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THE SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE

OF

THE WOMEN'S PRISON

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View of building and outside surroundings block

INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to give a concise definition of the concept "social atmosphere", especially in the context of a prison community. Lorimer and Heads ¹ studied morale, which they defined as "a measure of the quality of the personal relationships of the prison community". This is a large component of social atmosphere but does not describe the concept completely. In addition to personal relationships, social atmosphere includes the set of perceptions of and attitudes to the physical environment: in the prison situation the physical environment comprises the location and design of prison buildings, the programme and details of daily living (food, clothing etc.).

A number of writers have studied different aspects of social atmosphere in women's prisons and their observations provide a valuable framework for discussion of the phenomenon.

Morale

Three broad areas of personal relationships apply in a prison: relationships between inmates and staff, (custodial and professional), relationships amongst inmates and relationships amongst staff. Lorimer and Heads ² suggest the following as indicators of poor staff-inmate relationships: physical attacks on staff; inmates beaten up or subject to brutality in private; go-slow policy at work by inmates; machinery constantly broken; riots and mass defiance; a high incidence of psychosomatic illness; smashing prison property; self-mutilation; constant petty annoyances by inmates; staff move less freely around the prison.

They acknowledge the difficulty and delicacy of inmate relationships in a close community: "for many, the hardest factor in prison life is living with the other women inmates." ³ Klare makes a similar comment: "a gaol for women or a borstal for girls is often a very tense place. Girls in particular find it hard to live together in large numbers" ⁴ The normal tensions of daily living are exacerbated by enforced contact with the same small group of people over a long period and absence of heterosexual contact. For these reasons some writers such as Brodsky ⁵ advocate co-educational prisons or at least the employment of male staff in certain areas (although they acknowledge the problems which could result from these arrangements).

Relationships between staff are often ignored as a significant aspect of morale in the prison community. Inmates are usually quick to detect and use jealousy or hostility between staff members to their own advantage. Lack of co-operation between professional and custodial staff will seriously hinder the smooth running of prison programmes and add to tensions. Staff shortages resulting in excessive overtime can have a particularly negative effect on both staff and staff-inmate relationships for Smith wrote "those who work in prison have a particular need for relaxation away from it" ⁶

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1. Lorimer A.E. & Heads M. The Significance of Morale in a Female Penal Institution, *Federal Probation*, Vol. 24 No. 4, 1962 p. 44.
 2. *ibid* p. 44.
 3. *ibid* p. 41.
 4. Klare H.J. *People in Prison* Pitman, London, 1973 p.58.
 5. Brodsky A.M. Planning for the female offender, *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, Vol. 4 Dec. 1974 p. 395.
 6. Smith A. *Women in Prison*, Stevens & Sons, London 1962 p. 325.

The physical environment — prison buildings

The location and size of women's prison have been the subject of much comment in the literature. Brodsky⁷ argues that "small local facilities are felt to be most adaptive as the ultimate goal is to teach the offender to live life away from the institution" (and adaptation to a large institution would hinder this process). Wheeler⁸ agrees that local community facilities should replace distant rural prisons for women in the United States: "it's important we concentrate on building newer facilities much earlier — as near as possible to the community where most of the resources are, where the women are and where the problems are. This way we can have realistic intervention on the first offence".

Within the local prison, according to Lorimer and Heads⁹, there should be living units for small groups of women with "separate cell accommodation, dining, ablution and recreational space for groups of 20 to 30 women". Smith¹⁰ has similar views, but adds that the design should be capable of adaptation to future changes in policy and treatment.

— programme

It would appear that a positive attitude towards the prison programme is essential for good social atmosphere. However, a number of prison administrators view penal programmes with frustration and disillusionment. Taylor¹¹ sees very little hope of rehabilitation through current programmes:

"The community wants us to do in six months what society hasn't done in the entire lives of these women. We're supposed to be undoing what they did to them for eighteen or nineteen or twenty-seven years. We didn't create these people. We didn't throw them out of the community either. We don't have magic pills. We didn't create their attitudes and hostilities but we became the object of them".

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7. Brodsky, op. cit. p. 395.
 8. Wheeler M. quoted in Burkhart, K.W. *Women in Prison*, Doubleday, N.Y. 1973 p. 201.
 9. Lorimer & Heads, op. cit. p. 41.
 10. Smith A. The treatment of women offenders, *British Journal of Criminology* Vol. 9, 1969 p. 398.
 11. Taylor P. quoted in Burkhart K.W. op. cit. p. 37.

Wheeler ¹² views penal programmes with cynicism, rather than despair, as a sop to social conscience instead of constructive attempts to change offenders: "because we are not entirely happy with locking people up, we begin to invent ways to add programmes to make the lock-up seem more comfortable for those who are confined and so more palatable for those who impose it".

If these comments are representative of administrative attitudes to prison programmes, then it is important to assess the effect on staff and inmate attitudes and the resultant social atmosphere.

- details of daily living

Minor aspects of daily living are seen as extremely important to people in a closed community: not only do they affect the pleasantness of institutional life, but they also have psychological implications.

Goffman ¹³ examines the effect of "graded living arrangements built around wards, administrative units called services and parole statuses" upon the self-concept of mental hospital inmates. The setting and house rules reinforce the identity of 'social deviant', he maintains, and contribute to either the building up or the destruction of the self.

Similarly the psychological effects of the details of daily living upon prisoners should not be overlooked in an analysis of a prison community.

Implications for the study

The considerations noted above led to the design of a social atmosphere study which examined the perceptions and attitudes of female prisoners towards staff and other inmates (by indirect means) and towards the physical environment of buildings, programme and details of daily living (by more direct means). An outline of the methodology is presented below.

12. Wheeler M. op. cit. p. 378.

13. Goffman E. *Asylum*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1968, p. 138.

AIM

The aim of this study was to describe the structure and functions of the Mulawa Training and Detention Centre for Women, and to analyze the inmates' perceptions of and attitudes to their environment.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects of the attitudinal study comprised 100 female offenders¹⁴ those in custody on 30th June, 1972 and those received into custody within the following two weeks. An interview schedule, administered by two female research officers, was used to gather data. Questions covered the following areas: educational, vocational and leisure programmes, health services, professional services, visiting service, general aspects of the prison routine, effects of imprisonment and future plans.

In order to view the prison programmes and policies at the Detention Centre in historical perspective, a study was made of the history of female prisons in New South Wales through primary and secondary sources up to 1969 when the Mulawa Training and Detention Centre was opened. Information relating to staffing, accommodation, programmes and regulations at the time of the study was obtained from current departmental records and observation.

14. Social and criminal characteristics of these women are described in Research Publication No. 7 "The Background of Women in Prison", New South Wales Department of Corrective Services, September 1975.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S PRISONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The Transportation Era

New South Wales began as a penal colony for female, as well as male, convicts. Anne Smith¹⁵ summarizes the early penal life of women¹⁶ in a chapter entitled "the transportation of women convicts to Australia" from which the following quotations are taken.

"Between 1787 and 1840, a succession of ships, carrying men and women sentenced to transportation, crossed the seas to Australia. In 1787, an Order in Council had appointed Australia as the destination for 184 women convicts. Fifteen of these women had originally been sentenced to be transported to America, and sixteen to Africa. During the next thirteen years, twenty-two convict ships sailed for Australia. Seven carried women alone; the others a mixed cargo of men and women. Altogether 1,560 women convicts embarked for Australia during these years; and 120 died before they reached their destination."(p.113)

Who was exempted from transportation?

In the early years of transportation only those women, convicted of felonies, who were over fifty were exempted: no exceptions were made for mothers of infants or small children. However, as a result of the efforts of Mrs. Fry, regulations which allowed women to take with them all children under the age of seven years were passed, and nursing mothers were not transported until the baby was weaned.

Life at sea and on arrival in New South Wales

Conditions on board the transport ships improved gradually over the period of transportation, but in general they were characterized by overcrowding, lack of sanitation, inadequate food and lack of medical care, as well as the natural hazards of a long sea voyage.

On arrival in New South Wales the women convicts were either engaged in government service or employed by free settlers, relieving the government of the expense of supporting them. However, Smith notes:

15. Anne Smith, *Women in Prison: A Study in Penal Methods*, London, Stevens and Sons, 1962.
16. Up to 1852.

"Since there was no control over their masters until 1835, the treatment they received varied from great kindness to extreme cruelty. At first, women servants were scarce in Australia and convicts were often employed as governesses, but this experiment was not successful. The majority of the convicts became nursemaids and household servants. Their influence over young children was, however, felt to be undesirable and many respectable settlers were unwilling to employ convict women at all. They were, therefore, employed generally by those settlers who were the most likely to exploit and ill-treat them. In 1838, it was reported that 'a considerable number of the female convicts are retained in the service of the lower description of settlers by whom it is notorious that they are not uncommonly employed as public prostitutes.'"(p.117)

The first gaol for women convicts: The Factory, Parramatta

Finally a gaol or 'barrack' for women convicts who had not found work or who were returned by employees for misconduct was built at Parramatta and became known as 'The Factory'. Since the well-behaved convicts had little difficulty in finding work, the Factory housed the less satisfactory convicts and was described by a member of the Ladies Committee in 1836 as having "few signs of kindness and understanding, no attempt at reformation and many dark and comfortless punishment cells".

Many free settlers chose their wives from the Factory, although these marriages apparently had a high failure rate since "the woman not infrequently becomes the common property of the convict servants on the establishment; and gives rise to innumerable quarrels among the men, who purchase their favours generally by petty favours upon their master" (p.119). The woman convict gained her freedom on marriage, remaining under police supervision.

The ticket of leave system and the end of transportation

When tickets of leave were introduced for male convicts, they were made available for women convicts as well: Smith asserts that the conditions under these tickets were granted were probably more flexible for the women.

During the last few years of the 1830's the number of women convicts arriving from England gradually declined, both through the recognition of its inefficiency as a deterrent or reformatory measure and through the protests of free settlers in the colony. From 1840 all convict fleets were diverted to Tasmania, the last fleet being dispatched in 1852.

