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Extending borders of knowledge: gendered pathways to prison in Thailand for international cross border drug trafficking

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Few researchers have concerned themselves with qualitative gender-comparative studies of women's and men's prison trajectories – particularly appraisals relating to international cross border drug trafficking (ICBDT). Using life history interviews with prisoners incarcerated in three regions of Thailand, we describe, examine and compare the features of women's and men's pathways to prison for ICBDT. Overall, the findings point to both similarities and divergences in experiences by gender. Three pathways to prison emerged for both women and men: (1) 'deviant' lifestyle, (2) economic familial provisioning and (3) inexperience and deception. However, gendered variance was found within these pathways; an additional woman-only trajectory, the romantic susceptibility pathway, was also identified.

Keywords: international cross border drug trafficking; ICBDT; drug couriers; drug mules; gender; Thailand; Southeast Asia; feminist pathways.

Introduction

The 'war on drugs' (global and domestic) and its associated prohibitionist policies and harsh punishments for drug-related crime have contributed greatly to the growth in women's incarceration numbers around the world (Inter-American Commission of Women, 2014; Penal Reform International, 2016). For example, since the war on drugs began, female prison populations have evidenced a steady increase in the number of women incarcerated for international cross border drug trafficking (ICBDT; see Fleetwood, 2014; Kensy et al., 2012; Unlu & Ekici, 2012). Although most people arrested for ICBDT are men, women comprise a significant minority (Banks, 2011; Barnoux & Wood, 2013; Fleetwood, 2014; Penal Reform International, 2016). It is estimated that women represent around 20% of the drug traffickers arrested worldwide (Fleetwood & Haas, 2011).

In Thailand, the government has taken a particularly punitive approach to illicit drugs (particularly methamphetamine) since the 1990s. This culminated in an official drug 'war' being declared in February 2003. The Thai government's objective was to reduce both use and availability. The chosen method was strict law enforcement and harsh sentencing regimes. Drug offenders of 'whatever nature' were 'indiscriminately imprisoned' (Junlakan et al., 2013). Furthermore, over a three-month period in early 2003, the drug war escalated with the extrajudicial killings of over 2000 suspected drug dealers and traffickers

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(Cohen, 2014; Jeffries, 2014; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2016; Junlakan et al., 2013).

Unsurprisingly, given this hard-line approach to illicit drugs, Thailand's prison population has risen steeply since the early 1990s and drug offenders are significantly overrepresented. Furthermore, the drug war has disproportionately impacted women; although data specific to the number of women incarcerated in Thailand for ICBDT are unavailable, we do know that – compared to men – drug offenders constitute a higher percentage of the female prison population (Jeffries, 2014; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2016). For example, Jeffries and Chuenurah's (2016) study of imprisonment trends in Thailand from 2003 to 2013 found that, compared to men, far higher proportions of the female sentenced prison population were incarcerated for a drug offence over the period (72 to 89% compared to 45 to 65%).

In 2009 the United Nations (UN) advocated for international collaboration to address women's involvement in ICBDT (Fleetwood & Haas, 2011), yet there is a relative paucity of studies exploring the potential gendered conditions occasioning imprisonment for these offences. Currently, ICBDT research is ordinarily focused on quantitatively charting international drug markets and organised transitional criminal networks, and there is no consideration of women as drug traffickers or the gendered nature of ICBDT (e.g. Bright et al., 2019; Chin & Zang, 2015; Reid et al., 2006; Wood, 2017). Research exploring ICBDT as a conceivably gendered happening is scant – and of the studies published, most have focused exclusively on women (Fleetwood, 2014; Fleetwood et al., 2015).

The results from this limited body of work suggest that women who participate in ICBDT are often first-time offenders with negligible links to organised crime, and that their role is characterised by a lack of control; namely, women are often unaware of what they are carrying and are subjugated to various degrees (Fleetwood & Haas, 2011). Women living with vulnerabilities are frequently targeted and groomed by recruiters (commonly men), and remuneration is minimal while the risks of apprehension and incarceration are high (Kensy et al., 2012). Women drug couriers are invariably under-educated, impoverished and primarily responsible for familial economic provisioning. Gendered vulnerability – including the feminisation of poverty[1] – and the confines of familial caregiving restrict women's choices, impelling them into ICBDT. Other typical susceptibilities include extensive victimisation histories, associated trauma and general life chaos, all of which increase women's vulnerability to being exploited by recruiters (Bailey, 2013; Fleetwood, 2014; Sudbury, 2005).

Some women's participation in ICBDT is linked to experiences of abuse, violence, threats, coercion, manipulation and deception, including unknowingly transporting drugs and being used as a decoy (Fleetwood, 2014; Fleetwood et al., 2015; Kensy et al., 2012; Unlu & Ekici, 2012).[2] Subsequently, it has been argued that women drug couriers are in fact victims of human trafficking because many are moved across international borders under circumstances of force, threat, coercion, fraud and/or deception for exploitative purposes (Fleetwood, 2014). Despite this, the global use of rationalised sentencing models (e.g. legislated mandatory minimum imprisonment terms) that assume individual choice and responsibility while minimising the significance of social inequality and vulnerability ensure that harsh penalties are applied, regardless of culpability, mitigating circumstances or the collateral damage caused by incarceration (Fleetwood et al., 2015; Fleetwood & Haas, 2011; Kensy et al., 2012).

Prior research in this field has argued that women ICBDT offenders often present as victims of happenstance who are unduly and unfairly punished. Men on the other hand are construed as rational actors; the 'real' players/criminals in the international drug trade (Fleetwood, 2014). However, a lack of research

on men's ICBDT participation makes it difficult to unpack the extent to which these crimes are in fact gendered. Furthermore, understanding both men's and women's ICBDT experiences may prove useful in challenging notions about trafficking that legitimate harsh punishments for men as well as women.

This article reports findings from in-depth life history interviews with women and men imprisoned in Thailand for ICBDT. Utilising a feminist pathways approach, we explored and mapped these women's and men's narratives of their imprisonment journeys. Our aim is to contribute to the development of a gendered understanding of the ICBDT experience. The paper begins with a discussion of the extant literature. We then explain our methodological approach, present our findings and position the research results within the broader subject field. Finally, we discuss the limitations of our study and provide directions for further research.

Literature review

Two bodies of literature informed this research: (1) prior studies on the gendered nature of ICBDT and (2) the feminist pathways to crime framework. We review both below. What will be shown is that studies specifically focused on the gendered features of ICBDT are restricted in number, scope and breadth. To date, attention has chiefly centred on women imprisoned for ICBDT in Europe or the Americas. The primary aims have been to understand: (1) the impact of the global drug war on women, (2) the part women play in the international drug market, (3) women's immediate offending motivations, (4) women's agency in offending and (5) women's experiences within foreign systems of criminal justice. Each study we reviewed below took a broadly feminist approach and provided instrumental knowledge about an understudied and especially marginalised group of women. However, none specifically applied a feminist pathways perspective, and only one attempted to compare the ICBDT narratives of women and men (Bailey, 2013; Dorado, 1998, cited in Díaz-Cotto, 2005; Fleetwood, 2014; Sudbury, 2005).

In contrast to the existing ICBDT research, feminist pathways scholars look further than the expressed motivations, characteristics and experiences of offending. Pathways scholarship maps the life histories of women (and less frequently of men) to determine their criminalisation trajectories. By addressing the unique combination of frequently interconnected and interrelated life experiences (over childhood to adulthood), pathways scholarship has generated a more nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of criminalisation (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014).

Feminist pathways researchers maintain that women's offending is largely survival based and bound to an assemblage of interconnected factors. These include victimisation and trauma, disordered family lives, other adverse life experiences, 'deviant' friendships, addiction (and other mental health problems), male influence and control, limited education, poverty and familial caretaking responsibilities (Owen et al., 2017).

