

The background image shows a modern building interior. The top half features a large, curved staircase with a white metal railing and glass balustrade. The walls are made of large glass panels, some with labels like 'FM 04', 'FM 06', 'FM 07', and 'FM 08'. The bottom half shows a common area with several round white tables and green chairs. A long white counter is visible on the right side. The overall atmosphere is bright and open.

Trauma Informed Justice: Understanding the Justice Client For Human Centered Design

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University of Alberta Prison Project

Conducted in-depth interviews with 800 inmates and 200 staff inside 4 provincial and 2 federal prisons in Western Canada from 2016-2020



Typical “open concept” prison unit (houses roughly 80 inmates)

Canada's Prison Population

- ◇ ~40,000 Total Number of Inmates (daily count) (Federal and Provincial)
- ◇ **Federal System (more than 2 years)**
- ◇ ~23,000 Federal Inmates (3% are women)
- ◇ **Provincial System (less than 2 years, plus remanded)**
- ◇ ~22,000 total (13% women)
- ◇ ~ 10,000 Sentenced
- ◇ ~ 12,000 remanded
- ◇ ~250,000 Total annual admissions (Federal and provincial combined)



Dominant Narratives:

- A. People need to be punished for the crimes they commit**
- B. Prisons are horrible intolerable institutions. They serve no purpose and do no good.... “Prisons are Shit” (Andreas Aresti)**

**More Complicated
Finding:**

**Paying attention to
the lives of
incarcerated men and
women reveals a
more nuanced and
perhaps more
unsettling reality
about the impact of
trauma in their lives**



Victimization

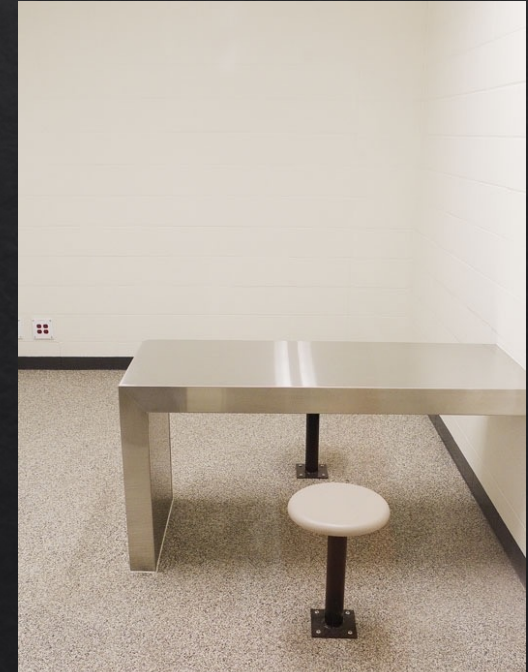


Victimization

- ◆ Overall 95% of men and 97% of women experienced victimization in their lives, 82% of men and 83% of women experienced the first victimization prior to first detected offence

Victimization

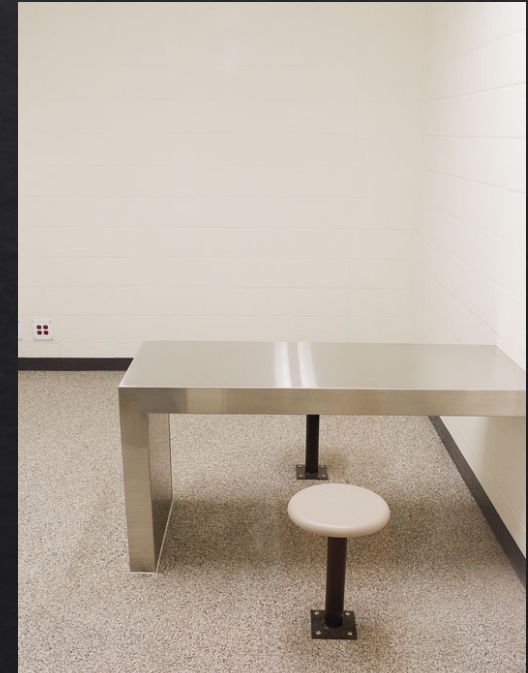
- ◆ They [family members] molested me, and my daughter is [from] incest. And then I used to get raped by other people that would come to our house. And then by the time I was 16, I was sold into sexual relationships with other people.
- ◆ An ex (ex-boyfriend) [...] tried killing me, so I left him [...] and when I told him “we're never getting back together” he snapped and starting strangling me and then chased me with a fucking machete out of my house [...] until the police came.



