



**Transformation of Stigma into Opportunity:
A Qualitative Study of Rehabilitation Strategies for Female Inmates
at Class IIA Kerobokan Prison, Bali**

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ABSTRACT

The correctional system and the process of social reintegration still face social stigma toward women who come into conflict with the law. Female inmates face layered stigma because they are considered to deviate from social norms and are seen as criminals. This is a vulnerable group. The aim of this research is to see how vulnerable groups of women at the Class IIA Women's Correctional Institution in Kerobokan, Bali, can turn stigma into opportunities.

This study uses qualitative methodology and is designed as a case study. Data were collected through limited observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation research involving female inmates, prison officers, and supporters of the rehabilitation program. To identify patterns of rehabilitation strategies and experiences of stigma transformation, data analysis was conducted thematically.

The research results show that inmates experience stigma both personally and socially, but it can be transformed through a rehabilitation approach that includes the development of useful skills, strengthening their identity, and institutional support from the prison environment. This strategy enhances the confidence and readiness of inmates for life after incarceration.

This research concludes that the elimination of stigma on female inmates is a strategic process influenced by a holistic and contextual rehabilitation approach. The results provide an empirical basis for creating more inclusive and socially reintegrative policies for female inmates. This research contributes by conceptualizing stigma as a transformable social construct mediated by institutional rehabilitation.

Keywords: social stigma; female inmates; rehabilitation strategies; social reintegration; correctional system

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INTRODUCTION

As the number of women coming into contact with the law increases and the complexity of the vulnerabilities they experience grows, the issue of women's incarceration has drawn global attention over the past twenty years. According to the World Prison Brief and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, although women are a minority group in the global prison system, they are more vulnerable to social stigma compared to men. Stigma ini terutama berkaitan dengan peran gender, moralitas, dan konstruksi sosial tentang gambaran perempuan ideal (Fair & Walmsley, 2024; UNODC & Atabay, 2014). Stigma tidak hanya bertahan selama masa pidana, tetapi juga bertahan setelah pembebasan. Ini berdampak pada reintegrasi sosial, akses pekerjaan, dan relasi sosial.

In the perspective of sustainable social development, modern incarceration is no longer understood merely as an instrument of punishment, but rather as a space for social transformation oriented toward rehabilitation, empowerment, and the restoration of human dignity (restorative and rehabilitative justice)(Prabowo & Sulaiman, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2024). Therefore, the strategy of transforming stigma into opportunities through skill development, strengthening positive identities, and building social capacity has become an important agenda in the management of women's correctional institutions in various countries (Patmawati et al., 2025; Yousef & Kyomuhendo, 2025).

According to Law Number 22 of 2022 on Corrections, which emphasizes respect for human rights, social reintegration, and the empowerment of inmates, the correctional system in Indonesia is regulated according to the rehabilitation paradigm. However, recent research shows that female inmates still face two types of stigma, or double stigma, namely as women who are considered to violate social and cultural norms and as perpetrators of criminal acts. (Barr, 2023; Quiroga-Carrillo et al., 2024).

Moreover, national research shows that rehabilitation programs in women's correctional facilities often do not rely on transformative strategies with long-term goals. Most programs focus on technical skills, but do not balance psychosocial reinforcement, positive identity narratives, and public communication strategies that can transform social stigma into reintegration opportunities (Deffrilia & Indahdewi, 2025; Fawwas et al., 2024). This condition can cause the impact of rehabilitation to become less sustainable after the inmates return to society. The Class IIA Women's Correctional Institution in Kerobokan, Bali has unique socio-cultural characteristics. Bali, as an international tourist destination, has different socio-economic dynamics compared to other regions in Indonesia, including opportunities for creative economy, culture-based tourism, and community-based enterprises. On the other hand, the stigma against female inmates in Bali is inseparable from traditional values, moral norms, and strong social expectations regarding women's roles in families and society (Kumbara, 2022).