Although men's pathways to prison are characterised by many of the same factors, women experience these aspects differently to, and perhaps more acutely than, men. For example, while victimisation and associated trauma are linked to both women's and men's imprisonment, incarcerated women tend to be victimised earlier in their lives, in multiple ways (e.g. child abuse and domestic violence) and more frequently. As a result, victimisation appears to be an experience that carries more weight in shaping women's pathways to prison (Owen et al., 2017).

Additionally, gendered norms result in a greater emphasis on social bonding and relationship-building for women, and these are implicated in their offending. These bonds are exacerbated in societies with matrifocal kinship systems[3] such as in Thailand, where cultural expectations are placed on women to meet extended familial needs. To uphold

familial obligations, matrifocality in Thailand requires women to undertake daughterly responsibilities. Dutiful daughters take care of their parents and other members of their extended family, including the provision of financial support (Angeles & Sunanta, 2009). Imprisoned women are generally undereducated, which results in poor employment prospects, increasing the chances of economic marginalisation. Poverty plays a key role in many women's pathways into crime, intersects with familial economic provisioning and is exacerbated in cultural contexts where women's financial familial responsibilities expand beyond the nuclear family (Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis, 2019).

The above themes are demonstrated in our review of the pertinent feminist pathways studies discussed in detail below. However, as will be seen, gender-comparative work in this area is limited.

Gender and ICBDT

Dorado's (1998) research (cited in Díaz-Cotto, 2005) investigated the factors that had led to the imprisonment of Colombian women in Europe for ICBDT. The results revealed that these women were frequently undereducated, impoverished and responsible for familial economic provisioning. Poverty and financial responsibility to families occasioned the women to make a choice, albeit constrained, to traffic drugs for money. Others were deceived into ICBDT by friends and acquaintances or by men with whom they were romantically connected. Some were coerced into offending by threats to the lives of their children and other family members. The women were frequently unaware of the type, amount and value of the drugs they were carrying.

Sudbury (2005) interviewed female ICBDT offenders in the United Kingdom (UK). Most were first-time offenders serving lengthy sentences. Women gave three explanations for their predicament. Some had been duped into ICBDT by friends or romantic partners (always men). Others narrated being coerced or intimidated into ICBDT via threats of violence against them, their children or other family members made by male drug dealers or members of organised criminal groups. Most women nevertheless acknowledged choosing to traffic drugs for the money, but their agency was executed within a constrained context, i.e. poverty. None of the women knew about the international drug trade. Their only contact was via an intermediary (always a man) who approached them and supplied them with the package and instructions. Rather than being a partnership, women's relationships with these male traffickers and recruiters were found to be exploitative. Sudbury (2005) concluded that even when agreeing to traffic drugs, the women were exploited, poorly remunerated and ultimately disposable workers in the global drug industry.

Research on women imprisoned for ICBDT in Barbados has identified poverty as the primary antecedent in the offending (Bailey, 2013). Some women had also experienced family violence (in childhood and/or adulthood) and this trauma had led them into crime. In some cases, women revealed that their romantic entanglements had been the precursor to offending. Here, women either unknowingly transported drugs because they were tricked by their romantic partners (always men) or chose to traffic drugs to gain favour from the men they loved. One participant however revealed that her participation in ICBDT was motivated by greed and the thrill and power of offending.

Fleetwood (2014) critically reflects on the tendency of popular – and some academic – discourse to construct women drug couriers as victims devoid of agency. Drawing on extensive ethnographic research and interviews with drug traffickers, Fleetwood explored the lived experiences of women imprisoned for ICBDT in Ecuador. While women were the focus, Fleetwood also interviewed a small number of men. She found that some women and men recounted being coerced or threatened into carrying drugs. Some also described carrying

drugs planted in their luggage without their knowledge. However, these narratives were atypical.

The most common stories told by women centred around the choice to traffic drugs for love or money. Women couriered drugs for romantic partners and/or to financially support children and other family members, often in the face of poverty. Rather than being compelled, the women often felt duty-bound by their gendered responsibilities and roles as girlfriends/wives/lovers, mothers and/or familial caregivers. Thus, women expressed agency within the confines of their gendered social realities. In contrast, men more frequently offered narratives based on individualistic desires. Finally, the ICBDT role tended to be characterised by a lack of control over one's labour, regardless of gender. Fleetwood (2014, p. 159) notes: 'even apparently willing mules were in fact labouring within extremely constrained circumstances. In this sense, women and men's participation was remarkedly similar'.

Feminist pathways

Moving on to consider the feminist pathways literature, Daly's (1994) research was the first attempt made by feminist scholars to comparatively explore women's and men's pathways into the criminal justice system. Daly examined convicted offenders' life stories, from which she constructed a typology of five pathways for women:

1. *Harmed and harming women:* Had suffered neglect and/or abuse as children. By adolescence they had substance misuse problems. The harm experienced growing up manifested in harming others and resulted in convictions for crimes of interpersonal violence.
2. *Street women*: Were either pushed out of or ran away from abusive homes or were drawn to the excitement of street life. Here they got involved in petty hustles, became drug addicted and engaged in criminal activities that supported their drug habit and general survival. Criminal histories were lengthy, with offending behaviours related to life on the streets.
3. *Battered women*: Experienced abuse later in life within intimate relationships. All of these women were in relationships with domestically violent men, and their offending was directly related to these relationships.
4. *Drug connected women*: Were engaged in drug offending attributable to the men in their lives (boyfriends, husbands, family members).
5. *Other (or economically motivated)*: Criminality was related to immediate economic circumstance or greed.

The women's pathways identified by Daly (1994) were not a 'good fit' for the men. Although finding a gender overlap in some categories (i.e. harmed and harming men, drug connected men and street men), an additional male-only pathway – the 'costs and excesses of masculinity' – accounted for close to two fifths of the men (p. 68). Men on this pathway were sub-classified as: (1) 'explosively violent men' (who used violence to control and dominate others), (2) 'bad luck men' (who were in the wrong place at the wrong time and often harassed by other men) or (3) 'masculine gaming men' (crime as recreation, a means to attain social rewards and demonstrate masculine prowess).

Daly's (1994) framework has been reassessed and further developed by several researchers. This scholarship generally focuses on women only and supports core aspects of Daly's work (see Artz et al., 2012; Cherukuri et al., 2009; Dehart, 2018; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018, 2019; Jeffries, Chuenurah, Rao, & Yamada-Park, 2019; Jeffries et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2014; Khalid & Khan, 2013; Kim et al., 2007; Maghsoudi et al., 2018; Reisig et al., 2006; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009; Shechory et al., 2011; Shen, 2015; Simpson et al., 2008).

However, as is the case with the body of ICBDT research, since Daly's (1994) research there have been few gender-comparative

studies (Daggett, 2014; Jones et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2020), only one of which has been qualitative (Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis, 2019). Nevertheless, this body of research supports Daly's original work, demonstrating that while overlap exists in women's and men's criminalisation trajectories, there is gendered variance both between and within pathways.

Jones et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative gender-comparative exploration of juvenile trajectories into crime in the United States (US), finding three trajectories: (1) traditional antisocial, (2) gendered pathways and (3) mixed pathway. Their traditional antisocial trajectory approximates Daly's (1994) street pathway and includes association with antisocial peers, school suspensions, substance use, manifestations of violence, antisocial attitudes and prior involvement with the criminal justice system. This trajectory emerged for females and males. Jones et al.'s findings also revealed a female-only trajectory, termed gendered pathways, which aligns with Daly's 'harmed and harming women'. A male-only trajectory coined 'mixed pathway' also emerged, which encompasses factors from both the gendered (i.e. harmed and harming) and traditional antisocial trajectories.