Penology and female convicts: mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century

Little change in penal practices

Very little changed in penal practices for women from 1850 to the turn of the century. Women who offended against the law after transportation ceased serving their prison sentences in the 'female sections' of existing prisons for males. Some of the problems faced by prison administrators during this period are described by Neitenstein¹⁷, Comptroller General of Prisons, in 1896:

"A portion of every gaol, more or less secluded, is set apart for the reception of female prisoners, who are controlled by women officers, under the general superintendence of the male head of the establishment. At the close of 1896 there were 217 female prisoners, with 78 officers of their own sex to manage them. The majority of the women were confined in Darlinghurst, Biloela, Maitland and Bathurst, and numbered 181, with 23 officers — a proportion of 7.8 prisoners per officer; while scattered about all over the country were 36 more, with 55 officers — a proportion of 1.5 officers to one prisoner. Little useful employment can be found for these women, especially in the country prisons, where their services are principally utilized in washing and general domestic work for the gaoler and his household. This latter purpose is the principal reason for the appearance of women prisoners at some of the gaols, they having been specially transferred from the metropolis to perform general servants' duties. I cannot approve of the system which obtains of allowing gaolers to use prisoners as their servants. It cannot assist discipline, it is liable to abuse, and it is objectionable for several easily understood reasons; and it would be far better to give the officers an allowance to provide free servants."

Neitenstein: advocate for reform

Women prisoners in the larger centres were employed at needlework for the Government Stores Department, laundry work, picking oakum and the general service of the prison. Even with satisfactory employment, Neitenstein noted problems arising from the temperament of these prisoners:

"They are subject to emotional instability and to periods of great nervous depression, rendering them liable to break out in fits of ungovernable hysteria for no apparent cause, and they necessarily require much more consideration and even medical attention".¹⁸

Consequently he advocated that a 'humane and modern' prison for females be built, where different classes of female offenders (prostitutes, short sentenced women, long sentenced women etc.) could be segregated but within one concentrated and economical management. This centre for women prisoners would provide for 'health, reform, labour and supervision'.

17. Annual Report of the Comptroller General of Prisons, 1896.

18. *Ibid.*



Entrance to the State Reformatory for Women
Long Bay, 1914

The State Reformatory for Women 1909 – 1960 – A New Area

The physical environment

On the 25th August, 1909, the new women's prison of which Neitenstein wrote was opened and named the 'State Reformatory for Women'. Situated at Little Bay, the Reformatory (according to the Annual Report of that year): "consists of four large halls, A containing 60 rooms, B, C and D containing 72 rooms each. A hall contains in addition bath and lavatory conveniences on each landing, so there is ample provision for the prevention of contamination of hopeful cases by intercourse with depraved characters; the other halls are each provided with elaborate bathing accommodation.

"There are two large well-ventilated workrooms, each with complete lavatory accommodation, a special hospital for cases coming under the operation of the Prisoners' Detention Act, a large kitchen, fitted up with the most modern appliances for cooking, and the supply of steam for heating the baths and laundry.

"A specially constructed tram-car conveys the prisoners from the court right into the Institution.

"At the main entrance are most complete baths and reception rooms, where provision is made for cleansing the persons received from the courts and the supply of clean clothing to them before they are passed into the halls, where they are to remain according to classification. At the entrance there are also cooking and dining rooms for resident officers, a special room for the use of the ladies of the Council of the Prisoners' Aid Association, and visiting rooms for the inmates, a church, laundry, and general hospital, containing two large well-ventilated wards, and officers' quarters are built outside the yards near the main walls.

"The classification is complete in so far as it provides for special sleeping and exercise accommodation. Of course each inmate occupies a separate room at night and during non-working hours, where she is supplied with suitable literature and electric light."

All female prisoners convicted in the metropolitan area were sent under escort to the new reformatory.

Inebriates Institution for women – a failure

An Inebriates' Institution for women was proclaimed at the same time as the reformatory was opened. This comprised C wing of the reformatory buildings together with a garden containing about 1¼ acres of land. Treatment was based on principles of industry and self-control; the method used was a progressive marks system under which the inmate could work towards dietary and other privileges over the

twelve months of the compulsory therapy. Part of the "therapy" comprised a form of physical drill, directed by a "smart drill officer from the male staff at Darlinghurst".

However, this scheme had very little success. It is reported in the 1913 Annual Report: "The most discouraging phase of the matter is the total absence of voluntary effort on the part of those treated. In no single instance would a woman remain here if she could get away. The conditions from which it is sought to rescue them are their normal conditions, the measure taken for their welfare are regarded by them as inflictions, and their lengthened period of detention seems only to ensure their quicker and deeper downfall. The regularity with which they return, having failed to comply with the terms of the licence is surprising. The humanitarian nature of the legislation, the untiring exertions of the officers, the powerful and persistent ministrations of the chaplains and church agents, and the kindly solicitations of the visiting committee of ladies of the Prisoners' Aid Association have all been set forth in previous reports, and further reference to them here seems uncalled for, except to say that they are in no way relaxed, but the poor response accorded to their exertions seems to indicate a doubt as to whether the proper course of treatment has yet been hit upon. It may have been successful as regards a few cases in which the drink habit has received a check, but in the majority of cases the success only goes the length of keeping the streets so much the cleaner, from the absence of these people for a lengthened period."

Other reforms such as day leave for home visits were also tried, but with little ultimate effect.

Reforms for women prisoners 1910 – 1935

For the bulk of the women prisoners gradual reforms were made.

In 1911 the diet scale was liberalized (although distinctions in diet were made depending on industry and conduct) and the time spent in separate treatment was drastically reduced. Concerts and entertainments were provided by voluntary groups and a gaol newspaper called "The Compendium" was issued in 1912 to provide general news and employment information.

During the war years (1914 – 1918) women prisoners were employed at spinning wool and knitting socks for the Red Cross Society. Poultry farming and vegetable gardening also commenced.

In the 1920's and 1930's conditions for women prisoners gradually improved, although the number of receptions and the daily prison state fell sharply (see graph below). Some comments on this population trend are given in the Annual Reports: "The short sentences which most of the prisoners were serving and the resultant small daily average were responsible for an almost acute shortage of suitable labour for the domestic service of the prison. After excluding those who could not be employed, the number available for employment in the cookhouse, laundry and general cleaning services were barely sufficient to satisfy the needs of the prison" (1933). Other aspects of the female prison population are mentioned in the 1935 Annual Report: "The majority of women received into prison are over 35 years of age,

and in most instances have long histories of offences against good order . . . the majority of those received were imprisoned in default of payment of fines." Special accommodation was built for prisoners 'of more reformable character' in 1935 and "a more reasonable and self-respecting boots, stockings and clothing were supplied to the women".

1935 - 1960 - period of few changes

Very few changes in conditions for women prisoners are mentioned in the Annual Reports from the mid-1930's to 1960. During the late 1950's it was observed that the State Reformatory was the best maximum security prison in Australia and its use for a comparatively small number of female prisoners, in view of the increasing male prisoner population, was wasteful. Plans were drawn up for a new, modern and less secure prison for women, allowing the original reformatory buildings to be used to hold male prisoners.

The new Reformatory- 1960

In the 1960 Annual Report the following comments were made about the project: "This is the largest job of prison construction by prison labour ever undertaken in New South Wales. At 31st December, 1960, the work of erecting housing accommodation for about 220 prisoners with kitchen, laundry, sick bay and all ancillary buildings had reached the stage where 160 male prisoners engaged on the project were, in fact, housed in the buildings they had constructed." In 1961 it was written: "A prison for women does not normally require the degree of security that is required in a prison for men and the prison being erected is one, therefore, in which although security measures are at medium level, provision has been made for a full range of rehabilitative activities".¹⁹

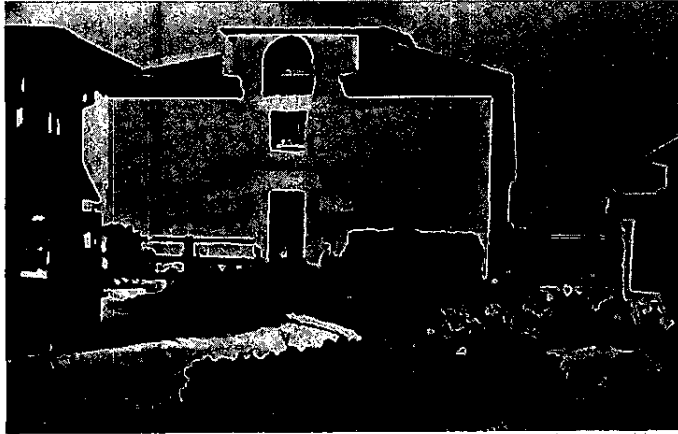
A comprehensive treatment plan

Once the new reformatory was opened in 30th November, 1962, a number of educational programmes commenced as part of a comprehensive treatment plan. In 1964 a part-time handicrafts teacher was appointed: women prisoners began to learn to produce leather goods, cushions and dolls. The following year a course in social graces commenced, comprising deportment, dress sense, speech, household management, behaviour and etiquette and skin/hair care. In 1966 for the first time, five prisoners passed the General Cooking Course of the Sydney Technical College.

This, then, represents the situation at the Women's Reformatory at the eve of the transfer to Silverwater in 1969. Naturally a broader historical perspective can be gained of the policies and programmes for female offenders in the early days of the colony than over the last fifty years.

However, the major themes emerging from the turn of the century appear to be the centralization of female prisoners in the Reformatory in 1909, the gradual replacement of the separation system with association and the addition of carefully planned educational and vocational courses to the industrial programmes as a means of rehabilitation.