With around 270 female inmates, the Kerobokan Women's Prison becomes a strategic space to examine how rehabilitation strategies are designed and implemented in a local context rich with potential yet fraught with the challenge of social stigma. However, to date, empirical studies that deeply explore the strategies for transforming stigma into opportunities in women's prisons, particularly through a contextual qualitative approach in Bali, remain very limited.

According to several international studies, the success of post-incarceration reintegration for women is greatly determined by the institution's ability to develop strategies that encompass skills, self-identity, social relations, and overall community support (Edwards et al., 2022; Lewis, 2025).

However, certain studies do not sufficiently examine the strategic processes, subjective meanings, and social dynamics experienced by vulnerable groups. On the other hand, certain studies place more emphasis on program evaluation or quantitative results.

At the national level, research on women's incarceration generally focuses on the rights of inmates, the effectiveness of vocational training programs, or legal and policy aspects (Karisadini, 2025; Paikah, 2023). Studies that specifically analyze stigma transformation strategies as a social and cultural process are still rare. Additionally, qualitative approaches that place the voices of inmates as the main subjects of research are not yet dominant, even though this perspective is crucial for deeply understanding the meaning of transformation.

Many studies have discussed social stigma and rehabilitation programs for female inmates. However, there is still little research that specifically views stigma as a process that can be altered by institutional strategies in correctional facilities. The dynamics of the process, subjective meanings, and the role of the local socio-cultural context in shaping stigma transformation have not been extensively discussed through in-depth qualitative approaches, while most studies tend to focus on program evaluation or work skill outcomes.

By positioning stigma transformation as a strategic process mediated by rehabilitation practices and the institutional environment of correctional facilities within a specific socio-cultural context, this research offers novelty. This research aims to study how female inmates use rehabilitation strategies to transform stigma into opportunities for social reintegration. This was conducted using a qualitative case study approach at the Class IIA Women's Penitentiary in Kerobokan, Bali.

By providing qualitative evidence about rehabilitation practices in women's prisons, this research is expected to enhance the sociology of corrections and studies on vulnerable groups. Additionally, it is hoped that this research will provide policy and practical benefits to help correctional managers and policymakers develop more inclusive, sustainable, and socially reintegrative rehabilitation strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study uses qualitative methodology and is designed as a case study. This method was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the methods used to transform stigma into opportunities for female inmates as a contextual social and institutional process. This case study allows researchers to thoroughly investigate the rehabilitation process, subjective experiences, and the relationship between inmates and the institutional environment in the specific context of the Class IIA Women's Penitentiary in Kerobokan, Bali.

Research Location and Informants

The research was conducted at the Class IIA Women's Penitentiary in Kerobokan, Bali. The research informants numbered 20 people who were purposively selected, consisting of 12 female inmates, 5 prison officers, and 3 external partners involved in the implementation of the rehabilitation program.

Because they have direct experience with facing stigma and undergoing the rehabilitation process within the prison, female inmates were chosen as the primary informants. The planning, implementation, and evaluation of rehabilitation strategies are discussed from both institutional and operational perspectives by prison officers and external partners. The principle of data saturation, also known as data saturation, is when the information obtained has become repetitive and does not yield any new substantive

findings. Based on this principle, the number of informants can be determined (Asrulla et al., 2023; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Criteria and Techniques for Selecting Informants

The selection of informants was conducted using purposive sampling techniques, considering inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for selecting informants are as follows:

- 1) Criteria for female inmates: have served a minimum of six months of their sentence, have a variety of sentence lengths (short, medium, and long), are either actively or passively involved in skill and personality development programs, and have a variety of ages and social backgrounds to capture the diversity of stigma experiences and transformation processes.
- 2) Criteria for prison officers: directly involved in the planning, implementation, or supervision of rehabilitation programs, with at least one year of work experience at the Kerobokan Women's Prison.
- 3) Criteria for External Partners: acting as instructors, facilitators, or mentors in training programs, continuously involved in activities empowering inmates, and these criteria are designed to ensure representation of perspectives and the depth of data obtained.