Also in the US, Daggett's (2014) quantitative analysis revealed five imprisonment trajectories, three of which comprise women and men, one that only emerged for men and one that only emerged for women. The three pathways found for women and men closely align with Daly's (1994) street, drug connected and situational (i.e. 'other or economically motivated') pathways. Daggett found substantial overlap between the women and men in these pathways. However, her analysis revealed an additional two pathways that represent opposite ends of the criminal justice system, with a first-time offenders' pathway emerging for women and a chronic serious offenders pathway emerging for men.

Outside of the US, there are two published gender-comparative feminist pathways studies, both of which were undertaken in Thailand. The first used a quantitative methodology (Russell et al., 2020) and the second utilised a qualitative approach (Jeffries, Chuenurah, Rao, & Yamada-Park, 2019). Each are discussed in detail below.

Russell et al.'s (2020) statistical research found three common pathways to prison for both women and men: (1) peer-group association/deviant lifestyle aligned with Daly's (1994) street pathway, (2) harmed and harming (reflecting Daly's pathway of the same name) and (3) economically motivated, i.e. Daly's 'other' (economically motivated) pathway. However, gendered variance was found within these common pathways.

For the peer-group association pathway, a key gendered variation is the centrality of deviant intimate partners to women's trajectories. In contrast to 'harmed and harming men' whose experiences of childhood trauma (including victimisation) led to them harming others via externalised acts of violence (and subsequently to imprisonment for such offences), many of the women experienced victimisation across the life course, internalised their trauma and ended up harming themselves through substance abuse and the resulting prison sentences for drug offending. The final pathway that comprises both women and men is the economically motivated pathway, containing two subcategories: (1) economic familial provisioning and (2) greed. Everyone in the economic familial provisioning subcategory offended in the context of financially providing for their families, with few resources available to them to do so legitimately. The main gender difference is that men were only providing for their wives or girlfriends and children whereas the women's economic support extended to other family members. The subcategory of greed is comprised only of men.

Russell et al. (2020) also found two women-only pathways: the adulthood victimisation and dysfunctional intimate relationship pathway, which aligns with Daly's (1994)

battered women trajectory, and the pathway of naivety and deception. This latter pathway is characterised by women with no prior history of 'deviance' or criminality who received questionable treatment in the criminal justice system.

In the only gender-comparative qualitative exploration since Daly (1994), Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis (2019) utilised life history interviews to map the prison trajectories of women and men imprisoned in Thailand for drug offending (ICBDT was not included). The two most common pathways to prison for both were found to be adverse childhood experiences and peer group association. Together, these correspond to Daly's street pathway. Here, people were either pushed out of problematic home environments into the arms of 'deviant' peer groups who introduced them to illicit drugs or enticed by deviant friends away from loving but overly permissive parents into the excitement and monetary rewards that illicit drugs offer. Drug addiction and histories of deviant and criminal behaviour are commonplace for those on both pathways – but gendered variance nonetheless exists. None of the men but a few of the women had lived with domestic violence. Furthermore, the women were more likely to have used and sold drugs within romantic relationship contexts. The economically motivated pathway is the third most common trajectory. It is traversed by comparable numbers of women and men and loosely equates to Daly's 'other' (economically motivated) pathway. Offending in these cases nearly always emerged from economic necessity, namely familial economic provisioning. Once again, there are within-pathway gender differences. For example, in contrast to men, as 'dutiful daughters' women were responsible for the provision of financial support beyond their immediate family. Three gender-specific trajectories were also found: (1) inexperience and deception, (2) bad luck men and (3) masculine prowess. The first, a female-only trajectory, describes imprisonment as the result of an unwitting association with a male lover. These stories align with Daly's 'drug connected' women. The latter two are male-only pathways; as with the 'bad luck men' in Daly's research, men who took this imprisonment journey were used by other deviant or criminal men, while masculine prowess aligns with Daly's masculine gaming pathway.

Finally, although not gender comparative, Jeffries and Chuenurah (2019) applied a feminist pathways approach to mapping the life histories and criminal justice experiences of Thai foreign national women imprisoned in Cambodia for ICBDT. The general profiles of these women reveal life histories marred by vulnerability (e.g. poverty, victimisation), and all the women trafficked drugs for someone else. None were career criminals, had knowledge of the international drug trade or had relationships with established criminal organisations. Their offending is characterised by a lack of control (e.g. some were unaware that they were carrying drugs) and involved varying degrees of exploitation. However, some women expressed choosing to offend for money and for the opportunity to travel. Others narrated agency within the confines of their gendered social realties, making them both victim and agent. Finally, ICBDT also occurred against a backdrop of familial economic provisioning. Moreover, Jeffries and Chuenurah identified four distinct pathways to prison: criminogenic, romantic susceptibility, domestic violence and self-indulgent. These pathways parallel those found by Daly (1994) and subsequent researchers.

Thus we can conclude that there is a relative dearth of research – especially outside of Europe and the Americas – examining the possible gendered nature of ICBDT and that gender-comparative feminist pathways studies, particularly qualitative explorations, are sparse. The research reported in this paper seeks to fill these gaps. We utilise in-depth life history interviews with prisoners to describe, examine and compare the features of women's

and men's pathways to prison in Thailand for ICBDT.

Data and methods

Our positionality as feminist researchers guided our methodological approach in that we wanted to provide marginalised women and men with a forum in which they could tell us their stories in their own words. As feminists we strongly adhere to the view that women (and in this case marginalised men) are experts in their own lives. As is common in the feminist pathways approach and previous feminist research on ICBDT, we utilised a narrative analysis of life history interviews. This approach considers the ways in which people construct and use stories to interpret their experiences. Narratives are social products that are constructed by individuals in the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations; they are interpretive devices through which people represent themselves and their social realities to others (Fleetwood, 2015; Presser, 2009).

The authors' positionality as feminist researchers impacted the design, execution and theoretical positioning of this study. During the interviews we were conscious of and tried to mitigate the impact of our privileged position on participant responses. We sought to diffuse the power imbalance as best we could while understanding that a total resolution to this issue is unachievable (Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018). Our interview schedule was semi-structured, open-ended and derived from the previously discussed ICBDT and feminist pathways research literature. This approach provided participants with the opportunity to describe significant events in their lives and explore links between their varied life experiences, offending and criminalisation. The discussion topics were as follows:

1. Childhood familial relationships, friendships, victimisation and other experiences.
2. Adulthood familial relationships, friendships, victimisation and other experiences.
3. Education, employment and economic circumstances.
4. Histories of prior 'deviant' behaviour and offending.
5. Histories of physical and mental ill health including substance abuse.
6. Circumstances surrounding offending.
7. Interactions with and experiences of the criminal justice system.

A total of 34 interviews were undertaken with women ($n = 16$) and men ($n = 18$) convicted and imprisoned for ICBDT during 2017, in 6 prisons across 3 regions in Thailand. Prison staff informed prisoners sentenced for ICBDT about the research and invited them to participate in the study. To ensure that participants had received the relevant information and were providing informed consent, we again explained the study's aim alongside all ethical considerations prior to commencing the interviews. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and minor life details were changed or masked to further protect anonymity.

The interviews, which were one to two hours in duration and conducted in either Thai or English, were audio recorded, translated and transcribed into English. All Thai to English translations (carried out either during interviews or in written transcriptions) were undertaken by the Thai members of the research team to ensure accuracy. Written notes of key points were also compiled during the interviews as a backup.