Typical interview room

Victimization

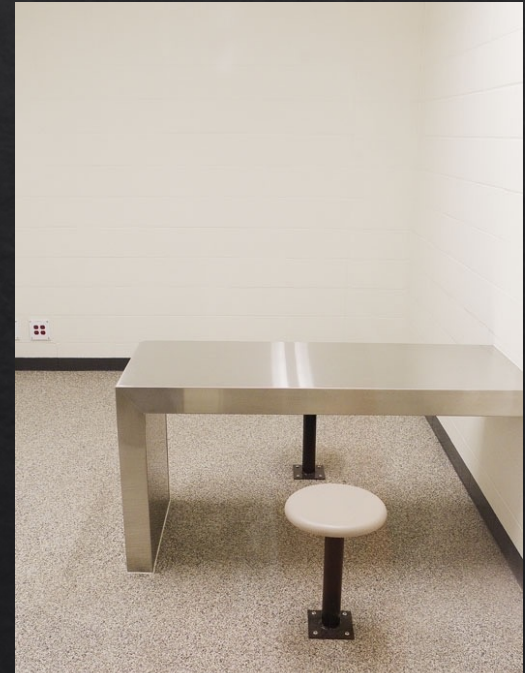
- ◇ I went to start datin' him, and kept going back because... it was him or homeless. **And I know how to be in an abusive relationship. I don't know how to be homeless.**
- ◇ I lost who I was. And so being in here like, I don't know jail kind of saved me because if I wasn't in jail right now I would probably still be getting high and still be that abusive relationship. Like I'm actually kind of, kind of glad I'm now in here right now.



Typical interview room

Victimization

- ◆ R: Yeah a lot of them actually get worried and will start to cry like when they got to leave. A lot of them don't want to leave or they will physically get into a fight before they leave so they can stay and get charged again.
- ◆ I: Are they, so they're scared to get out?
- ◆ R: Yeah.
- ◆ I: Why are they scared?
- ◆ R: Probably going to like family on the outside or an abusive relationship I'm guessing, or like getting out to nothing, a lot of them are worried about getting out to nothing because they're thinking where will they go what will they do and it... it's cold outside.



Typical interview room

Matter of fact stories

- ◆ Victimization was presented as an inescapable part of their lives
- ◆ Participants did not try to excuse their criminal behavior – they presented their victimization stories as a matter of fact aspect of their lives
- ◆ Most of them had the world view “I did the crime, I’ll do the time”

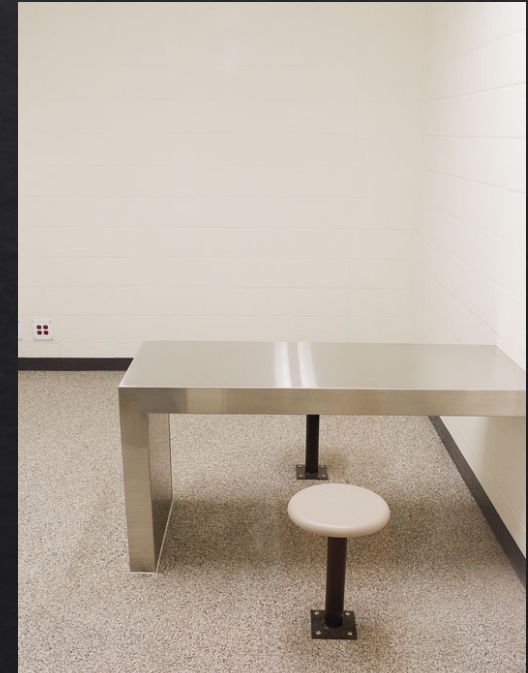
Housing

**73% of the women 43% of
the men in our federal
sample have been homeless
at some point in their lives**



◆ Like, right now, I've lost everything [...] And all of the sudden I got evicted [...] and I had no clothes [...] And then so now I got like no place and no clothes