19. Ibid 1961

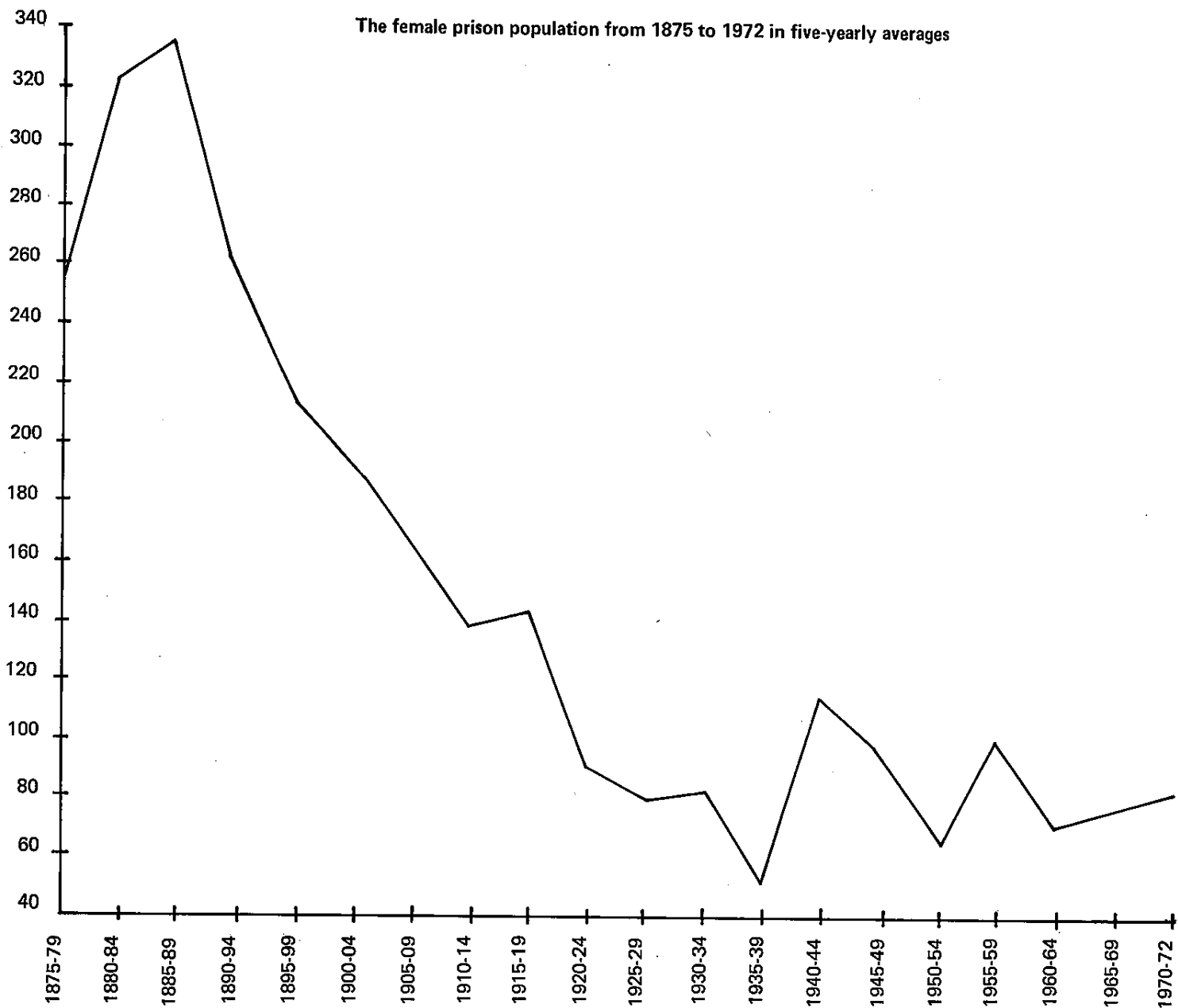


Flower garden, State Reformatory, 1914



Female prisoners employed outside the
State Reformatory walls 1914.

The female prison population from 1875 to 1972 in five-yearly averages

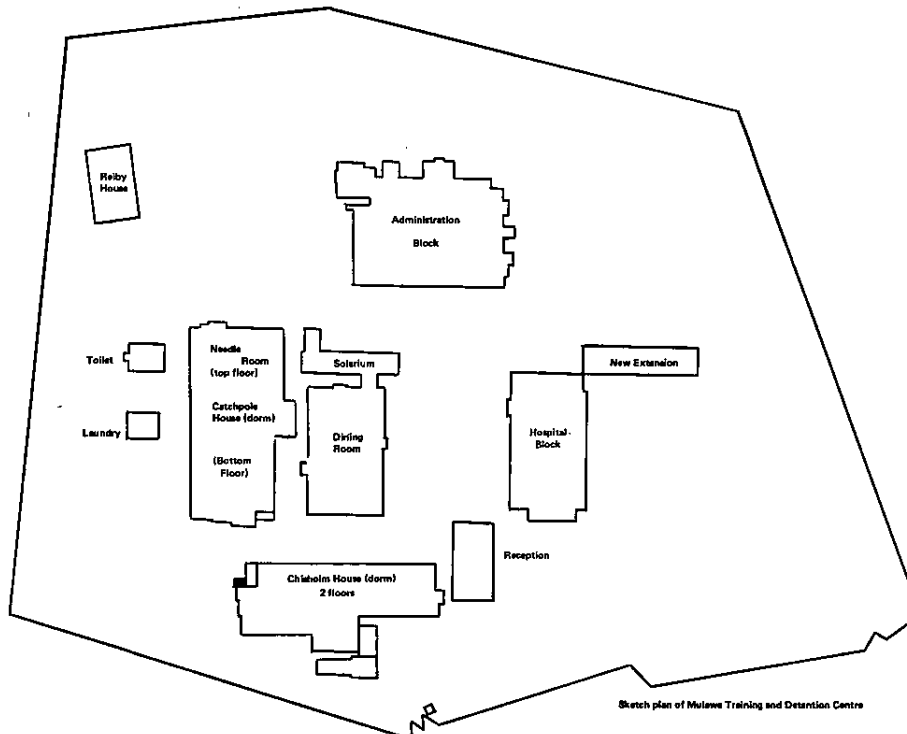


DESCRIPTION OF THE TRAINING AND DETENTION CENTRE FOR WOMEN, MULAWA

This new women's prison located at Silverwater, which is an industrial centre 15 miles west of Central Sydney, was opened on 21st November, 1969. The name 'Mulawa' is an aboriginal word meaning 'shadow'. In planning the new centre special consideration was given to "facilities for a complete training and treatment programme, based on the requirements of the individual and the need for an integrated approach to the special problems which confront a group of females in detention".²⁰

Layout

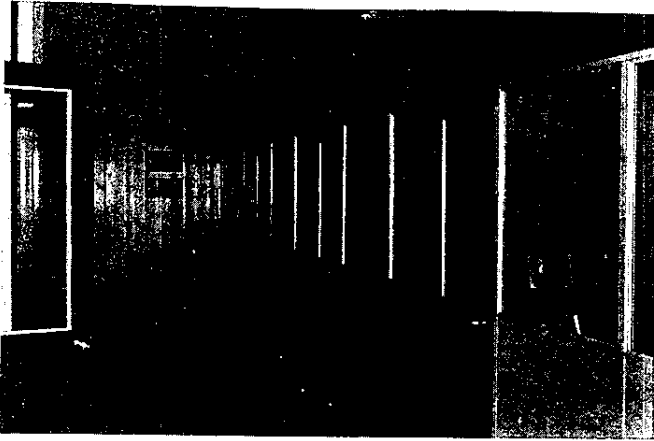
Buildings within the centre include a reception area, two double-storey accommodation blocks, servery and dining room, offices, classrooms, laundry and work areas, punishment block and clinic. Distribution of the buildings is indicated on the sketch below (not to scale).



20. Annual Report of the New South Wales Prison Department, 1969

Accommodation

One important feature is the provision of rooms, each accommodating several inmates, instead of the single cells formerly used to accommodate women prisoners. Caroline Chisholm House largely accommodates first offenders and unsentenced prisoners. It has a maximum capacity for 52 women, distributed over 6 one-bed rooms, 3 two-bed rooms and 1 four-bed room. Margaret Catchpole House, which has a capacity for 31 inmates, usually accommodates recidivist prisoners in 8 three-bed rooms and 7 single rooms. A small block named Mary Reiby House comprises 10 single cells and is used for inmates who need to be separated from other women for security reasons. The Centre as a whole can accommodate 93 women without overcrowding.



View of dormitory showing access to 2 or 3 bed units



Inside a unit decorated by inmate

Industry

In addition to work required for the general running of the prison (in cleaning, laundering and food distribution ²¹ women are employed in the garment shop and in punchcard operating. Two key-punch machines and a verifier were installed in 1970.

All sentenced prisoners are required to work and unsentenced prisoners may elect to work. A weekly payment of at least 75c is made to all prisoners employed: part of the money earned may be spent on approved items, while the remainder is given to the women on release.



Woman sewing in the garment workshop

21. Meals are prepared at the Parramatta Psychiatric Hospital and transported to the detention centre where they are heated and served.

Education

During the financial year 1970-71 an Education Officer was appointed to the Centre to supervise correspondence courses. These comprise primary and secondary school studies and business courses, including secretarial and home science studies. Remedial reading and migrant English courses are also offered.

Recreation

A number of recreational classes are held at the centre, using instructors from technical colleges, craft guilds and the New South Wales Council for the Arts. Over the 1970-71 financial year recreational courses comprised: art, copper jewellery, embroidery, first aid, dressmaking, gardening, hairdressing and hair care, home management, pottery and ceramics, skin care, lampshade making, millinery, spinning and weaving.

Counselling

Group discussions with staff and inmates, psychological assessment and counselling are provided by the psychologist.

Staff

At the time of the study there were no custodial staff shortages, with a total staff of 43. Staff comprised one superintendent, a deputy superintendent, three senior prison officers, eleven first class prison officers and twenty-seven prison officers.

Professional staff comprised a parole officer, a probation officer, medical staff, as well as newly appointed personnel: the education officer, psychologist, community service worker and prison visitor.

Reception and Assessment

On arrival at the centre women are escorted to the reception area where they bathe and change into prison clothing (personal belongings remain in the reception area until release). Women are assigned to a room in one of the houses. Shortly after reception the women are interviewed by the Reception and Assessment Committee which discusses legal queries, personal problems or questions about prison regulations, and assigns job placements. The Education Officer then discusses educational and recreational activities with the women.

Daily routine

The following routine applies to week-days.

6.00 a.m.	awakened by Watch Officer, dress, clean and tidy rooms
7.00 a.m.	muster – report for assigned work
8.00 a.m.	breakfast
8.30 a.m.	return to work
11.45 a.m.	return to recreation area in house
12.00 noon	muster
12.15 p.m.	lunch
1.20 p.m.	return to work area or allocated class
3.30 p.m.	return to recreation area
4.00 p.m.	muster
4.45 p.m.	evening meal
5.15 p.m.	return to recreation area if not attending classes
6.45 p.m.	optional retire for night
7.45 p.m.	supper for those in the recreation area
8.30 p.m.	return to sleeping area
9.00 p.m.	retire for night
10.00 p.m.	lights out



Menu

The following is a sample menu for one week at time of study. (B – breakfast, L – lunch, D – dinner).