The participants' narratives were then manually collated into life history maps (for an example, see Figure 1) which were thematically grouped (according to common factors and experiences) into imprisonment pathways. The narratives situated within each pathway were further analysed to explore commonalities and differences by gender. During data analysis we were conscious of how our feminist and privileged position as researchers may impact our mapping of the participants' stories. Through communication with one another we actively sought to mitigate underlying

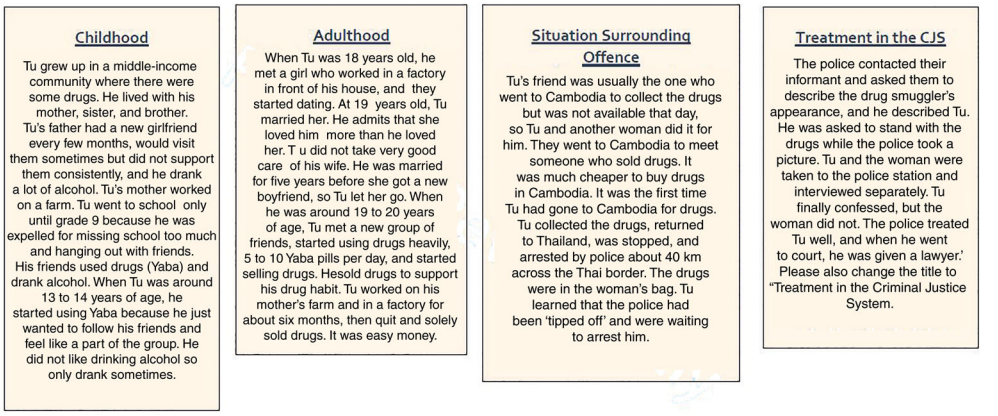

Figure 1. Example of life map.

biases and establish intercoder reliability by working separately and then together to construct and organise the life history maps by common themes. If interpretations varied, these were discussed until a consensus was reached. However, data interpretation will invariably incorporate the assumptions that the researchers bring to the topic (Creswell, 2013). It is impossible to separate ourselves from the research, whether we adhere to a feminist or non-feminist epistemological approach.

Research results

In this section we describe the findings from the study, commencing with an overview of the key characteristics of the participants that is followed by an account of the pathways that emerged from our analysis.

Demographic profiles

Most of the participants were aged from 20 to 39 years of age. Over half of the men and one quarter of the women had only completed lower secondary school,[4] and most were Buddhist. Pre-incarceration, half of the women had supported themselves financially by working in retail or in the food and beverage industry. Most of the men had been farmers. Only a small number reported drug dealing as their main income source. The men had commonly worked in industries where women did not feature and vice versa (see Table 1).

Adverse childhood experiences

Compared to the men, the women more commonly reported childhood adversity. The women were more likely to have grown up in low-income families, experienced parental separation and been exposed to illicit drugs in their communities. They were also more likely to have become romantically involved with a 'deviant'[5] intimate partner and to have lived with childhood abuse.[6] Notably, the men more often spoke of 'deviant' peer group associations (see Table 2).

Adulthood experiences

During adulthood, the women were more likely than the men to have become parents. They were more likely to have experienced intimate partner infidelity and lived through the breakdown of an intimate relationship. While deviant peer group associations were common, unlike the men, most of the women had been – at some point – romantically involved with a deviant intimate partner. Half of the women and none of the men reported

Table 1. Age, education, religion and employment.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	*n = 18*	%
Age (years)				
20–29	4	25	1	6
30–39	7	44	10	56
40–49	2	13	6	33
50 and over	3	19	1	6
Education				
Never attended secondary school/failed to complete lower secondary	4	25	10	56
Completed lower secondary	6	38	4	22
Completed upper secondary	4	25	4	22
University	2	13	0	0
Religion				
Buddhist	10	63	16	89
Christian	3	19	1	6
Not reported	3	19	1	6
Primary means of financial support prior to incarceration				
Hotel/bar/restaurant work	5	31	1	6
Farming	1	6	8	44
Shop assistant/sales	4	25	0	0
Drug dealing	2	13	2	11
Familial support	1	6	0	0
Masseuse	1	6	0	0
Cleaner	1	6	0	0
General labour or factory work	1	6	1	6
Business owner	0	0	2	11
Tour guide	0	0	1	6
Trade (i.e. mechanic, plumber, welder)	0	0	3	17

being a victim of domestic violence (see Table 3).

Substance use and criminal history

Nearly all of the men but less than half of the women reported illicit drug use. Only *two* women and *six* men described themselves as ever having been 'addicted'. The men were more likely than the women to have been introduced to and/or used illicit drugs in association with friends and/or older siblings. In contrast, the women's drug use had occurred more frequently within the context of their intimate relationships. Compared to the women, the men's criminal histories were more extensive (see Table 4).

Offence and sentence length

Most of the offences involved methamphetamine, namely 'yaba' (a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine) or 'ice' (crystal methamphetamine). One woman was imprisoned for trafficking cocaine. Methamphetamine is a Category 1 drug under Thai law whereas cocaine is a Category 2 drug.

At the time of our fieldwork, the *Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* was the main legislation in Thailand governing illicit drugs.

Table 2. Adverse childhood experiences.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	*n* = 18	%
Low-income family	12	75	8	44
Separated from parents	9	56	5	28
Worked from a young age (under 18 years)	9	56	10	56
Became a parent	3	19	2	11
Victim of childhood abuse	8	50	2	11
Exposed to illicit drugs and/or crime in the community	8	50	2	11
Familial substance use and/or other 'deviant' behaviour	8	50	5	28
'Deviant' peer group association	6	37	11	61
'Deviant' intimate partner	9	56	0	0

Table 3. Adulthood experiences.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	*n* = 18	%
Became parent	13	81	9	50
Victim of domestic violence	8	50	0	0
Intimate partner infidelity	8	50	1	6
Dissolution of an intimate relationship	12	75	5	28
'Deviant' peer group association	11	69	15	83
'Deviant' intimate partner	12	75	1	6

The importation of Category 1 and 2 drugs as prescribed in the Act is punishable by harsh sentences. Persons who import Category 1 drugs are liable to a mandatory minimum term of life imprisonment. Furthermore, if a Category 1 drug offence is committed 'for the purpose of disposal' then the prescribed sentence is the death penalty (*Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* s. 65). Those who import cocaine are liable to imprisonment from 20 years to life (*Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* s. 68). To receive 20 years to life for cocaine trafficking, or life or the death penalty for Category 1 drug trafficking, the narcotics must reach certain purity, numerical, dosage and/or net weight thresholds. For methamphetamine, the requirements are 375 mg or more, 50 doses or more or a pure weight of 1.5 g or more (*Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* s.15[2]). To receive 20 years to life imprisonment for cocaine importation, the quantity computed to be a pure substance must be 100 g or more (*Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* s.17). All of the participants were convicted and sentenced for drug importation offences that fell within these criteria. Furthermore, the Act's ambiguous language on who 'possesses' drugs makes it possible to be found guilty by association, and when the trafficked drugs reach the thresholds there is a legislative assumption of 'possession for the purpose of disposal' (*Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* s.15 & s.17).