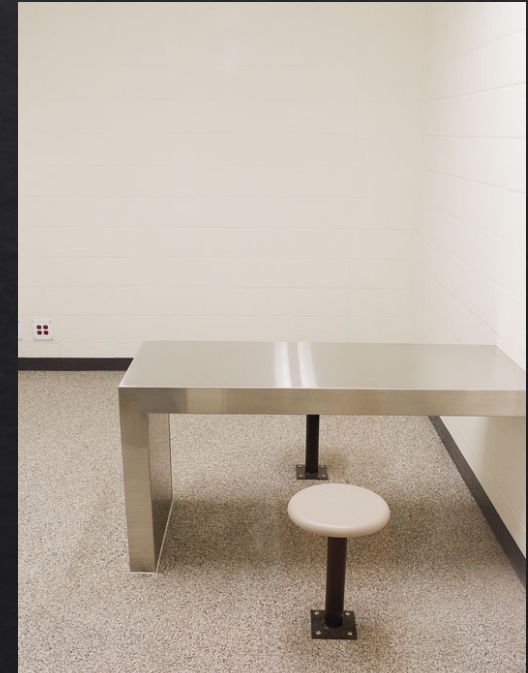
Housing



Typical interview room

◆ Before I got arrested this last time I [...] wanted to come back to jail because I didn't have a house. I didn't have a shelter. I didn't know when I was going to eat. I didn't know where I was going to shower.

Housing



Typical interview room

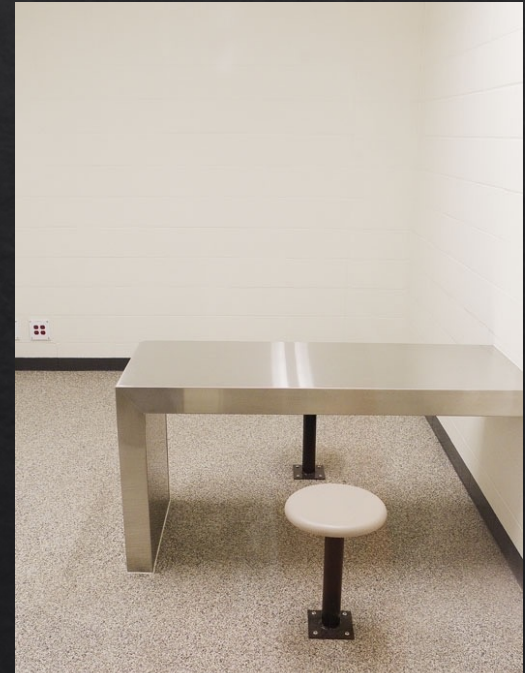
Drugs

82% of all men and women in the sample report using drugs outside of prison, while 49% of all men and women report using drugs inside of prison, with women reporting a higher prevalence in both groups.



Drugs

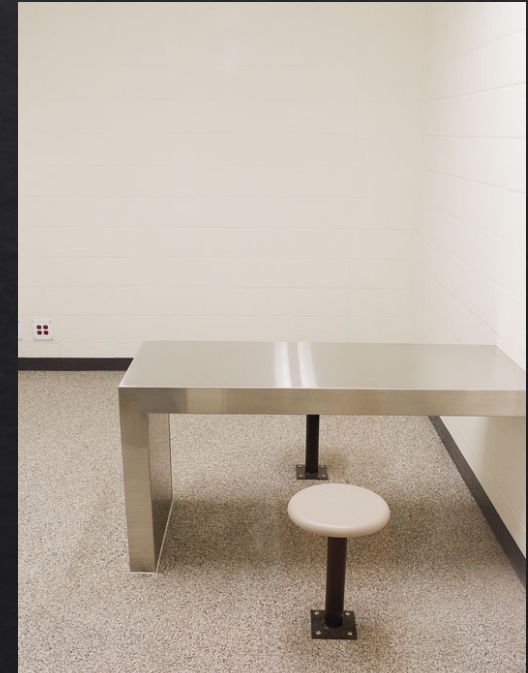
- ◆ Oh, the percentage is probably about 90 percent. Yeah. And [...] that's a generous 10 percent [...] because I'm the only one I know that doesn't have a drug problem, like I've done drugs before and I'll probably do them again but I've never had an addiction.



Typical interview room

◆ Like sometimes we have to [...] use pint [crystal methamphetamine] to stay up. You have to do the drugs to stay up, cause you can't fall asleep on the streets, you'll get raped, you know what I mean. The guys would take advantage of you or something [...]. Yeah, like it's a bit of a relief coming to jail.