- | | | | |
|----------|---|-----------|--|
| Saturday | B. Porridge. Sausages & tomato, gravy.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. | Wednesday | B. Cereal. Small grilled chop.
Bread, butter & honey. Tea. |
| | L. Ham, tomato, egg & lettuce salad.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. | | L. Curried sausages & rice. Orange.
Bread, butter & honey. Tea. |
| | D. Roast lamb, baked potato, cabbage.
Apricot, rice. Tea. | | D. Stew & cabbage.
Jelly, cake. Tea. |
| Sunday | B. Cereal. Powdered egg with potato.
Bread, butter & honey. Tea. | Thursday | B. Porridge. Baked beans & sausage.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. |
| | L. Rissoles, tomato, mashed potato.
Bread, butter & honey. Tea. | | L. Spaghetti bolognese.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. |
| | D. Beef, potato & cauliflower.
Pudding & custard. Tea. | | D. Lamb, baked potato, spinach.
Cake & custard. Tea. |
| Monday | B. Porridge. Mince.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. | Friday | B. Porridge. Fish.
Bread, butter & honey. Tea. |
| | L. Vegetable soup. Fishcakes, tomato,
lettuce & cucumber.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. | | L. Chop, mashed potato.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. |
| | D. Corned beef, potato & carrot.
Apricot, custard. Tea. | | D. Fish, brussel sprouts, mashed potato.
Cake, icecream & sauce. Tea. |
| Tuesday | B. Porridge. Powdered egg with tomato.
Bread, butter & peanut butter. Tea. | | |
| | L. Potato pie. Scones.
Bread, butter & jam. Tea. | | |
| | D. Lamb, cauliflower, potato.
Chocolate cake with sauce. Tea. | | |

Health Services

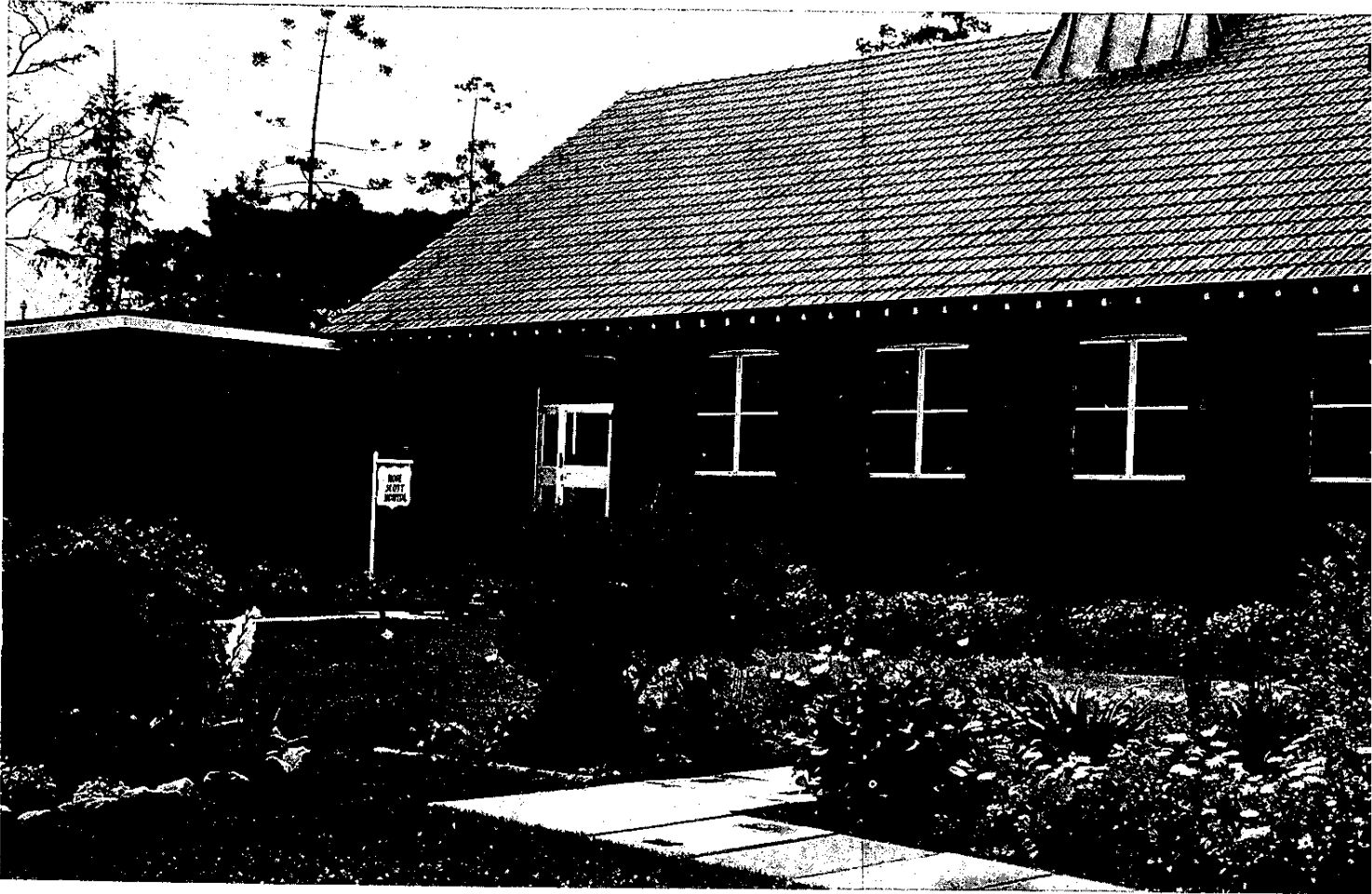
The clinic within the Detention Centre comprises two observation cells for disturbed prisoners, three clinic cells for infectious cases and five general beds. In July, 1972, three of these general beds were occupied by mothers with their babies (women are permitted to care for babies up to the age of 12 months while serving their sentence). Usually two nurses are on duty at the clinic during the day, with one nurse on duty at night and at weekends. One additional staff member is on duty when visiting medical staff (doctor, gynaecologist, dentist) attend the centre on Mondays and Thursdays.

Merit system

In April 1972, a merit system commenced, where house officers award points for appearance, behaviour, cleanliness and performance at work. When the required number of points is accumulated, the woman joins the next outing from the prison.



Accommodation for mothers with young babies at the centre's clinic



Exterior of the clinic

PERCEPTIONS OF CENTRE BY INMATES

Six areas were covered in the interviews with inmates: general evaluation of the centre, educational and recreational classes, health services, social services (provided by community services officer), outside contacts (prison visiting service), effects of imprisonment and plans for the future. Each area will be discussed in turn, with responses analyzed (where applicable) according to length of time spent at the centre on the current offence, first experience of prison and unsentenced or sentenced status.

1. General evaluation of the Centre

TABLE 1. Responses to question "What do you like best at Mulawa"

Comment category	Frequency
Don't like anything – getting sick of it	11
Neutral – don't really know	21
Everything O.K. – nothing wrong with it	30
Home atmosphere – like a boarding school – better than outside	8
Modern conditions – clean, good food	3
Friendliness of inmates – being able to mix in dorms	5
Good treatment by officers	6
Permissiveness – able to smoke, listen to music, watch films	4
Classes and work – less time to think	12
TOTAL	100

1. General evaluation of the Centre

Positive aspects

Almost one-third of the women had no positive comments to make about the centre. Of these making negative or neutral comments to the question proportionately more had been at Mulawa for over twelve months (19%, whereas these comprise only 12% of the total sample). The proportion of unsentenced prisoners and of first timers to Mulawa in this group is the same as their proportion in the sample.

Almost another third of the women could not specify a particular positive aspect; "everything was O.K." Nineteen women mentioned aspects of morale most favourable: the home atmosphere, relationships with inmates and relationships with staff. Another nineteen specified environmental factors: conditions, regulations, courses and work.

In other words, the ratio of women expressing global satisfaction with the centre: women appreciating relationships most: women appreciating conditions most, 3 : 2 : 2. Women who had been in custody for less than 1 month expressed more positive feelings about Mulawa.

TABLE 2. Responses to question "What do you like least at Mulawa"

Comment category	Frequency
Nothing/not stated	37
The daily routine ^a	19
Contact with other prisoners ^b	11
Confinement – being in prison ^c	11
Officers ^d	5
Anonymity – lack of personal contact ^e	5
Petty degradations – lack of privacy ^f	4
Dormitories ^g	4
Food and clothing ^h	4
TOTAL	100

Typical comments

- a. early rising, no cigarettes, short visits, can't watch T.V. as you like, early bed, boredom.
- b. the fighting, language, lesbianism, discrimination, same faces.
- c. forced obedience to bells, mustering, sound of keys being locked, thinking you're locked in.
- d. not educated, make trouble, give you a bad time at first, way they speak to you.
- e. loneliness, lack of personal toiletries, can't contact anyone.
- f. stripping, no dormitory curtains, no privacy.
- g. can't go to room for peace and quiet.
- h. no fruit, ill-fitting clothes, no bras or stockings, old fashioned.

Negative aspects

Over one-third of the women had no negative comments to make about Mulawa. In this 'satisfied' group, women who had been in custody for under one month were over-represented and proportionately fewer women who had been in custody for 1-12 months (medium sentence) were represented.

For another fifth of the respondents features of the daily routine were the worst aspects of imprisonment. In this group, the medium sentenced women were over-represented. Just over ten per cent found contact with other prisoners most irksome (short termers - having spent less than one month at Mulawa - over 12 months in custody - were over represented in this group) and a further eleven per cent found confinement itself most irksome (medium sentenced group over-represented). Very few complained about relationships with officers: it is difficult to know whether this indicates good staff-inmates relationships or reluctance by the women to criticize officers when the researchers (as departmental research officers) were identified with the administration.

In short, prisoners who had been in custody for less than one month were least negative in their attitude to Mulawa.

General comments

The women can be divided into approximately equal three groups: those who were completely negative in their attitude to the centre and could not commend any features of it, those who did not specify any criticisms and expressed only positive attitudes, and those who expressed both positive and negative feelings towards the centre.

In the completely negative group, long-sentenced prisoners were over-represented whereas in the completely positive group very short-termers were over-represented.

2. Educational and recreational classes

TABLE 3. Educational and recreational courses taken by women

Type of course	No. taking course ¹
Not applicable — no course taken	54
Cookery	21
Pottery	16
Typing	15
Fashion and design	14
Hair care	11
Weaving	11
Social graces	11
Cake decorating	8
Gardening	7
Drama	5
Group discussion	5
Embroidery	3
First aid	4
Other unspecified	4
TOTAL	189

TABLE 4. Number of classes/ courses taken

No. of classes	Frequency
Nil	54
1	3
2	8
3	26
4	7
5	2
TOTAL	100

1. Includes multiple enrolments.

2. Educational and recreational classes

Class attended

Almost half the women in the study were taking courses during their imprisonment, in over thirteen different subjects. On average, each woman enrolled in classes was taking three different courses.