Typically, the men were incarcerated for the importation of yaba overland from Laos. In contrast, the women's offences are more diverse, comprising a broader range of drug

types, source countries and transportation modes. However, most of the women imported drugs from neighbouring countries over land or water. The penalties received by the participants include a death sentence and prison terms ranging from 24 years to life. Only one male participant received the death penalty. Overall, there is little variance in sentencing outcomes between the women and the men. The most common sentence is life imprisonment and the minimum sentenced received is 24 years (see Table 5). It is important to note that sentencing outcomes which fall below those prescribed in the *Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* (see above) are the result of guilty pleas. Judicial officers are permitted under law

Table 4. Substance use and criminal history.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	*n = 18*	%
Substance use				
Used drugs	6	38	16	89
'Addicted' to drugs	2	13	6	33
Started and/or continued to use drugs with intimate partner	4	25	1	6
Started and/or continued to use drugs with friends and/or older siblings	5	31	16	89
Criminal history				
Prior arrests	1	6	7	39
Prior terms of imprisonment	0	0	4	22

Table 5. Offence and sentence length.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	***n*** *= 18*	%
Drug type				
Crystal methamphetamine ('ice')	9	56	1	6
'Yaba'	6	38	17	94
Cocaine	1	6	0	0
Source country				
China	6	38	0	0
Laos	7	43	14	78
Cambodia	2	13	2	11
Myanmar	0	0	2	11
Trinidad	1	6	0	0
Mode of transport				
Air	6	38	0	0
Land	8	50	14	78
Water	1	6	4	22
Mail	1	6	0	0
Sentence				
Death	0	0	1	6
Life	10	62	9	50
35 to 45 years	3	19	2	11
24 to 34 years	3	19	6	33

to reduce sentences by up to half for defendants who plead guilty.

Criminal justice system experiences

As shown in Table 6, experiences of police misconduct were frequent, took several forms and were reported with similar frequency for women and men. The women were slightly less likely to have had legal representation in court compared to the men, and a smaller number of women relayed being fairly treated by the criminal justice system.

Analysis – life history maps

The tables above provide a cross-sectional view of the women and men who participated in this research (Daly, 1994). The analyses presented below paint a more sequential picture. Here, we have mapped the life circumstances, experiences and central mechanisms that constitute the participants' differing imprisonment pathways. Four pathways emerged: (1) 'deviant' lifestyle, (2) economic familial provisioning, (3) romantic susceptibility and (4) inexperience and deception (see Table 7). The key features and common themes arising within each are described in detail below, alongside the differences in experiences across genders.

The 'deviant' lifestyle pathway

The narratives of over half of the participants constitute this imprisonment route ($n = 21$). However, compared to the women, the men were proportionately more likely to recount

Table 6. Criminal justice system experiences and legal knowledge.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	*n = 18*	%
Police misconduct				
Asked for bribe money	1	6	1	6
Verbally abused and/or threatened	4	25	6	33
Physically abused	1	6	3	17
Threatened/intimidated/tricked into signing confession documents	6	37	6	33
Police/other law enforcement officials gave false evidence in court	1	6	1	6
Court				
Had legal representation	12	75	18	100
Fairness of treatment				
Treated fairly by the police	4	25	9	50
Treated fairly by the courts	2	13	8	44

Table 7. Pathways to prison.

	Women		*Men*	
	n = 16	%	*n = 18*	%
'Deviant' Lifestyle	5	31	16	88
Economic Familial Provisioning	6	37	1	6
Romantic Susceptibility	4	25	0	0
Inexperience and Deception	1	6	1	6

this trajectory (31% vs 88%, see Table 7). Everyone on this pathway had behaved in 'deviant' and criminal ways across the life course. They are all self-reported repeat offenders, and some had official criminal histories ($n = 1$ woman; $n = 7$ men). All of the participants reported using drugs (i.e. methamphetamine), drinking alcohol and 'hanging out' with 'bad' friends. These deviant lifestyles eventually impelled these women and men into prison. Friendship groups during adolescence or early adulthood constituted a pivotal moment. As outlined by Aat (a male interviewee):

> Meeting bad friends changed me. I tried what I had never tried before. I tried many things, at first, I tried drinking alcohol. I went along with them. I went out with them, so whatever they did, I did as well, they [sold] and used drugs so I did the same.

For some, childhood abuse (and in one case parental death) had led them into 'deviant' friendship groups, 'bad' behaviour and substance abuse. This was more common for the women on this pathway ($n = 4$ of the $n = 5$ women) than the men ($n = 4$ of the $n = 16$ men). In other words, and compared to the men, the women's routes into lifestyles characterised by drug use and other deviant behaviours more frequently arose from histories of trauma.

Pang for example told us that her father was a chronic alcoholic who was 'very strict' and would 'hit [her] often'. She decided to 'rebel' and made 'new friends' who 'sniffed glue, smoked and did drugs'. She also 'got a boyfriend' and it was with him that she began using regularly after she 'tried drugs' and 'liked it'. Another interviewee, Pin, was only 14 years old when a 'boyfriend tricked [her] into drinking alcohol, took [her] to his room and raped [her]'. After the rape, Pin made new friends and 'through them got to know about drugs'. She drank alcohol, 'skipped school' and at 16 years old was introduced to 'yaba' by a boyfriend.

The remaining participants described relatively stable childhoods. Rather than being pushed by childhood abuse or trauma into 'deviance', most of the men ($n = 12$) and some of the women ($n = 2$) were instead pulled away from loving families by 'deviant' peer groups – by the fun associated with partying lifestyles, alcohol and drug use. For example, Pim was raised by her grandmother, who she described as 'very loving', while her friends at school were 'well behaved'. However, when she moved to 'another province and became a waitress', she made 'a lot of friends' who introduced her to 'the drinking, partying lifestyle'. Pim 'met a boy' who 'used drugs' and told her 'to try' them. It was through him that she started using yaba on a regular basis.

Nut was 20 years old when he tried 'yaba for the first time':

> It started when I had a night life. I started to hang out with friends, playing snooker [...] we started to use drugs together. I was curious and wanted to experiment, so I asked my friend [for drugs] and started to use from that time onwards. It was enjoyable. I felt that I had power when I had drugs. I wanted to try it because of social trends and friends.

While both the women's and the men's initial deviance was peer facilitated, for four of the five women the eventual use of drugs was expedited within the context of an intimate relationship. These women started consuming drugs after they 'met a boy' who also used (e.g. see Pim, Pang and Pin above). One woman also reported being the victim of domestic violence 'at the hand' of her drug-using boyfriend.

In contrast to the women on this pathway, none of the men reported domestic violence victimisation. Further initiation into or escalation in drug use for the men never occurred within the context of a romantic relationship. Indeed, rather than acting as facilitators, the men's girlfriends and wives tried to impede their drug use. For example, Pai expressed that

his 'wife knew' about his drug use and told him 'not to' do it: she was 'not happy about it but I didn't listen'.

For everyone in this group, imprisonment for ICBDT was the culmination of a pathway involving a 'deviant' lifestyle. This occurred in one of two ways: either the participants had travelled to different countries because they could purchase drugs more cheaply and attempted to re-enter Thailand with drugs for their own use and/or their drug-using lifestyles resulted in them getting caught up in the ICBDT of friends ($n = 3$ women; $n = 7$ men), or ICBDT occurred in the context of long-term drug use, dealing, trafficking and other offending ($n = 2$ women; $n = 9$ men).

With regard to the first route, Aawat trafficked drugs for his own use: 'drugs in [Thailand] are very expensive; they are a lot cheaper in Laos'. Because of the price difference he decided to 'go to Laos around three to four times per year', and each time he 'bought about 30 [yaba] tablets', which was 'enough for about four to five months'. He never sold or distributed these drugs, rather they were only for 'personal use'. Eventually he was caught at the border by immigration officials. Pete used yaba regularly and travelled to Laos with a group of friends to 'party'. Pete's friends bought yaba and when they crossed the border into Thailand everyone was arrested, including Pete, even though the yaba was not in his possession.