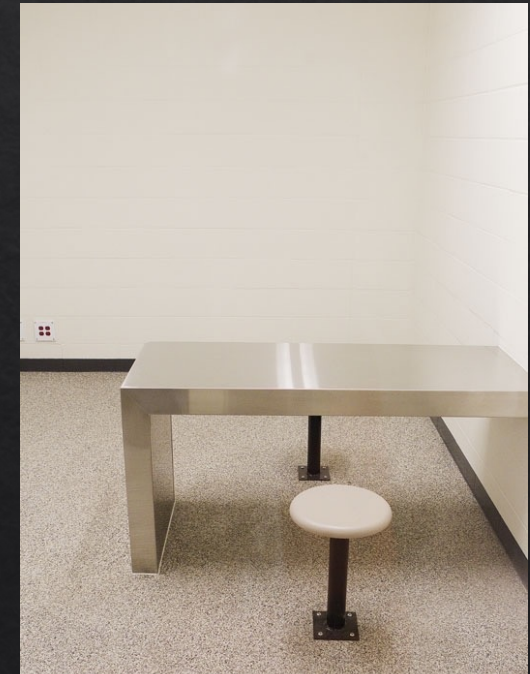
Drugs



Typical interview room

Drugs

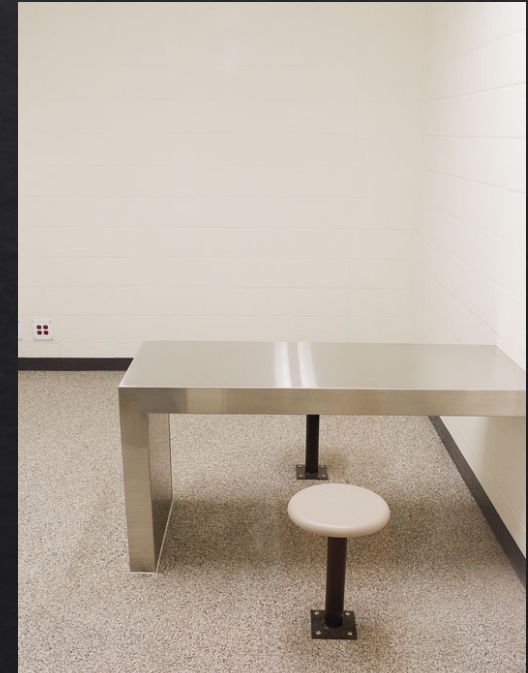
- ◆ This place saved my life [...] I would've been a junkie or instead of showing up in shackles and handcuffs I'd probably would've been in a body bag, you know.
- ◆ This is the only place that I usually do get clean [...] This is when it always ends for me. Like this is the best-case scenario for ending, is in jail. Like if you can't say no in here, you're never gonna' say no out there.



Typical interview room

◆ I've been doing heroin since I was 12 [...]. I was so messed up with my mom passing away [recently] [...] like I overdosed 4 times in one week and so I really think that if I didn't come to jail when I did then I probably would've overdosed and died [...] I was doing like 4 grams a day before I came in here

Drugs



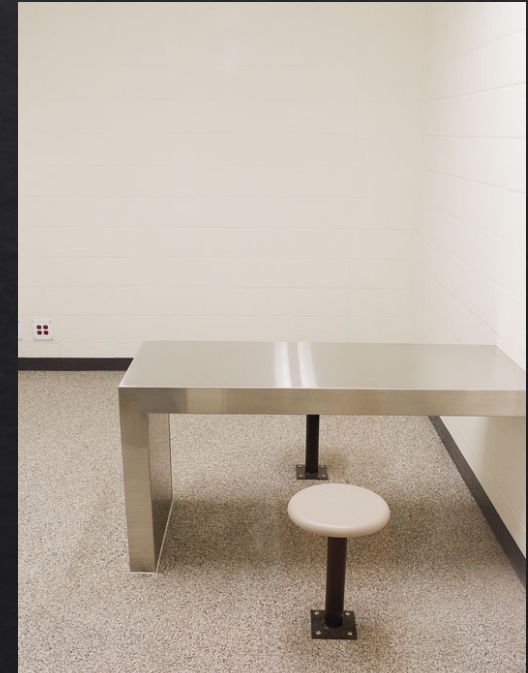
Typical interview room

**Time to change the
conversation**



◆ This is not about crime, drugs, choices...it is about ACEs, Trauma, and Pain, we need to start by changing how we as system actors interact