Of the women attending classes, 94% had spent over one month at Mulawa ('medium' and 'long-termers' comprised 47% of the total sample). Only one unsentenced prisoner who had spent over one month at Mulawa was attending classes.

This illustrates one administrative problem in providing courses for women prisoners: at any time approximately half the prison population will be serving sentences that are too short to allow them to benefit from courses, and hence the same few people are given opportunities to attend a number of classes.

TABLE 5. Reason for choosing classes/courses taken

Reason	Frequency	<u>% of no. enrolled in classes</u>
Enjoyment – though I'd like it	11	23.9
Didn't choose – just sent to class	11	23.9
Self-improvement -- will be useful later	8	17.4
Always wanted to learn it	6	13.0
To help pass the time – take my mind off here	5	10.9
Other ¹ /not stated	5	10.9
TOTAL	46	100.0

TABLE 6. Perceived effect of courses on release

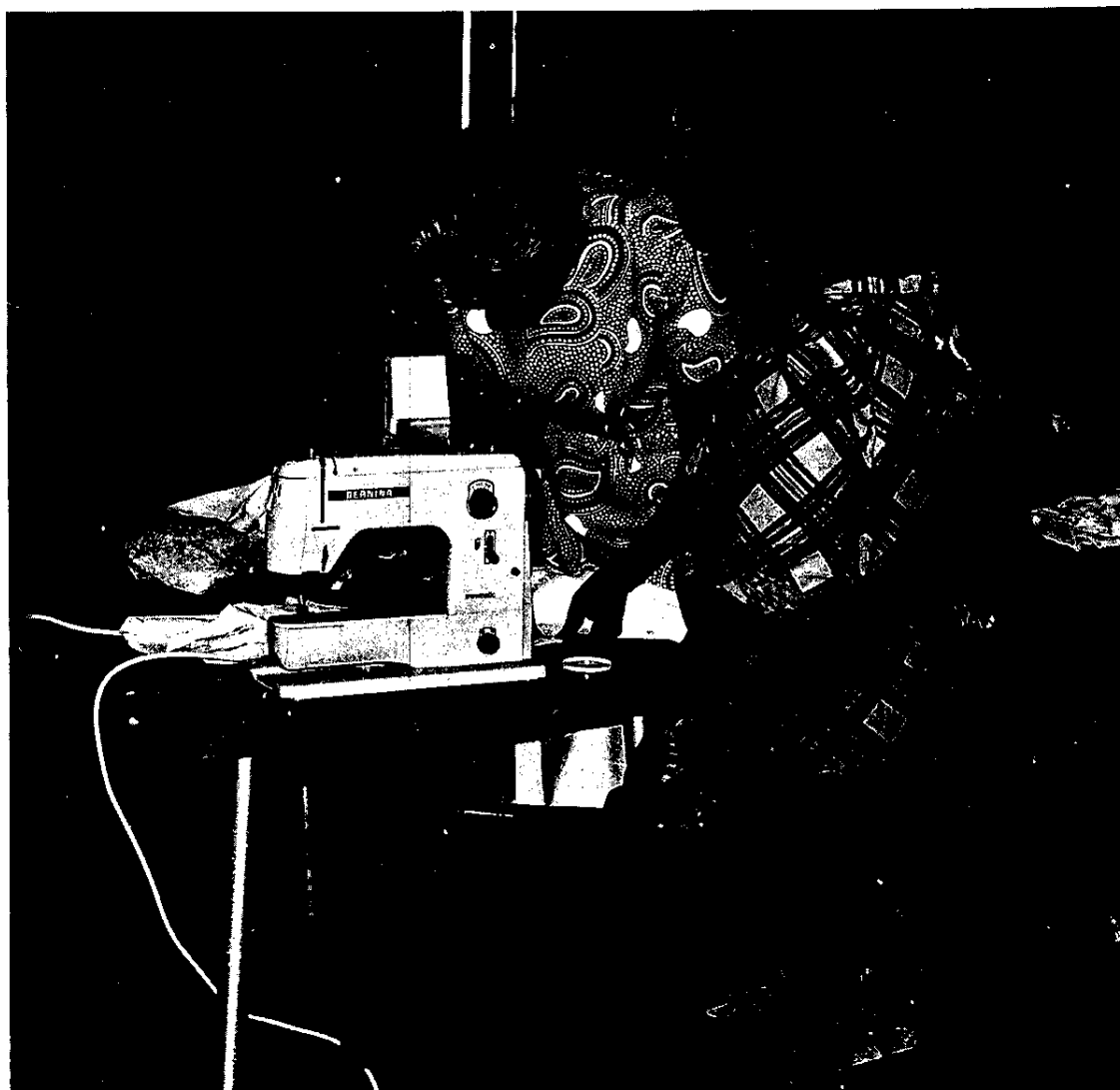
Effect on release	Frequency	<u>% of enrolments</u>
Assist in getting job (typing, motel cooking)	13	23.3
Help in the home (cooking, sewing)	12	26.1
General benefit (good to know how to do things)	9	19.5
Not much help (benefit only while here ²) -- not stated	12	26.1
TOTAL	46	100.0

1. Took cooking to get a good feed
2. One woman commented about cooking, "Maybe I'll never cook nothing like that -- plenty of cake shops nearby".

TABLE 7. Suggestions for additional courses to be held at Mulawa

Suggestion	Frequency ¹
No comment -- satisfied with classes	65
Arts and crafts painting (14), crochet (2), toy making (1), leatherwork (1), jewellery (1), millinery (1)	20
Physical activities physical culture/gymnastics (8), yoga (5), jazz ballet (2), dancing (2), basketball (1), judo (1)	19
Music instruments general (4), piano (2), guitar (2), singing (1)	9
Intellectual programmes commercial courses (4), debating (2), poetry (1), group therapy (1), general mental stimulation (1)	9
TOTAL	122

1. Multiple responses



Teacher assisting inmate in fashion and design class

Evaluation of classes

Enjoyment, desire to learn and 'filling-in time'⁽¹⁾ motivated almost half the women in choosing classes to attend. Another 17% weighed up the potential usefulness of courses offered, and almost one quarter maintained that they were just assigned to classes, irrespective of personal choice. Yet only two stated that they did not like the classes they attended.

Over half of those women who felt they had been allocated to classes perceived some potential benefit of the course on release. Some courses such as typing and cooking were seen as aids in obtaining jobs on release by 28% of those enrolled, while another 26% felt that the courses would help them in their roles of wife or mother. However, half of those attending classes specified others from the range available that they would have preferred to attend. In particular, the typing course was in strong demand.

Almost two-thirds of the women interviewed on the study were completely satisfied with the range of classes offered at the centre. The remaining 35 women suggested additional courses in arts and crafts (especially painting) in physical culture, and other physical activities, music and mentally stimulating activities such as debating.

(1) One woman commented: "If there was none, time would drag and you would really go up the wall".

3. Professional and welfare services

(a) Community Services Officer

TABLE 8. Contacts with inmates reported by Community Services Officer (C.S.O.)

Nature of contact with women in study	No. of contacts
Reception interview	3
Financial inquires – trace cheques, establish payment	7
Legal inquiries – contact solicitor, arrange bail, arrange payment of fines	9
Contact with relatives – inform them that women in gaol, arrange assistance	12
Arrange care of children	3
Accommodation arrangements	4
Employment arrangements	3
Location or storage of clothes, luggage	6
TOTAL	47

Number of distinct women assisted: 41.

3. Professional and welfare services

(a) Community Services Officer

Role

The Community Services Officer, who attends the centre on a part-time basis, provides assistance for prisoners in Mulawa and after release. She attends to immediate welfare problems such as a request for bail, contacting relatives or friends, discussing employment referrals, handling pension inquiries or transport arrangements. Assistance on release is provided by referral to the Civil Rehabilitation Committees and other voluntary bodies such as the Smith Family, Salvation Army and church organizations.

Contact with women in study

The Community Services Officer had interviewed 41 women in the study and provided assistance on 47 occasions. Most frequent areas of assistance comprised contacting relatives, making legal and financial inquiries and locating clothing and possessions for prisoners.

Women who had been in custody for less than two weeks and unsentenced prisoners were over represented amongst those who had consulted the Community Services Officer. This reflects her role of providing assistance immediately on reception.

TABLE 9. Reports by inmates of their contact with the Community Services Officer (C.S.O.)

Nature of assistance provided by C.S.O.	No. of respondents
Nil/not stated	71
Contact with relatives	7
Financial arrangements (bail, pension, maintenance cheque etc.)	4
Legal inquiries	3
Accommodation arrangements	3
Employment assistance	3
Location of clothes, possessions	4
Other ¹	5
TOTAL	100

TABLE 10. Evaluation of assistance by Community Services Officer (C.S.O.)

Comment on assistance	No. of respondents
Not applicable, did not help me	80
Provided information -- about case, relatives, children	3
Made arrangements -- medical, job, accommodation, pension, bail	11
Good to have someone to talk to ²	2
Not specified	4
TOTAL	100

1. "Listened to marital problems", "provided information about sick boy-friends", and not specified.
2. "having contact with a person who understands", "she could tell us what we wanted to know and reassure us".

Knowledge of C.S.O. role by inmates

Forty-five women said that they knew a Community Services Officer was employed by Corrective Services: thirty-five stated that they had had some contact with her. Only twenty-nine women specified the nature of the assistance provided by the Community Services Officer: assistance covered a range of areas from contact with relatives to marital counselling.

Evaluation of C.S.O. role

Progressively fewer women were prepared to answer questions about the Community Services Officer as the interview progressed: perhaps they did not want to talk about the family matters that comprised a significant proportion of matters discussed with the Community Services Officer. Moreover the women who answered this question tended to repeat the nature of contact with the Community Services Officer rather than assessing the value of her assistance.

It is possible that many women would have felt in the same way as one respondent who said "she could tell us what we wanted to know and reassure us". They probably valued her role as a means of obtaining information about matters outside the centre and found some reassurance in her practical help.