In contrast, and illustrative of the second route, Pang used and sold drugs 'off and on' for her entire life. She had previously been imprisoned for drug possession. Upon release from prison she had continued using yaba while engaging in a series of tumultuous relationships with drug-using men. She eventually started 'walking the streets' to find a 'foreign boyfriend' and dated 'five Nigerian men'. It was with her 'fifth Nigerian boyfriend' that Pang started her 'own business' recruiting people to sell drugs. She was 'addicted to ice'. After separating from her boyfriend, Pang partnered with another Nigerian man to sell drugs. This man suggested trafficking drugs from China, which Pang successfully did on two occasions. On her third attempt she was arrested.

In summary, although half of the participants followed this pathway into prison, the men make up a larger proportion of this group. Differences were also noted in the reasons for their 'deviant' lifestyle. The women's routes were more likely to have arisen from histories of trauma, whereas the men were most often pulled onto the pathway by 'deviant' peer groups and the fun associated with partying lifestyles, alcohol and drug use. For the women, intimate relationships and sometimes domestic victimisation accelerated their drug use. In contrast, narratives of domestic violence are not present in the men's stories – and rather than acting as facilitators, their girlfriends and wives tried to put an end to their drug use. Everyone on this pathway was either caught attempting to purchase drugs more cheaply from another country or in the context of their long-term drug use, dealing, trafficking and/or other offending.

The economic familial provisioning pathway

The stories of just over one fifth of the participants constitute this pathway to prison. Only one man narrated this trajectory, but for the women it is the most common conduit (see Table 7). Here, the central theme is familial duty and expectations in the context of lifelong poverty and lack of employment and earning potential due to under-education.

Everyone on this pathway grew up in households characterised by poverty, which caused them to exit education early in order to work to support their families. Three of the women and Thew, the only man on this pathway, never attended secondary school. The remaining three women only completed lower secondary school. Ink relayed:

> My parents worked in the rice fields. They were poor. My father passed away and later so did my mother. My sister paid for my

> education, but she stopped in Grade 9 because she couldn't pay for it anymore. I had to work to support my family. So, I went to Bangkok to work at a department store [and sent money home to her family].

As adults, those on this pathway worked as subsistence farmers, construction workers, factory workers, general labourers[7] or shop assistants. For all of them, the poverty of childhood extended into adulthood, as did their economic obligations to their parents. Fai reported: 'I was the only one working and sending money home every month'. Nan married a man who raped her; she did this for dowry money 'to support family' and then continued to send 'money home every month to [her] mother'. After getting married and having a child, Thew was also responsible for supporting his mother.

Unlike Thew, all of the women ($n = 6$) married young in the hopes of improving their economic situation. However, 4 of the 6 women found themselves in relationships and parenting children with dysfunctional men who invariably made their financial circumstances worse. For example, Fai grew up in a poor family and shared 'a good relationship' with them, but after her father died she 'had to quit' school because her mother could not replace her father's income. At 16 years old, Fai 'found a boyfriend' and wanted to 'marry him because [she] thought he could take care of [her] and [her] mother'. She gave birth to a child. Then Fai's husband 'changed': he started 'hanging out with friends and became addicted to alcohol. Sometimes when he was drunk, if [she] questioned him, he would hit [her]'. Fai wanted to get a divorce but she 'didn't know where to go or what to do'. Her husband continued 'abusing her every month and threatened to kill her if [she] left him'. Fai needed to 'make money to support her family' because her husband was incapable of doing so and she was incurring 'debt'. This is when a neighbour asked Fai to 'sell drugs'. These drugs were sourced from Laos, and Fai travelled there to collect them. She trafficked drugs from Laos for nearly a year before getting caught. Over this time Fai's 'financial situation improved' and she 'was able to repay her debts'. When asked what the turning point was that led her down the pathway to prison, Fai said:

> I was facing a difficult financial situation and came from a family that had so many struggles in life, living hand to mouth. I had no foundation in life, nothing to adhere to, no one to lean on – not even my husband. I never thought that I would come to be involved with drugs, but I decided to do so because it was a way that I could get money to raise my kids, to have a house for them.

Jai and Anne married 'good' men, but as is the case for everyone on this trajectory, ongoing poverty eventually led them into ICBDT. Jai for example explained: 'the money was not enough, we had to send the children to school'. Someone who Jai knew at the construction site where she worked asked her if she wanted 'to make money' by 'picking something up' from Laos: 'In the beginning I did not know it was drugs [but] I [knew] it was drugs when they handed it to me. I needed to support my family'.

Unlike with those on the previous pathway, there is no evidence in this group of 'deviant' behaviour across the life course or expressed enjoyment of a partying and drug-using lifestyle. Rather, familial ties (as opposed to peer group attachments) and financial need were paramount. In contrast to those on the preceding trajectory, offending in every case emerged during adulthood against a backdrop of familial economic provisioning. As noted by Anne, the reason for committing the offence 'was poverty – there sometimes wasn't enough money to eat, to pay for water or electricity […] the school fees were very difficult to pay'.

Thew, the only man on this pathway, was a drug user at the time of his arrest. However,

Thew's drug use arose from the need to financially provide for his family:

> During that time, it was hard. I had to take [work from] anyone who would hire me. I [was the sole provider] because my wife was so young. I didn't have the energy to do it, but I had to – that is when I started using yaba every day because it kept me working all day.

Like the women, Thew decided to traffic drugs to provide for his family, but his story differs. None of the women were drug users – and, unlike Thew, they did not traffic drugs for their own use. Rather, every woman was approached by someone who knew of their tenuous financial circumstances and asked if they would like to earn some extra money through clearly illegitimate means. The women were eventually paid by these other persons to traffic drugs into Thailand, and these payments then enabled them to support their families. In contrast, Thew started using yaba because it enabled him to work longer hours and in turn earn more money to support his family. Thew eventually learnt that yaba was significantly cheaper in Laos:

> It was so cheap, so I decided to buy a lot. I was using 10 tablets a day so that I could work longer hours to support my family. So, I bought 160 tablets. I knew it was illegal, that it was a serious crime, but it was like gambling. If I could get past then I would have enough tablets to last me for 2 months, and then for that 2 months I can work a lot, like all day and all night. The baby, my wife, my mother, I must support them. It was like a dilemma. Do I go? Do I not go?

There is a stark gender component to this pathway: all of the participants on it bar one are women. Everyone attributed their offending to familial financial need against the backdrop of lifelong poverty. Unlike the man in the group, the women married young in hopes of improving their financial situation. However, dysfunctional intimate relationships frequently made the situation worse. As adults, everyone worked in informal, insecure jobs, which – coupled with their duty to care for their families – exacerbated their economic difficulties. While the only man on this pathway trafficked drugs to support his own use, enabling him to work longer hours and provide for his family, none of the women were drug users. In contrast, the women were approached by others who knew of their dire financial situation and provided a way out through ICBDT.

The romantic susceptibility pathway

Only women narrated this imprisonment pathway (see Table 7). All of them related fractured parent–child relationships growing up, with accompanying feelings of parental rejection and not being loved. Despite this, and unlike those on the 'deviant' lifestyle pathway, no one formed relationships with deviant peers, used drugs or behaved in other deviant or criminal ways across the life course. Rather, their offending relates directly to romantic entanglements with foreign men who, in hindsight, appear to have romanced and groomed these women into ICBDT by exploiting their need for love and security (both emotional and financial).

For all of these women, their first serious romantic entanglements were with Thai men who at the least mistreated them (e.g. were unfaithful) and at worst were domestically violent. Shortly after the dissolution of these relationships, all were romanced by Nigerian men who they described as having enriched their lives by being loving, supportive and protective. For example, Ploy explains about her Nigerian boyfriend: 'he took very good care of me and my family. Now I had someone that fully supported my family and he loved me very much. I felt like I had the ideal life'. Another participant, Ple, expressed that her new partner helped her to escape from a domestically violent ex-husband. Nevertheless, from the beginning, all of the women expressed trepidation about their new boyfriends' involvement

with illicit drugs. For example, Ploy conveyed: 'he told me that he sold textiles and fabrics, but I always suspected he was involved in drugs'.