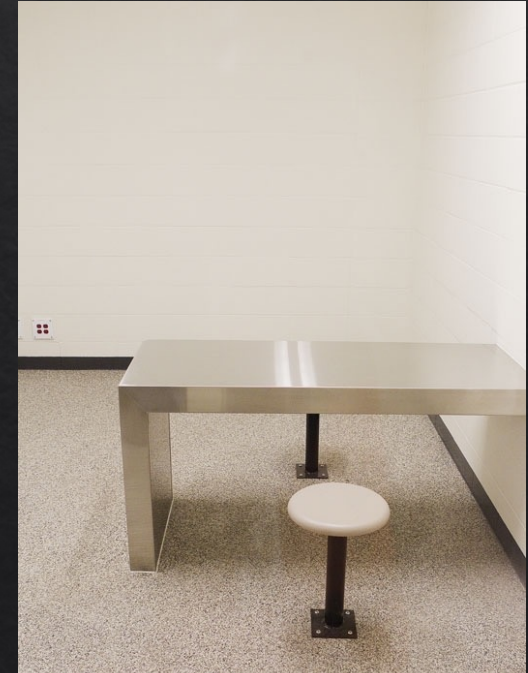
Change the Conversation



Typical interview room

Change the Conversation

We need to start actually partnering
Police, Public Health, Education,
Fire, Emergency Medical Services
and truly working to be Trauma
Aware and Trauma Informed

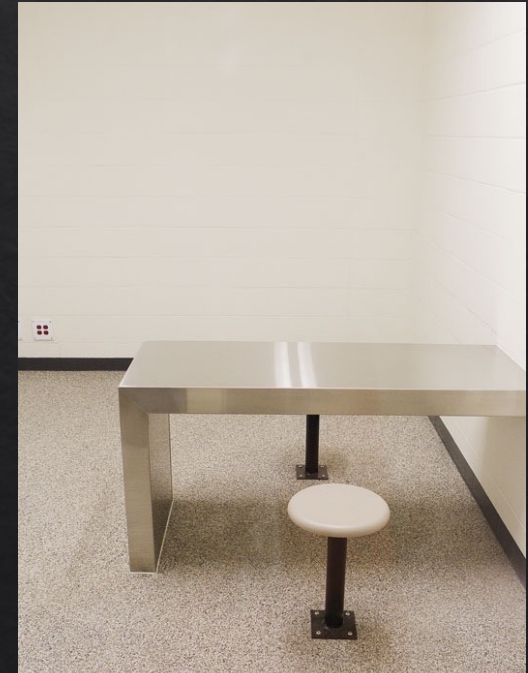


Typical interview room

There are government strategies for
Opioids, Methamphetamine,
Poverty, and Homelessness.

Change the Conversation

The data show that people fall into
multiple categories. Rather than a
strategy for the symptom, it is time
for human centered trauma
informed practice in the Criminal
Justice System.



Typical interview room

Trauma of Offending

- ◆ Seldom talked about
- ◆ Often the worst trauma in their lives
- ◆ Refusal to forgive self
- ◆ Interrupts healing
- ◆ Restorative Justice

**Universal
Precautions for
Trauma**



- ◆ First Aid teaches universal precautions for blood and bodily fluids
- ◆ Canadian statistics show that 0.6% of the Population has HEP C and 0.006% of the population has HIV and 2.17% has tested positive for Covid-19
- ◆ Overall 95% of men and 97% of women experienced victimization in their lives, 82% of men and 83% of women experienced the first victimization prior to first detected offence



The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for justice calls for Trauma Informed Systems.

In Recommendation 9.2 iv it states:

“Undertake training and education of all staff and officers so that they understand and implement culturally appropriate and trauma-informed practices, especially when dealing with families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.”

More Complicated Finding:

A considerable number of men and women in federal, remand and provincial prison suggest prison can be a site of “temporary” refuge from otherwise challenging, dangerous, unhealthy, or intolerable life conditions.



This Finding Does Not Mean More Prison

- ◆ Trauma Informed Justice
- ◆ Trauma Informed Health Care
- ◆ Trauma Informed Education
- ◆ Compassion From Systems Actors

Backdrop of Systemic Institutional Failures

- ◆ Lack of Stable Housing
- ◆ Lack of Personal Security
- ◆ Lack of services to manage addictions
- ◆ Lack of services to address mental health issues
- ◆ Difficulties in obtaining medical care