

how to deal with the day to day issues in the workplace, such as the importance of quality, taking responsibility, and getting along with supervisors and peers.

Now that students have learned the issues that face women convicted of a crime and have considered the potential for alternatives to incarceration, it is time to struggle with the challenging question of whether women should face justice for their crimes just as men do. Consider this issue in the "You Make the Decision" box.

## You Make the Decision...

### ► Should Women Go to Prison Just Like Men?

In 1925 women represented only 3.7 percent of the national prison population, but in the 1980s this percentage began to climb. By 1990, it had increased to 5.7 percent, and by January 1, 2001, 6.6 percent of the 1,372,131 prisoners in state and federal prisons were women. Historically, judges gave female offenders a break by often granting them probation instead of incarceration, thinking that they were not a risk to society and most of their crimes were as accomplices to men. With the war on drugs, the imposition of mandatory prison sentences, and the use of sentencing guidelines, women now go to prison just as frequently as men. However, the average sentence served by women is considerably less than that served by men (in 2001, men in prison were serving an average sentence of 5.22 years, while women in prison were serving an average of 3.63 years).

Women face different issues than men do when they go to prison. Eighty percent of incarcerated women are mothers, one-fourth of the women who enter prison are either pregnant or have given birth within the past twelve months, and 65 percent of women held in state prisons have children under age 18. About two-thirds of these women (compared

to 44 percent of male inmates) lived with their young children before entering prison. More female inmates have a link between their criminality and substance abuse than male inmates. Approximately one-third of women inmates committed the offense that brought them to prison to obtain money to support their need for drugs.

It can be argued that female offenders are not as dangerous or as serious a risk as their male counterparts. In terms of recidivism, rates for female offenders are high, yet thought to be less than recidivism rates for comparable male offenders. They are less likely to be involved in violent crimes, and the consequences of male violence are more serious for the victim. This increase in women in prison, the collateral consequences faced by women, and the fact that they are less dangerous to society urges the reconsideration of the "one size fits all" sentencing approach. A question of policy is whether judges should have more discretion to consider these factors and sentence women offenders to community alternatives when they believe that such sanctions are in the public interest. Consider all these issues and decide whether women should be sentenced differently than men.