

CCJA-SCQ Joint congress
Quebec City
Nov. 06-09 2019

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Old Mission Brewery

Transparency,
Human Rights and
Incarceration in
Canada:

An Innovative
Research
Partnership

Partnership Development Grant (SSHRC)

Goals of the PTP

To document
prison conditions

- Prov. institutions
- Fed. institutions
- Immigration
Detention Centres

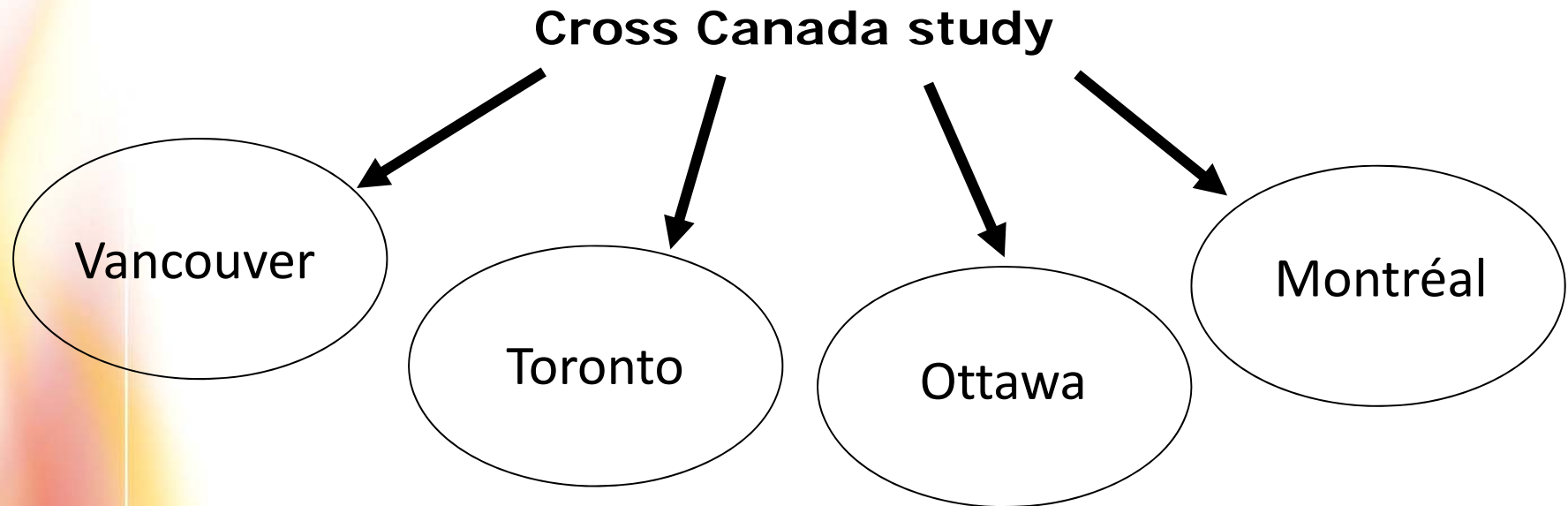
To work with
former prisoners
& their allies

- Create
documentation
method for lived
experience of prison
conditions

To develop
strategies to
optimize :