Data Collection Techniques

Three main methods are used to collect data: in-depth interviews, limited participatory observation, and documentation studies. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted to study informants' experiences with stigma, their perceptions of coaching, and the meaning of transformation. Limited participatory observation is used to observe social interactions and coaching activities conducted in the prison environment. Documentation studies are conducted on official documents, program reports, and coaching activity archives. With this combination of methods, method triangulation can be conducted to enhance data validity.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is conducted thematically, referring to the stages proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process includes: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes, (2) initial open coding to identify relevant units of meaning, (3) grouping codes into initial themes that represent stigma transformation strategies, (4) reviewing and refining themes to ensure internal coherence and alignment with research objectives, and (5) defining and naming themes analytically. The analysis is conducted iteratively, where the data collection and analysis processes occur simultaneously.

Data Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality and validity of the research, this study follows the trustworthiness standards of Lincoln and Guba, which consist of credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, Dependability is ensured through the application of an audit trail, and Confirmability is upheld through researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing.

The researcher continuously engages in critical reflection on their position, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the research process. In addition, the analysis results are discussed with colleagues who have methodological competence to obtain critical

feedback and ensure that the findings are based on empirical data, not solely on the researcher's subjectivity.

Research Ethics

This research was conducted based on social research ethics, especially because it involves vulnerable groups. Before the data was collected, the authorities in the correctional environment granted approval for the research. Each informant was given written consent explaining the purpose of the research, the steps used, potential risks, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. In research reports and publications, codes or pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of informants.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This section presents the research results based on the analysis of empirical data obtained through in-depth interviews, limited participatory observation, and documentation studies at the Class IIA Women's Penitentiary in Kerobokan, Bali. The results are organized thematically to illustrate the strategies for transforming stigma into opportunities as executed and interpreted by the female inmates within the context of the correctional institution.

Informant Profile

The research informants consist of 12 female inmates, 5 prison officers, and 3 external partners of the rehabilitation program. The age, educational background, type of crime, and sentence duration of the inmates vary greatly. Before serving their sentences, most inmates were mothers and had family responsibilities. The diversity of these characteristics provides a broad picture of the experiences caused by stigma and the transformation processes undergone.

Theme 1: Internalized Stigma

All inmate informants revealed that stigma does not only come from external environments such as family and society, but is also internalized in self-perception. Stigma is experienced in the form of negative labeling, shame, and fear of social rejection after release. In the early stages of their sentence, the stigma affects the inmates' self-confidence and motivation to participate in rehabilitation activities. One of the informants stated:

"At first, I felt ugly and ashamed of my family." Whatever I do seems like it won't change people's perspective. (WB-03)

A similar expression was also conveyed by another informant:

"A similar sentiment was expressed by another informant: "The hardest part is not being in prison, but the thought that when I get out, people will still see me as a convict." (WB-07)

A similar sentiment was expressed by another informant: "The hardest part is not being in prison, but the thought that when I get out, people will still see me as a convict." (WB-07) This finding shows that stigma functions as an identity burden that affects how inmates perceive themselves and their future.

Theme 2: Skills Development

Kerobokan Women's Prison offers various productive skills development programs tailored to local potential. These programs include skills in handicrafts, food, and sewing.

These programs help inmates regain confidence and optimism about their abilities. A prisoner expressed:

"After participating in the sewing training, I feel capable. It turns out I can still produce something useful." (WB-01)

Another informant added:

"From this activity, I started to think, later when I am free, I don't have to return to the old environment, I can work from this skill." (WB-09)

Although initially perceived as a routine activity, skill development is gradually interpreted as an economic opportunity as well as a symbol of personal transformation. This skills program is attended by the majority of inmates and is conducted on a scheduled basis. The inmates view these skills as practical preparation for life after incarceration.

Table 1. Types of Skill Development Programs

Types of Development Programs	Activity Types	Inmate Participation
Sewing Skills	Training and Practice	High
Handicrafts	Group-Based Production	Medium
Culinary	Food Processing Training	Medium
Other Productive Activities	Limited Production	Low-Medium

Theme 3: Positive Identity Formation

The stigma transformation process is supported by a rehabilitation strategies that focuses on strengthening positive identities, in addition to technical skills. Inmates can experience a social change that contrasts with the stigma they previously experienced through personality development programs, psychosocial support, and opportunities for active participation.

