

# Conducting Research with Women Prisoners

- Catherine I Fogel,  
PhD, RNC, FAAN
- Professor
- University of North  
Carolina School of  
Nursing





## Who are women prisoners?

Poor, undereducated, unskilled with sporadic employment histories

Disproportionately women of color

Childbearing age, mothers of children (85%)

# Who are women prisoners?

- High rates of STIs;
- Substance abusers-drug involvement
- Experienced abuse—physical, emotional, sexual (~75%)
- Depression, PTSD, anxiety
- Chronically chaotic lives



# History of Prison Research

- Lack of research on women prisoners and HIV
- Many abuses in early prison research in US
- Early recommendation: Discontinue all prison research
- Present: explicit federal regulations for research involvement of prisoners

# Securing IRB Approval

- Multiple gateways & potential obstacles
- Educating the IRB members
- Patience and persistence



# Navigating Diverse Cultures

- Funding sponsor, University IRB, Department of Corrections, the prison, and the culture of women prisoners
- Know your Department of Corrections
- Establish relationships with Research & Development Department
- Keep the Warden/Superintendent informed





# Access to Prison Setting

- Access to prison setting—exercise in persistence & patience
  - Complex bureaucracy
  - Suspicion from administrators and correctional officers
  - Clearance by NC DOC
  - Sign in, memos, searches

# Subject Recruitment

- Access to prison:  
Guest in their house
- Access to the  
women
  - Contact person
  - Officers
  - Calling & waiting
  - Passes, lock-downs
- Inmate trust





# Confidentiality

- Informed Consent
- Certificate of Confidentiality
- Coercion potential



# Trust and Relationships

- Respect, acceptance, concern for individual
- What to expect



# Institutional Barriers

- Rules and policies of DOC and individual prison
- Rules, routines, schedules