- Transparency
- Accountability

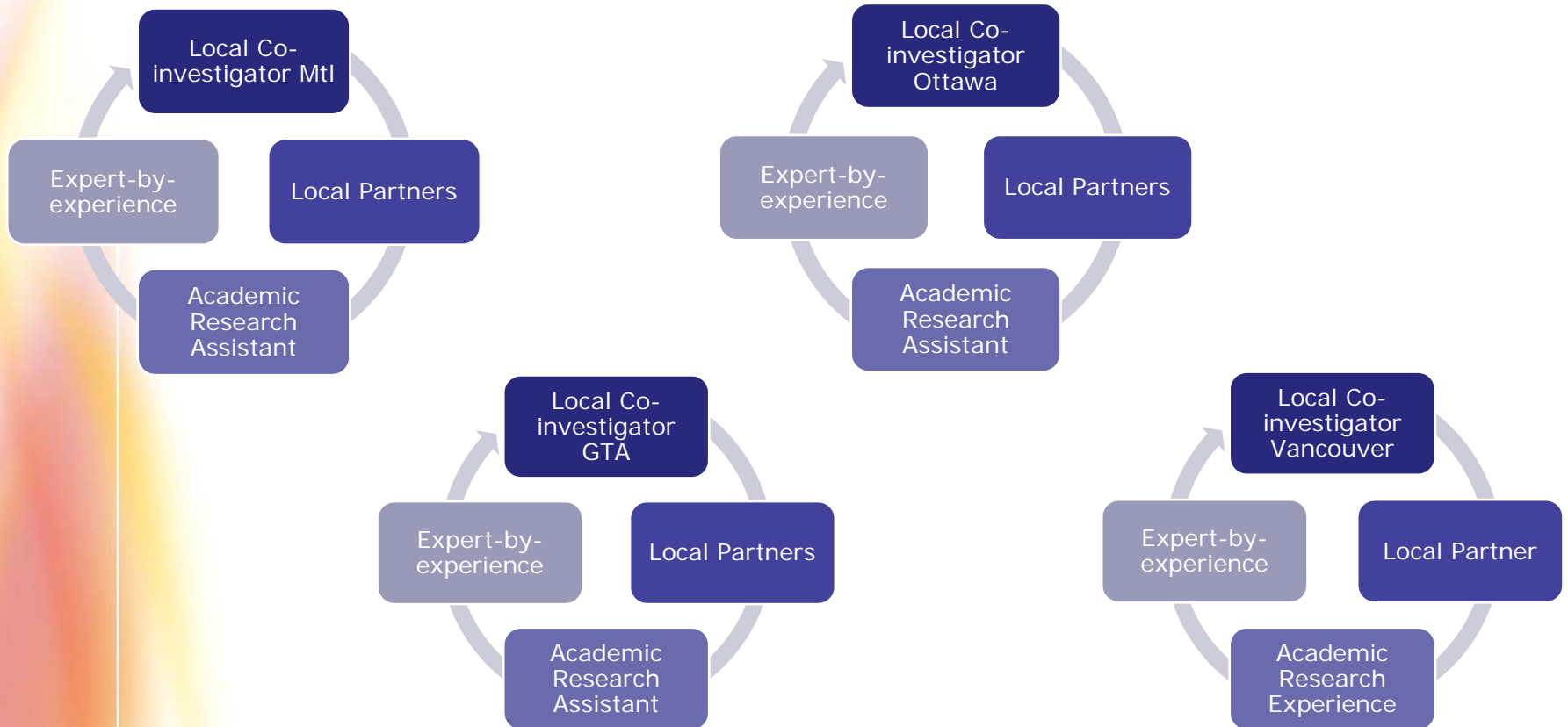
Research Methodology



Choice of sites

1. Location of prisons;
2. Researchers' established connections with prisoner communities in each site;
3. Variety of prison cultures (jurisdictions; populations; usage; etc.)

General Structure of the Study



Experts-by-experience

Co-creators of interview guide;

Co-interviewers of persons with lived prison experience;

Consultants in the coding of interviews;

Co-analysts of interview transcripts;

Co-authors of publications;

Co-presenters at conferences;

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Research Partners

**Canadian Civil Liberties
Association**

**Canadian Association of
Elizabeth Fry Societies**

**John Howard Society of
Canada**

West Coast Prison Justice Society

Aboriginal Legal Services of
Toronto

No One is Illegal

E. Fry Society of Ottawa

E. Fry Society of Québec

Social Reintegration Services
Association of Québec

Local Collaborations



Vancouver

- Pivot Legal Society
- Vancouver Area Drug Users' Network
- Positive Living Society



Ottawa

- Sandy Hill Community Centre
- Aboriginal Friendship Centre



Montréal

- Action Réfugiés Montréal
- Mission Old Brewery
- Centre Femmes aux 3 A (QC)

Semi-directed interviews

Who ? Men, Women

From where ? Provincial & federal institutions

How many ? 184 interviews in 4 sites

Goal ? To document prison conditions since 2011.

