

Book Review

Pregnancy and New Motherhood in Prison

By Lucy Baldwin and Laura Abbott
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Lucy Baldwin is an Honorary Fellow at Durham University. Previously a Senior Lecturer and Researcher at De Montfort University for nearly 20 years, she has an extensive background in social and criminal justice having worked as both a Social Worker and a Probation Officer. Laura Abbott is a Senior Lecturer in Midwifery at The University of Hertfordshire where she researches the experience of pregnant women in prison. Together, the authors have written significantly on the experience, issues and impact of mothers before, during, and after prison.

Pregnancy and New Motherhood in Prison is the first of its kind in the UK to be published on pregnant women, new mothers and prison. It builds on a plethora of previous research, namely the authors' own research to critically explore the way in which the criminal justice system responds to pregnant women and mothers. It uses the voices of those with lived experience and the tragic losses of life to further compound the message of the book and support efforts towards change and improvement within the system.

Within the book, the authors acknowledge that the book was written at a time when policy developments have been positive, but crucially note that these changes have occurred retrospectively of tragic deaths. The authors took on the roles of activist researchers and academics to put forward 'evidence- and practice-based, and passion-driven' calls for change whilst also sharing the stories of mothers and pregnant women to have their voices heard (p. 17). This all weighs into an argument for an alternative to custody in most cases for pregnant women and new mothers. The book endeavours to expand interest in the area and challenge disinterest, ignorance and inaction with resolve, motivation and passion for change. It is well-constructed, paced, and flows comfortably whilst making an invaluable contribution to the field. As such, the book is an essential read for policy-makers, practitioners in social and criminal justice along with students and researchers of criminology and midwifery.

The sheer amount of empirical data in this book raises feelings of frustration at the lack of movement of policy, inconsistent approaches and delivery of provisions. The lived experience drawn on throughout the book is harrowing, heart-breaking, and downright shocking at times. It raises important and necessary, but frustrating, points about the nature of pregnancy and motherhood in prison and the care, or lack thereof, experienced by these women. I particularly found interesting the inclusion of the law and policy changes, as well as

research studies in the field. It is perhaps unsurprising to read that family courts consider the aspect of having dependents to a greater extent than criminal courts, but it was necessary to raise the point.

As someone with a keen interest in historical criminal justice, I found the chapter on criminalising motherhood, in particular, very interesting. It underpins the core values with which women are, and have historically been, judged and how these have persisted to present day to negatively impact pregnant women and new mothers within the criminal justice system and beyond. The starkness with which the treatment of women today is mirrored to the treatment of women and mothers in the Victorian period is deeply troubling. The fact that many mothers were, and still are, imprisoned on short sentences for non-violent offences and how similar concerns were being raised about motherhood in prison in 1919 shows consistency in the issues that continue to be raised today. This further compounds notions that the penal estate, as a whole, too closely reflects life 150 years ago.

Of particular interest was the expansion of the term 'double deviancy' in light of the intersectionality of the experiences of mothers which means they can sometimes be 'deemed triply or even quadruply deviant' (p. 95). This encompasses themes raised throughout the book around trauma and maternal trauma, which can prevent desistance, as well as the multiple ways in which women have been let down by the systems in place that should have

been there to support them. The harrowing stories of tragedy and preventable death repeatedly drawn on throughout the book raises reoccurring themes of inconsistency of care, the way mothers in prison grapple with maternal identities, stress, guilt and shame, which are also prominent in the authors' previous research.

An interesting addition was the inclusion of 'pauses of thought' throughout the book. The authors had included a set of questions carefully scattered throughout each chapter of the book which offered the reader a chance to stop and reflect on what they had just read. It enabled the reader to develop their thinking and challenge ideas and assumptions, whilst

encouraging people to continue challenging ideas of others in the way others might view certain situations.

Overall, I felt fundamentally changed after reading the book. Admittedly, female prisoners, and specifically motherhood in prison, is not an area in which I had spent much time reading and researching prior to this book. As someone who has never been pregnant before, I was very surprised by how much this book affected me. However, as a female, I felt emphatically moved by the poignant stories of mothers who had experienced the most horrific of circumstances. As such, I found that it was a much tougher read than I was expecting it to be and had to take my time with it. It

was important that this book is given the full attention it deserves. The stories of these women and their children will stay with me for a long time.

Pregnancy, New Motherhood and Prison is overflowing with a wealth of knowledge from the authors and those with lived experience evermore compound the necessity of change in this area. It was encouraging to read about all of the positive movements that have come off the back of tragedy and all of the organisations working to provide better outcomes for pregnant women in prison. The book is profoundly devastating, yet remained resilient and completely optimistic for the future. An essential read.