(b) Prison Visiting Service

TABLE 11. Contact with prisoner visiting service

Comment	Response		Total
	Yes	No	
Knew that a prisoner visiting service operation	39	61	100
Had received a visitor from the service	15	85	100

TABLE 12. Evaluation of prisoner visiting service

Comment	No. of respondents
Very good idea	22
O.K. but some reservations ¹	4
No comment	74
TOTAL	100

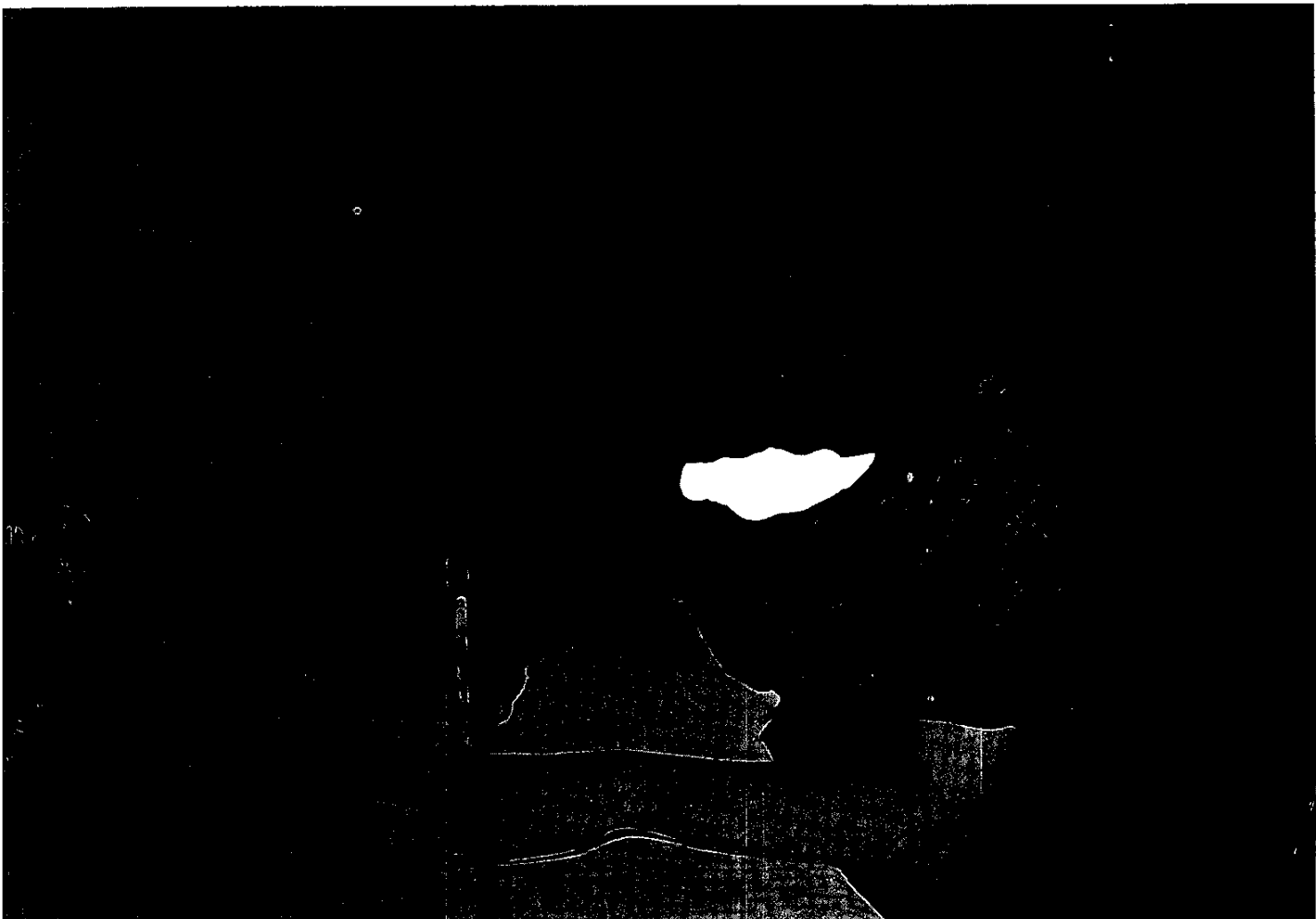
1. "good for some who don't have visits",
"O.K. but I need more than that".

(b) **Prison visiting service**

Less than 40% of the women knew that a prison visiting service existed, and only 15% stated that they had received a visit from the service. It is probable that some women had received visits without realizing the service represented by the visitor (it would have been desirable to obtain an independent listing of women visited by the service in order to check this).

All of the women who commented on the visiting service gave favourable replies, although one respondent felt that it did not meet all her visiting needs.

Most of the women who responded to these questions had been at Mulawa for over one month. It seems that the first few weeks after reception comprised a socialization period, where the woman is mainly concerned with problems outside: her family, relatives, financial and legal matters etc. Hence she relies on the Community Services Officer to provide assistance at this time. With time, the daily routine of the prison becomes her first consideration and she looks to the people who can make her prison life more varied or comfortable.



**Letter writing: an important way of keeping in touch
with the outside world**

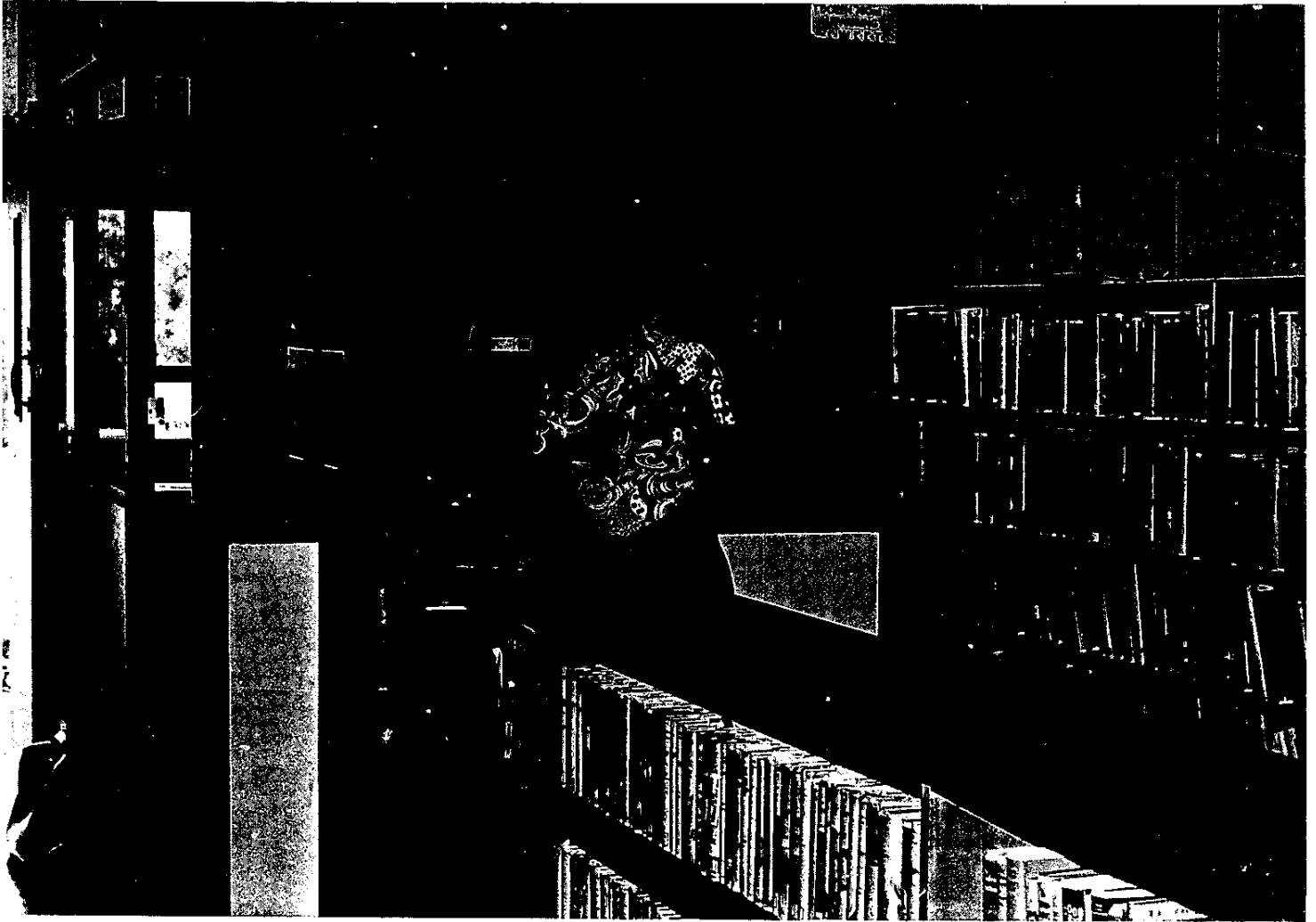
(c) Civil Rehabilitation Committees

TABLE 13. Knowledge of Civil Rehabilitation Committees

Knew about the Civil Rehabilitation Committees	Number
Yes	7
No	93
TOTAL	100

Very few of the women had heard about the Civil Rehabilitation Committees. Only one girl had been in contact with them in the past: she stated that they helped her obtain a job (canteen work) and a flat.

In part, this lack of contact with the Civil Rehabilitation Committee could reflect the short sentences given to most women, thus minimizing disruption to life outside, and also to the relative dependance of women on relatives or male friends in obtaining accommodation or jobs compared with male prisoners.



The Education Officer checks some books in the library

(d) Other professional and welfare services

TABLE 14. Contact with other professional and welfare personnel at Mulawa

Personnel contacted	No. of respondents
Nil – no other personnel seen at Mulawa	74
Psychologist	11
Parole Officer	7
Salvation Army	5
Education Officer	4
Chaplains	3
Employment Officer	1
Probation Officer	1
St. Vincent de Paul Society	1
TOTAL	107*

Almost three-quarters of the women in the study stated that they had not been in contact with any professional or welfare personnel at Mulawa (apart from the Community Services Officer who had interviewed thirty-one women from this group).

The psychologist and parole officer were most frequently contacted out of the staff employed by the department to provide professional-welfare services. However they were largely contacted by women who had been at the centre for over one month. Again this could reflect a deliberate policy by staff to concentrate only on medium and long sentence prisoners or a reluctance by the women to make contact with professional staff soon after reception.

* Includes multiple contacts by seven respondents.