Despite suspecting or knowing what their boyfriends did for a living, these women decided to 'turn a blind eye' to it. They felt loved and enjoyed the sense of security that these relationships provided. Initially, they attempted to distance themselves from their boyfriends' illegal activities. Namwan, for example, told her boyfriend that she 'would not be part of it'. However, eventually, all of these men manipulated, coerced or misled the women they professed to love and care for into ICBDT. For the women on this pathway, it was these romantic entanglements that led them down the pathway to prison.

For example, as a victim of domestic violence, Ple still lived in fear of her ex-husband, making her susceptible to exploitation. The events leading up to her arrest demonstrate how she was misled by her new lover into ICBDT:

> One day he said he needed to pick some gemstones up from Laos and asked if I could pick them up for him. I said I would help. He said that he would pay my rent for me. So, I decided to go. I thought it was really gemstones because I had never seen ice before. I went across the border by bus. So, I get the bus and there was a person that delivered the package to me. I wasn't thinking things through. I didn't know it was drugs. I realised during the police investigation. He said we were a couple, but once I got arrested he didn't show up to help me or anything. So, I guess he just exploited me. Back then when I had problems, I thought I would just get help from him.

In another example, Ploy was manipulated into trafficking drugs by her foreign fiancé. She explained the events leading up to her arrest:

> He asked me to marry him on Christmas day. Something happened two days later. He called me in the morning, talked about the wedding plans, talked about how we would move once we got married and have one child. But he said we needed a lot of money. He asked, can you help me out with one thing? Can you go see my brother in China? I knew right away what he needed me to do. It was hard for me to choose. I knew that if I went and it worked, I would get married and have a good life – but if I didn't go then he would think that I don't love him any more and we would break up. I knew that I really loved him, so I said yes. I met his 'brother', but I knew that it probably wasn't his brother. I had to take care of everything myself. Get the hotel, get the flights. His 'brother' came to see me at the hotel. Two males came to the hotel. They told me that I looked innocent. Another man comes to my hotel room with two bags. One big suitcase and one small backpack. I didn't know where the drugs were. I didn't know what exactly was in the bags. They tell me that it will be okay. I will get home safely.

After Ploy was arrested, she refused to tell the police about her fiancé: 'I wouldn't talk at all. I wouldn't tell the police. I was sure that he wouldn't run away, I was sure that he would wait for me'. However, she discovered that:

> On the day I got arrested he ran away. He disappeared into the clouds. I came to understand that he probably didn't really love me. He probably just used me. Used love to use me. I went to China because I loved him very much.

Only women make up this pathway. Their offending relates directly to a romantic entanglement with a foreign man who, under the pretext of romance, primed them for ICBDT by exploiting their need for love and security. All of the women mentioned that their 'foreign' boyfriends were loving, supportive and protective partners – but they expressed apprehension about their involvement with drugs. The women initially ignored these concerns because they felt loved and secure in their relationships. However, they

were all eventually manipulated, coerced or misled into ICBDT, leading them down the pathway to prison.

The inexperience and deception pathway

This pathway to prison was traversed by only two people ($n = 1$ woman; $n = 1$ man). Ton and Oh grew up in poor rural families yet in terms of familial relationships described their childhoods in positive terms. Neither associated with a deviant peer group during adolescence, nor did they try drugs or engage in other deviant behaviour. Both had abided by the law their entire lives. They had limited education and no obvious 'criminal smarts'. This made them vulnerable to deception and exploitation by the primary offenders. Oh was deceived by a female friend into ICBDT. Her friend had a clothing business, was 'sick' and had two children to support. She asked Oh to 'go to China to buy some clothes for her shop'. Oh explained what happened:

> A man took me around to buy clothes. I had a lot of new clothes to take back, [he] bought me a bigger suitcase. When we got to the airport, I was going to open the bag, but the foreign guy called my phone and asked 'what are you doing?' He told me not to. I was scared. He said not to do it, or my family would be killed. I managed to tear the bag a little and found something crystal-like. I decided to report it once I got to Thailand. At customs in Thailand I told the officer there might be something in the bag. They found ice. I told them that my friend's boyfriend was waiting for me in arrivals and he was the main man, but they didn't listen.

Ton lived near the Thai/Myanmar border and on the day of his arrest had travelled there with his nephew, who had wanted to show Ton around. Ton's nephew borrowed money from his uncle, but unbeknownst to Ton it was used to buy drugs. Ton's nephew was arrested at the border along with his uncle.

In addition to being deceived and caught up in the offending of others, both Oh and Ton described untoward behaviour on the part of law enforcement officials (e.g. the police fabricated evidence and pushed them into signing confession documents without understanding what they were). With limited education and no prior criminal experience, Oh and Ton were thus vulnerable both to deception and exploitation by the primary offenders and law enforcement officials, and this is what propelled them into prison.

Summary and discussion

This research has sought to compare, using in-depth interviews with prisoners, the features of women's and men's trajectories into prison for ICBDT in Thailand. Four pathways have been identified: (1) 'deviant' lifestyle, (2) economic familial provisioning, (3) romantic susceptibility and (4) inexperience and deception.

Corresponding to Daly's (1994) street pathway, over half of the participants are categorised in the 'deviant' lifestyle pathway (for similar pathways found in other studies, see Daggett, 2014; Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2019; Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis, 2019; Jones et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2020). This pathway is dominated by the men and emerged as the most common male imprisonment trajectory. The men on this pathway tended to be pulled away from loving families by deviant peer groups into drug use and offending. In contrast, the women on this pathway were frequently pushed into deviant lifestyles – including problematic friendship groups, romantic partnerships and drug use – by histories of trauma. Of note, and unlike the case of the men, the women's drug use tended to be accelerated within intimate relationships with men. This finding is mirrored in Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis's (2019) previous Thai study on gender pathways to prison for drug offending (in which ICBDT was not included). In contrast, men's girlfriends or wives tried to impede their partners' deviant behaviours.

The economic familial provisioning pathway is almost entirely constituted by women and is the most common imprisonment route

among the women. Like Dorado's (1998, cited in Díaz-Cotto, 2005) and Bailey's (2013) work on women's ICBDT, those on this pathway were pushed into criminality because of poverty and familial caretaking responsibilities. Low levels of education resulted in limited employment prospects, and these women chose to traffic drugs to provide financially for themselves, their children and extended family members. Our economic familial provisioning pathway loosely equates to Daly's (1994) 'other' (economically motivated) pathway and similar trajectories found in the research of Daggett (2014), Jeffries, Chuenurah, & Wallis (2019) and Russell et al. (2020).

The romantic susceptibility pathway comprises only women. Here, romantic entanglements with foreign (in this case Nigerian) men acted as a catalyst for ICBDT. Like Sudbury's (2005) research on women imprisoned for ICBDT in the UK and Dorado's (1998) study (cited in Díaz-Cotto, 2005) of Colombian women imprisoned in Europe, under the guise of love, the women narrated being manipulated, coerced or misled into becoming involved in ICBDT. This trajectory also corresponds to the romantic susceptibility pathway previously identified by Jeffries and Chuenurah's (2019) work on Thai women imprisoned in Cambodia for ICBDT. Here, women became romantically linked to criminal or deviant partners who took advantage of their romantic commitment to exploit them.