Interview Themes

Health care/mental health

Addictions

Emergency response

Access to justice; to family & friends; to community supports

Conditions of confinement

Segregation; lockdown/deadlock

Interactions b/w prisoners; with personnel

Discrimination/bullying

Transfers - Remand

Search & seizures

Violence – Use of force

Coping & resisting

Risk classification

Re-entry

Segregation

« I'm in the hole, I freeze, I have shit on the walls, I have blood [on the walls]. [...] And they only gave me cheese sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, cheese sandwiches. [...] I was in admin. segregation for suicidal thoughts. They took all of my clothes away, and gave me this kind of nightgown in heavy, rigid fabric that didn't cover much, with something to put on my cot in the same fabric [...] I froze, it was really, really, really cold. I froze for 24 hours. Then, at one point, this was a miracle, I discovered there was hot water. So, I warmed up with hot water, I put it everywhere I could [...] After that, when they ask you: Do you have suicidal thoughts? For sure you're gonna say no, even if it's yes. [...] Gee, I'm ok for sure, sure, sure. I wanna get out of here. I freeze, this is hell. But I still wanted to do it [suicide]. I said : Now I'm going to a place where I'll be able to do it. And I'll shut my mouth. » (Roxy, prov., 38 years old)

Access to family

« To have [name of niece] on my visit list, I had to cancel every other member of my family. [...] I even cancelled my daughter, and my sister-in-law, the only resource I have. They said no because she [niece] was not family. She's my brother's daughter! They accept « close family », that's brother, sister, father, mother or child. I explained that I'm homeless and that the only resource I had was [niece]. It took time, but they finally accepted, if I cancelled everyone else » (Boxer, fed., 48 years old)

Conditions of Confinement

« At [name of prison], the first time I went there, there was no shower curtain for privacy [...]. And they often had male officers and not women officers. So, they used to see everything. When I arrived, that lasted three days. Then, they installed curtains. I don't know how long that lasted before I arrived, though. [...] At one point, we were putting up bedsheets – we wanted to shower without being seen. Then, an officer forced us to take the sheets down. The following day, we had shower curtains. This situation didn't encourage us to wash up. Some girls just washed in their cell with facecloths » (Maddy, fed., 38 years old)

Health Care

« For methadone, it was quick, the following day. It was the other medication, like Seroquel to sleep. It took me a week before I got them. So, for one week, I didn't sleep. They gave me a bunch of reasons only to learn, seven days later, that my medications got here, at the same time as my methadone. For seven days, my medication was lost in space. » (Cloud, prov., 37 years old)

Discipline

« [...] when you work, you can take a shower at supper time. So, I would say: 'Open the door [of cell], I'll go shower right away'. It was allowed for workers. Sometimes, they'd forget about me. So, I'd push the alarm, and sometimes they opened the door, sometimes they didn't. [...] I have no other way [to communicate with guards in the bubble]. I push the alarm. [...] I pushed the alarm, and sometimes I went to [disciplinary] court for this. They gave me fines because I had pushed the alarm. [...] 25 dollar fines. I've had many, often. »
(Bob, fed., 52 years old)

Degradation, dehumanisation, disrespect (1)

« When the woman attempted suicide in her cell, close to mine, the girl next to her said: 'Let's all hit our panic button'. Then, we all hit the button. The guard who came by when they carried the woman on the stretcher, said: 'Hey! That was cool, it looked like a Christmas tree in our office earlier with all those lights'. He thought it was funny, and you have this woman who's pissing blood [...]. » (Mia, prov., 44 years old)

Degradation, dehumanisation, disrespect (2)

« The whole unit was under lockdown. Guards came by with our meal. The only thing that really disturbed me, and that I didn't feel right about is that one of the female guards said at one point: 'Here is your feed [animal feed], girls'. You know, 'your feed'. (Maddy, féd., 38 years old)

« We have compulsory two-hour naps everyday. 'Go to sleep now '. Its like daycare. » (Maddy, fed., 38 years old)

Preliminary Analyses: *Nothing New Under the Sun*

- Perenniality of prison conditions in Canadian institutions.
- Perenniality of women's prison conditions
- Prison food politics
- Prison experiences as constitutive of deteriorating mental health & addictions