4. Health Services

TABLE 15. Description by women of their current state of health

Comment	No. of respondents
Good	49
Not too good	4
Suffer from nervous tension, depression etc.	14
Respiratory problems (bronchitis, asthma etc.)	6
"Bad heart", blood pressure, blackouts	6
Joint/rheumatic complaints	3
Pregnant	2
General internal problems (kidney, stomach etc.)	9
Other health problems not clearly specified	7
TOTAL	100

TABLE 16. Reason given for poor health

Comment	No. of respondents
Worry, depression, nerves, tension	15
Poor food at Mulawa	7
Too much alcohol or drugs	3
Inadequate care at Mulawa	2
Other miscellaneous reasons	3
Not specified/not applicable	70
TOTAL	100

4. Health Services

Current state of health

Only half of the women in the study reported that their health was good. The remainder specified a range of conditions resulting in poor health: psychological complaints such as 'nervous tension' and 'depression' were most common (reported by 14% of total sample). Nine women attributed their poor health to poor food and inadequate care provided at Mulawa in their opinion.

TABLE 17. Personnel seen on attending Mulawa hospital

Personnel seen at hospital	No. of respondents
Doctor	26
Sister	22
Gynaecologist	5
Psychiatrist	4
Not specified	1
Not applicable — not attending hospital	42
TOTAL	100

TABLE 18. Nature of complaint: diagnosis made by medical personnel as reported by women

Nature of complaint	No. of respondents
Not applicable — not attending hospital	42
No clear idea of condition	22
Nerves, tension, depression	16
"Bad heart", hypertension	4
Urinary infection	3
Other miscellaneous (diabetes, kidney problem, ulcer, rheumatism, cold, pregnant)	13
TOTAL	100

TABLE 19. Nature of treatment as reported by women

Nature of treatment	No. of respondents
Not applicable — not attending hospital	42
Tablets — unspecified	19
— tranquillizers, anti-depressants	8
— sleeping tablets	5
— analgesics	4
— vitamins	3
Special prescription for chronic complaint	8
Other drops, creams, injections	6
Not specified	5
TOTAL	100

Hospital attendance

Almost 60% of women in the study reported that they were attending the hospital. Most of these were seen by the doctor and the sister. A large proportion (38%) had no clear idea of the nature of their condition. Another 28% reported that they were told their complaint was 'nervous' or predominantly tension, depression etc.

Two-thirds of the women attending the hospital stated that they were given tablets. Again; half of this group had little idea of the nature of the tablets they were taking and the remainder reported receiving tranquillizers, sleeping tablets, aspirins and vitamin tablets. Most of the women receiving treatment (72%) felt that the treatment was helping them.

General comment

These findings indicate a preoccupation with health, together with considerable vagueness about the nature of their health problems and the nature of treatment provided. It is likely that the women present psychological and psychosomatic complaints which cannot be clearly defined and treated. Moreover for many women the daily "pill parade" is another part of institutional routine or an opportunity to delay reporting for work.

5. Comparison with State Reformatory for Women, Long Bay

TABLE 20. Ways in which Mulawa compares favourably with the State Reformatory

Comment	No. of respondents*
No comment – no previous experience of State Reformatory	67
Better facilities:	29
More like a rest home; warm; better food; T.V.; cleaner; better beds and showers	
More companionship:	12
Dormitory accommodation; not locked up alone; mix more here	
More to do:	7
Classes; less work but more recreation; more opportunity to work	
More relaxed atmosphere:	9
More open; less punishment; officers gossip more	
No real change	1
Not stated	4
TOTAL	129*

TABLE 21. Ways in which Mulawa compares unfavourably with the State Reformatory

Comment	No. of respondents
No comment – no previous experience of State Reformatory	67
Mulawa is better	14
Prefer single cells to dormitory at Mulawa	10
Prefer to work at Long Bay	2
More pollution and insects at Mulawa	2
Not stated	5
TOTAL	100

* Multiple responses.

5. Comparison with the State Reformatory for Women, Long Bay

Thirty-three women had experienced imprisonment at the State Reformatory for Women before the transfer of the establishment to Silverwater in 1969. Some of these had served the first portion of their sentence at the Reformatory and continued to serve the same sentence at Mulawa: others had served one or more complete sentences in the past at the Reformatory.

Two aspects mentioned most frequently by these women in comparing Mulawa with the Long Bay Centre were the better facilities and increased companionship. It is likely that these conditions were partly responsible for the "more relaxed atmosphere" mentioned by nine of the women.

However, while twelve women viewed increased companionship favourably, ten women stated that they preferred the privacy of single cells. These differences reflect personality factors as well as differences in the sentences served at the Penitentiary and Long Bay. Other critical comments about Mulawa referred to the nature of work performed by inmates and pollution (four complaints).

Generally speaking the reaction to the move from Long Bay to Mulawa was overwhelmingly favourable.

(6) Effects of prison and plans for the future

TABLE 22. Effects of imprisonment

Effects reported by women	No. of respondents*
No effect stated	42
Positive effects	32
vows not to come back	12
greater compassion, understanding of people	7
more settled, less self-conscious and more realistic attitude	6
take fewer things for granted	3
learned self-control	3
deprivation of drugs	1
Negative effects	39
angry, harder, bitter, aggressive	13
worried, 'nervy', depressed, ashamed	16
family hardship	7
closed-in feeling	2
"learned too much"	1
TOTAL	123*

* Multiple responses

6. Effects of prison and plans for the future

Effects of prison

Over forty women stated that prison had not affected them in any way. The remaining women specified many negative and positive effects, with negative effects dominating.

In particular the women commented upon the adverse psychological effects of imprisonment generating tension, bitterness and aggression.

The major positive effect of prison appeared to be deterrence, although a number of women made comments that suggested a growth in maturity resulting from their prison experience.

TABLE 23. Future plans after sentence served

Comment	No. of respondents
Return home and take up normal life	28
Arrange job and accommodation	18
Travel — go interstate	8
Live with relatives or friends	5
Salvation army home	3
Psychiatric/hospital treatment	3
Continue prostitution	2
Further education	1
Not stated — can't think that far ahead	15
TOTAL	83*

Future plans

One-third of the sentenced prisoners planned to return home and take up their normal life again on release. Another 20% planned to arrange a job and accommodation. A large number (18%) could not formulate plans for the future.

* Sentenced prisoners only



An officer walking across the well-kept lawns

Other suggestions

TABLE 24. Suggestions volunteered by women concerning the Centre

Nature of suggestion	Frequency*
Changes in prison rules and regulations more money allowed to buy cosmetics, should be allowed shampoo, hair rollers, Sunday papers, eye makeup, more cigarettes, stronger toothbrushes, more freedom of grounds, phone calls, buying of birthday cards	31
Changes in recreation more classes, more activity at weekends, Sunday movie extended, more wool or handcraft material, record room needed, bus trips	16
Changes in physical activities more fresh air needed, morning exercises, more sport	14
Visits and information more letters allowed, more visits, more legal information, more routine information, less censorship of mail, extended visits	14
Hospital requires improvement, methadone treatment needed	16
Clothing more varied clothing needed, should allow own underwear, better fitting bras needed, lighter shoes, better fitting shoes	10
Dormitories more privacy, more single rooms	9
Food should have more fruit, more spicy food, less mushy food, a canteen	8
Classification needed Work Release plan, separate younger women from older, 1st sentence and recidivist, short and long sentences	6
Officers more screening of officers, more permanent officers, more communication with officers, less supervision in bathroom	4
Other miscellaneous more jobs to occupy girls, more time to organize affairs before reception	4
Not stated	22
TOTAL	154*

* Multiple responses.

Other suggestions

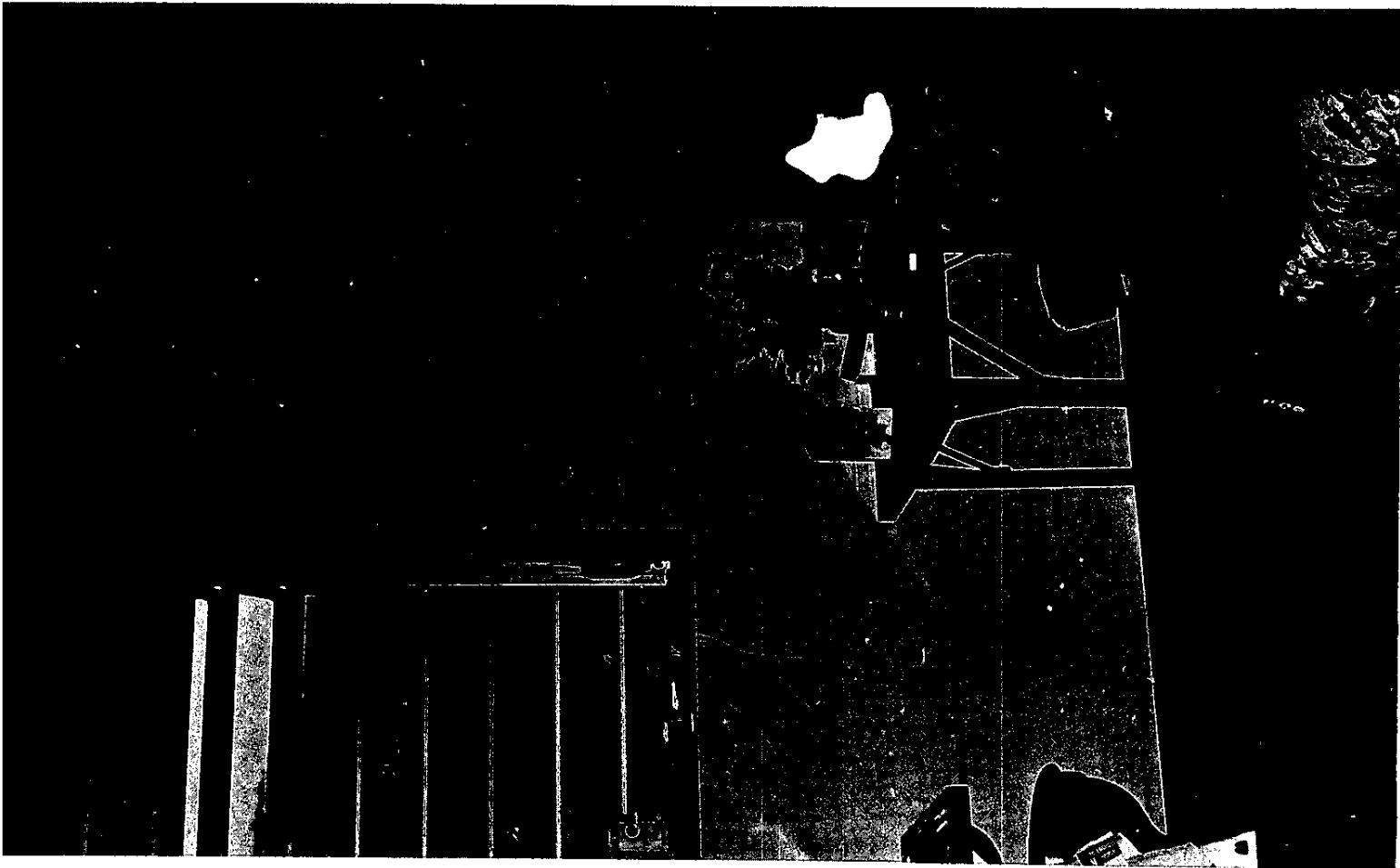
The majority of the women made a number of suggestions for improving the centre. These concerned petty prison rules and regulations (20%) changes in the hospital (10%), improvements to the physical activities and recreational programme (20%) visits and information (9%).