The final pathway, with just two participants (one man and one woman), is the inexperience and deception pathway. Here, the life histories are characterised by relatively positive experiences and a lack of prior deviant behaviour. Like the 'bad luck men' in Daly (1994) and Jeffries, Chuenurah, and Wallis (2019), in these two cases imprisonment resulted from either being tricked into offending or being implicated in the offending of others (see also the pathway of naivety and deception in Russell et al., 2020).

As argued by Fleetwood (2014) there is a tendency to categorise women convicted of ICBDT solely as victims, without any agency. This can be problematic because it fails to recognise that agency exists on a spectrum, with women capable of exercising constrained choices across various adverse situations. Like Fleetwood's research, the current study shows that while trickery and coercion were present in some of the women's ICBDT narratives, the most common story told centred on women's choices – albeit constrained decisions made within the context of poverty – to traffic drugs to financially support themselves and their families.

Overall, from both the current study and past research we can conclude that women's and men's ICBDT experiences differ in terms of their relationships to poverty, familial caretaking, intimate relationships, victimisation and trauma. Most of the women in this research were propelled into prison for ICBDT because they needed to economically support their families and/or because they fell in love with troublesome men. In contrast, 'partying' lifestyles and 'deviant' peer group associations more often characterised the men's imprisonment pathways. Thus, gendered variance exists in the manifestation of patterns of ICBDT pathways. Importantly, neither the women nor the men in this research were 'big time' drug traffickers with connections to organised criminal networks.

Thailand's war on drugs, like that internationally, has resulted in harsh legislatively prescribed sentencing tariffs for ICBDT that restrict judicial discretion. Punitive mandatory minimum penalties apply to all drug traffickers in Thailand regardless of culpability, mitigating circumstances or the collateral damage caused to offenders, their families, communities and society (Fleetwood et al., 2015; Fleetwood & Haas, 2011; Kensy et al., 2012). At the time of our research, ICBDT offences were subject to mandatory minimum imprisonment terms ranging from 20 years to life, as well as the death penalty. As a result, the sentencing outcomes for the women and men we interviewed are severe, and there is relative

gender parity. Over half of the participants received life imprisonment, and the lowest sentence is 24 years behind bars (see Table 5). Arguably, given what this research shows about women's and men's pathways into prison for ICBDT, there is a need to rethink prescriptive sentencing regimes because these constrain judicial consideration of the differing – including gendered – circumstances underpinning ICBDT criminalisation.

Thailand was actively involved in the development of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (2010). In terms of sentencing, Bangkok Rule 61 makes it clear that courts shall have the power to consider gender-specific mitigating factors. More generally, the Bangkok Rules ask us to recognise the unique set of gendered circumstances that result in women's criminalisation and the differential impact of imprisonment on women and their children. Because of their backgrounds, women generally experience imprisonment very differently from men; imprisonment can be an especially harsh experience for women (Owen et al., 2017). Thus, rather than seeking gender equality in sentencing through prescriptive or mandatory regimes that treat women and men the same, the Bangkok Rules seek gender equity in sentencing. This cannot be achieved when judicial discretion is impeded by law.

In a bid to reduce prison overcrowding, changes were made to the *Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* shortly after this study's fieldwork was completed. Under the prescribed new sentencing tariffs, the possible penalties for our participants would have been reduced, albeit slightly. Now, anyone importing Category 1 drugs (e.g. yaba and ice) is liable to imprisonment from 10 years (mandatory minimum) to life, down from a mandatory life sentence under the previous legislation. If the drug importation is deemed to be for 'distribution' then the death penalty is no longer mandatory as per the previous legislation; now offenders are liable to life imprisonment or capital punishment (*Narcotics Act no. 7 B.E. 2562 (2019)* s.65). The prescribed penalties around the importation of cocaine (a Category 2 drug) have not changed and remain at 20 years to life imprisonment. Furthermore, prior to these amendments, anyone importing batches of drugs that met certain legislative thresholds pertaining to purity and amount was presumed to be doing so for the purpose of disposal or distribution (*Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)* s.15 & s.17). The wording in the Act has now changed from presumptive to assumptive and there is hope that sentence reductions could now be applied for those importing drugs for their own use, a situation that applies to several (mainly male) participants in this research (*Narcotics Act (no. 7) B.E. 2562 (2019)* s. 15 & s.17). However, whether or not this hope will translate into less punitive sentencing outcomes has yet to be seen.

This study has demonstrated the ways in which pathways into Thai prisons for ICBDT are gendered. However, it is limited to a small sample of imprisoned women and men in one country's correctional system. Given the dearth of gender-focused research on ICBDT in Southeast Asia and globally, this study holds an important place in nurturing knowledge about an under-researched area in an under-represented part of the world. However, additional research is still needed in Thailand and other countries in the region and beyond in order to understand both women's and men's ICBDT experiences in a way that allows for comparative analysis across countries. Such work will help to develop a more robust knowledge base for formulating effective criminal justice policies on ICBDT in the future.

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Ethical standards

Declaration of conflicts of interest

Samantha Jeffries has declared no conflicts of interest.

Prarthana Rao has declared no conflicts of interest.

Chontit Chuenurah has declared no conflicts of interest.

Michelle Fitz-Gerald has declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Notes

1. The feminisation of poverty refers to the fact that women (and their children) are disproportionately represented among the world's poor compared to men.
2. The deployment of decoy drug couriers is carried out to distract the attention of law enforcement officials who will sometimes be 'tipped off' about the decoy entering the country. Multiple drug couriers will be recruited and travel together; even if a few get caught, the rest may go through unnoticed and the operation will still be profitable to ICBDT organisations (Unlu & Ekici 2012).
3. As outlined by Tantiwiramanond (1997, p. 193), "in matrifocality social organisation revolves around female members of the family […] there is [a matrilocal] residence, in which the groom moves in with the bride's family, the authority as the head of the household [nevertheless] is passed from father-in-law to son-in-law. Sons and daughters have equal inheritance rights, but usually the parent's household compound is allocated to the youngest daughter". However, in return and as outlined above in text, a daughter becomes "somewhat of a bonded labourer to her parents" (Tantiwiramanond, 1997, p. 180).
4. Education in Thailand is compulsory for the first nine years, i.e. six years of elementary school and three years of lower secondary school. Children are enrolled in elementary school from the age of six years. Secondary education starts at the age of twelve years and consists of three years of lower secondary education and three years of upper secondary education. After compulsory education ends (i.e. lower secondary), pupils can pursue upper secondary education in a general academic, university-preparatory track or continue their studies in more employment-geared, vocational school programmes.
5. In this article, the term 'deviance' (and related terms) is used to denote socially condemned behaviour – that is, violations of the established social rules and customs that prevail in Thai society. Obviously, 'deviance' is a social construction dependent on prevailing power relationships. The authors do not see 'deviance' as inherently (un)natural or as intrinsic to any act, belief or human attribute. Instead, we understand 'deviance' to be socially created by collective human judgement (Hills, 1980). However, the purpose of this article is not to contest social constructions of 'deviance' (or for that matter drug crime) in Thai society. Rather, our intention is to report prisoners' narratives of their pathways into prison and their reasons for offending. Prisoners' narratives do not sit in isolation from society; having been publicly labelled 'criminal' and condemned to prison for their behaviour, it is perhaps unsurprising that the participants frequently constructed behaviours and actions of both themselves and other people in their lives as being 'bad' or 'deviant'. In this case, for example, 'deviant' intimate partners were labelled as

such by the research participants; they spoke about their intimate partners being 'bad' and doing 'bad things' such as using drugs, drinking too much alcohol, 'partying' and getting arrested and/or imprisoned for criminal offences.

6. This includes childhood physical, sexual and emotional abuse, living with domestic violence and child neglect.
7. This includes informal work such as domestic work, housekeeping, babysitting, gardening, street vending and other usually daily wage labour.

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