finishing my school… then after that he lost his job and that's when me, I find a job. So that boyfriend of mine he was abusive, always demanding money, beating me… always I must give him my money so that he can buy drugs… I was working at* [restaurant chain]*, waitressing, there by* [city]*. He left his job, I don't know why or how … for that time it* [the drugs] *was just only for him… until I got in and I said "What the hell, let me smoke drugs once"… and then that's when I started smoking… and he was so abusive to me, too much… and then I had to leave him… I went again to the streets and stayed there and smoked drugs… stealing and smoking and stealing… I went again to the streets to steal and smoke until I was arrested."*

Similarly for Palesa, her caregiving role had led to issues and victimisation experiences at the hands of her boyfriend:

> *"My boyfriend was a sweet guy but… he was kind of abusive. He didn't want me to work, he didn't even want me to go and leave home to look after my granny. He didn't even want me to go to the shop to buy something. He was overprotective, I don't know… insecure? He beated* [sic] *me so badly I didn't even go to school! Then said to me "You are not going to your home, looking like this." I couldn't go home, and my grandmother was angry cause she knows, when I go at night, in the morning, I will go home. So that was what I was doing. That time, I had to stay a whole week* [at boyfriend's house]*. We even went to the chemist to buy things to remove* [bruises]*... I was afraid!"*

The aforementioned research from South Africa cements a setting characterised by high levels of GBV and gender inequality and found that patriarchal attitudes, which often favour men over women, create an imbalance of power that results in gender inequality and discriminatory patriarchal practices against women, both regarded to be root causes of GBV (Gehring, 2018: 4; NRCJIW, 2016; Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje & Brobbey, 2017:13). These reports confirm that the deeply patriarchal nature of South African society is not only reflected in the social constructions of masculinity and femininity, but also feeds directly into the high levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) and GBV experienced by the participants. Similarly to Rice's (2016:28-41) research, the participants in this study endorsed equal rights for women, but conversely, most admitted that in the past they had not exercised these rights whenever they had been physically and sexually assaulted. In the women's own families, gender violence was widespread and widely overlooked, forming part of the way that masculinities and femininities were experienced, and conceptualised in their childhood. This was evident in

phrases by Palesa "My boyfriend was a sweet guy but… he was kind of abusive. He didn't want me to work…" These shared narratives evidenced how social constructions of masculinity do not only approve masculine ideals of heterosexual performance, strength and an ability to 'control' women, but more concernedly, legitimise unequal and violent relationships with women (Bower, 2014:109). Commonalities in these narratives validate and authenticate the little spoken of yet disturbingly common gendered experiences of abuse, victimisation and subsequent trauma experienced by women in South Africa.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the incarcerated women who contributed towards this feminist pathways research study were primary breadwinners in their homes. They shared stories of being young, single mothers earning their wage in gendered, low paid work to support their children born out of wedlock. The patriarchal subsidies of the feminisation of poverty, gendered roles of unpaid labour and care, as well as GBV, as experienced by the women and revealed in their lived accounts, are signs of the existence of gender inequality in South African society. Indeed, besides their incarceration, the women in this study typify the experiences of many South African women: unmarried with a past of victimisation and abuse, living in poor households which are isolated, often unemployed with poor education, bearing the brunt of unpaid labour and exclusion. Through gender-sensitive analysis of these women's shared narratives, the serious challenges they face are revealed and elucidated how the gendered role of being female breadwinners played a part in their incarceration. The role of female breadwinner did not act as a sole stressor, but rather occurred within a context of complex social factors that included gendered division of labour and GBV. As explicated through the women's pathways narratives, this confluence of factors, coupled with fulfilling the dual roles of primary provider and caregiver, contributed towards their path to incarceration. That these lived circumstances form part of day-to-day existences does not need to be debated, rather it calls for action, motivating public dialogue and prioritising the development of new pathways for women that exemplify social equity, cohesion as well as gender justice and equality. As women's living conditions are directly affected by the basic services their households receive, with mothers often bearing the responsibly to secure the basic needs of their family while acting as the primary caregivers of children and infirm or extended family members, improved access to basic services and social grants may assist these households with a secondary source of income. Improved comprehension of female breadwinner households is therefore vital to address issues of poverty and its link to women's participation in illegal activities. If women remain the primary agents for the socialisation and provision of children, then the importance of the female breadwinner role performed by women needs to be stressed when considering the impact of their existence when lost to a domestic setting after their incarceration. The development of short-term, gender-specific restorative-based therapy as an alternative to incarceration for women in conflict with the law may be an important option to consider in order to provide these women with the possibility of contributing successfully to society as mothers, as workers and as constructive citizens.

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