In other words the routine and programme aroused most dissatisfaction whereas food, clothing, accommodation and officers aroused little dissatisfaction.

Since this study was made in 1972 a number of changes were made in prison rules and routine.

These include:

- reduction in mail censorship
- extended list of goods for purchase by inmates
- introduction of "Toastmistress" activity at weekends
- addition of duplicating service to other prison work
- extension of the merit system outings
- introduction of pilot "Project Survival for Women" activities
- special hostess courses for women prisoners and officers conducted at North Sydney Technical College.



DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGY

1. General issues of correctional research: bias, access

The first problem to be faced by departmental researchers engaged in correctional research is to assess the effect of their presence and questions on the respondents, in order to avoid undue bias. Usually prisoners are suspicious of researchers (particularly those who come in to the prison for a few days, ask questions and are not seen again) and give as little information as possible unless they see a personal advantage in "opening up". Often departmental researchers are confused with parole officers, and again prisoners hesitate to talk for fear of negatively affecting their parole.

An attempt was made to overcome these problems in two ways: firstly by living in special quarters within the prison complex for the duration of the two weeks' study in order to become familiar to prisoners, and secondly by clearly explaining the nature of the research and the status of the researchers (to avoid identification with parole officers). In this study it was felt that the critical response to some of the questions directed to the women prisoners indicated that the problem of reticence has largely been overcome.

Living-in at the gaol solved a further problem: that of access to prisoners. Usually it is only convenient to interview prisoners during their hours of work, to avoid disruption of prison routine. This reduces to about 3½ hours daily after musters, sick parades and so on are considered. Further interviews for the study were conducted from 5.15 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. in the dormitories, thus significantly increasing private interview times each day. However, the lack of suitable rooms for day and evening interviewing was a further problem for which no satisfactory solution was found.

2. Duration of study

This study examined the social atmosphere of a woman's prison at one particular time: women were interviewed once only during a two weeks' period. Other studies have used a longitudinal approach to measure social atmosphere. For example, the Varnier study²², examined the social climate of a women's prison using weekly and five-weekly measures over 27 months. This study provides a dynamic approach to social climate and effectively demonstrates social change within the centre. However, it is extremely time consuming to perform such analyses and standardised questionnaires or ratings must be devised. Since our project was more of an exploratory study in qualitative terms with wider objectives, a shorter, less intensive strategy was used.

22. The Varnier Centre for Women Research Report No. 1: An examination of the social milieu, Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services, 1974.

3. The interview schedule

The interview schedule was designed as an interview guide, rather than an ordered, exhaustive listing of detailed questions. A very open guide results in problems of uniformity and comparability when analyzing replies, but has the advantage of capturing spontaneous responses to sensitive areas of inquiry. It is particularly suited to pilot studies such as ours.

Some areas of the interview schedule did not tap issues of concern to the women, and produced rather barren replies. The most fruitful questions appeared to be the most open questions, such as "what are some of the things you like least about Mulawa?"

4. Verification of responses

In some cases an attempt was made to verify inmate statements by independent information from professional or welfare staff (e.g. Community Services Officer). This procedure considerably lengthens the time required to complete the data collection, but provides more valid information. If prisoner statements are used as a basis for further objective inquiry, care must be taken to maintain confidentiality.

5. Omissions

Two areas which directly influence social atmosphere were not studied in this project: staff relationships and inmate relationships. The inquiry, in fact, focussed on inmate perceptions of their environment, rather than encompassing an independent study of inmates' social environment.

(a) Staff relationships

This is a very difficult area to study in the prison situation, particularly if viewed from the perspective of inmates. Staff resent being rated by prisoners, and it is important for research worker/prison officer relationships not to appear to be siding with prisoners against officers. One solution, used in a research study of Cessnock Corrective Centre²³ is to interview staff, using an open schedule, before commencing interviews with prisoners.

(b) Inmate relationships

Inmates were not questioned about their relationships with other prisoners. Some indications emerged from responses to other questions, but in order to analyze the relationships fully, a questionnaire or sociogram technique would have been required. This method is used successfully in the Project Survival Research²⁴ where inmates are asked to list names of men with whom they associate most frequently and the area of contact: from this data a sociogram is compiled.

23. Staff Survey Cessnock Corrective Centre 1974. Stage 1.

24. The First Twelve Months of Project Survival, New South Wales Department of Corrective Services, 1974.

6. Future research

It is suggested that future research into the social climate of the women's prison should include a study of staff and inmate relationships. The record data should be extended to include indices of inmate and staff unrest such as frequency of inmate punishments, escapes, staff industrial disputes and sick leave incidence²⁵ The area of inmate behaviour, in particular, could be studied through staff ratings of "troublemakers", inmate observations or categorizations of these women and objective counts of formal punishments. It is felt that the combination of subjective evaluations from a number of sources together with objective criteria would produce a more balanced and meaningful research study.

25. These measures are now being used with other corrective establishments as indicators of unrest or potential disturbance.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. General evaluation

Respondents can be divided into three approximately equal groups:

- A. very negative comments (long sentenced inmates over-represented)
- B. some negative, some positive comments
- C. very positive comments (short termers over-represented)

In general, the women were not strongly critical of the detention centre. It could be argued that this indicates an effort to please researchers associated with the department. However, in other research studies²⁶ it has been found that if there is real dissent or perceived grievances, prisoners want Head Office to know about it, and give very frank replies. Thus it is felt that the general evaluation indicates, for most women, the absence of strong feelings against the prison environment.

2. Education and recreation

Major findings are:

- 1. almost half the women enrolled in educational courses, mainly medium and long termers (sentence more than 1 month).
- 2. very favourable response – benefits of enjoyment, learning useful skills, filling in time.
- 3. high demand for vocational courses.

These findings suggest that whether or not these courses assist the rehabilitation of inmates on release, they are very satisfying to the women during their imprisonment.

26. Project survival research, work release research. New South Wales Department of Corrective Services.

3. Professional and welfare services

A number of findings emerged.

A. Community Services Officer (C.S.O.)

1. almost half the women knew that the C.S.O. was employed at the prison.
2. the 41 women who had contact with her appreciated her assistance in:
 - contacting relatives
 - making legal and financial inquiries
 - locating clothing and possession for them

B. Visiting Services

1. less than 40% of the women knew the service existed.
2. only 15 stated that they had received a visit from that service.
3. those who commented (26%) gave a favourable evaluation.

C. Civil Rehabilitation Committee (C.R.C.)

Over 90% had not heard about the C.R.C.

D. Other professional staff

Almost three-quarters of the women said they had not been in contact with any professional or welfare staff apart from the C.S.O.

These responses suggest that a large proportion of the women did not know about the provision of professional or welfare services available to them in prison. Since the study was completed attempts have been made to fulfil this need by the printing of the "Mulawa Handbook" which is available to all prisoners on reception. The role of professional welfare staff is explained and procedures for obtaining an interview with specialist staff are set out.

It would be a valuable exercise to conduct a brief study of "knowledge of professional and welfare staff and specialist staff contacts by women prisoners" since the handbook was issued.

4. Health

1. approximately half the women said their health was not good.
2. almost 60% said they were currently attending the centre's hospital.
3. most of these women were extremely vague about the nature of their health problem and the nature of treatment.

A major problem in commenting on these findings is the absence of norms with which to compare the women prisoners. It is possible only to raise the following questions: are women prisoners more prone to ill-health than the general population? Do they require treatment to a greater extent than the general lack of knowledge about health and treatment reflect the situation in the population at large?

Alternatively, it is possible that the confinement and routine of institutional life may encourage an increased preoccupation with one's health, or that the prison experience may contribute to the psychological ill-health of inmates. However, without further normative research it is impossible to test these hypotheses.

5. Comparison with the State Reformatory

Comments made by 33 women who had been imprisoned at the State Reformatory prior to the opening of Mulawa indicated

1. the reaction to the move was generally favourable.
2. the women preferred better facilities and increased companionship.
3. some women were critical of the dormitory accommodation (most of these tended to be older women, aged over 40 years).

6. Effects of prison and plans for the future

1. similar proportions of negative and positive effects of prison were perceived by the women.
2. negative aspects comprised psychological effects.
3. positive aspects comprised prison as deterrence and contributing to maturity.
4. of those who formulated plans for the future most hoped to return home and arrange for a job or accommodation.

In analyzing the effects of imprisonment it is difficult to differentiate between the processes of conviction, sentencing and the actual prison experience. Many women who reported negative psychological effects – anger, bitterness, aggression – could have been reacting with resentment at being caught or punished for their offence, rather than at the nature of the punishment. However, it is equally possible that the positive comments – deterrence, maturity – could spring from the halo effect rather than the operation of real deterrence or real rehabilitation.

7. Other suggestions

Most suggestions made by the women related to the daily routine and prison programme.

In other questions most women commented favourably on the prison surroundings and the educational/recreational classes. It appears that the minor details of the daily routine provide the major source of dissatisfaction amongst women prisoners. From the diversity of suggestions, it appears that there is no single source of complaint. This seems to reflect a general satisfaction with the status quo, coupled with a need to have something to complain about. Repeated measures of sources of minor dissatisfaction would be required to test this hypothesis.

Alternatively, these results could indicate numerous sources of petty grievances, minor irritations that are magnified under the stress of confinement, which become important to different prisoners at different stages of their sentence. Again, further in-depth research would be required to test this hypothesis.

In conclusion, it is felt that similar broad studies of social atmosphere can provide valuable feedback to administrators concerning the perceptions of inmates to their prison environments. When coupled with repeated in-depth studies on different aspects of the social climate, and regular, objective measures of dissatisfaction through the use of indicators noted above, an increasingly sensitive monitoring of the prison atmosphere can be achieved. While a positive social climate is not the only goal of prison administrators, it is of considerable importance in the smooth running of correctional establishments and in the ultimate achievement of correctional objectives.