One informant stated:

"Here I feel appreciated. When my work is praised, it feels like I am not a failure." (WB-05)

This experience is also reinforced by the confession of prison officers, as conveyed by one of the officers:

"We try to see them not from their mistakes, but from the potential that can be developed." (PL-02)

This strengthening of positive identity contributes to changes in how inmates view themselves and their future roles.

Theme 4: Institutional Support

The stigma transformation process is facilitated by prison staff and the institutional environment. The relatively open and supportive relationship between staff and inmates creates a more humane environment for corrections and allows inmates to actively participate in the process.

One inmate explained:

"If the officers are supportive, we're more enthusiastic about participating in activities. It doesn't feel like we're being constantly watched." (WB-11)

This view is reinforced by external partners of the coaching program:

"The environment here is quite supportive, there is room for inmates to learn and develop, not just serve their sentences." (ME-01)

The prison social environment, which allows for positive interactions between inmates, also contributes to the formation of internal social support that strengthens the stigma transformation process.

Key Findings

Overall, the research findings indicate that for female inmates, stigma gradually transforms into an opportunity. Skills-building strategies, positive identity enhancement, and institutional support from prison staff and the prison community play a crucial role in this process. Over time, stigma, initially perceived as a burden on identity, transforms into a drive for self-reflection and preparation for social reintegration.

Discussion

Stigma Transformation as an Institutional and Relational Process

The results of this study indicate that the stigma experienced by female inmates not only functions as external social pressure, but is also internalized in the process of forming their self-identity during their sentence (Quiroga-Carrillo et al., 2024). The results of this study align with the literature that emphasizes that the stigma faced by women in the correctional system varies and is influenced by social morality and gender construction (Carlton & Segrave, 2013; Crewe et al., 2017). However, this research differs from previous studies that show stigma is not just a burden or an eternal obstacle. On the contrary, this research demonstrates that stigma remains dynamic and can undergo changes in meaning through structured institutional interventions. Therefore, stigma in this context not only becomes a burden but also marks the beginning of a process of reflection and identity reconstruction. (Liebling, 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025).

Difference from Previous Studies: Stigma as a Strategy, Not Just a Consequence

Difference from Previous Studies: Stigma as a Strategy, Not Just a Consequence Stigma is considered a social consequence post-sentencing that must be reduced through inclusive policies or societal acceptance (Masni & Asriadi, 2025). According to this research, stigma can also be strategically addressed in correctional institutions through design and rehabilitation practices (Balouch et al., 2023). At the Kerobokan Women's Prison, skills training and identity reinforcement strategies function to implicitly change the meaning of stigma in addition to enhancing technical skills. This result expands our understanding that correctional facilities are not just neutral places that reproduce social stigma but also play an active role in reshaping the experience of stigmatization (Veranita et al., 2025).

Completing the Literature: Integration of Skills, Identity, and Social Relations

This research complements previous studies that emphasize the importance of vocational training for female inmates by demonstrating that the primary value of skill development lies not only in economic outcomes but also in its socio-psychological functions (Balouch et al., 2023; Ekanayake & Madhuwanthi, n.d.). Productive skills serve as a tool to restore a sense of empowerment, self-recognition, and a positive identity narrative (Kumar Gupta & Tiwari, 2024). These results enhance research on desistance theory, which emphasizes identity change as a primary condition for successful social reintegration. This finding shows that institutional practices and social relations in prisons mediate identity change. Therefore, this research integrates aspects of skills, identity, and institutional relationships into a more in-depth analysis (Low, 2024; Suzuki et al., 2026).

Correcting Previous Study Assumptions: Power Relations That Are Not Always Reproductive

One of the factors hindering rehabilitation is the strict power relationship between officers and inmates, according to several critical studies on incarceration. Although this research does not deny the existence of institutional hierarchies, it corrects the notion that the relationships within these hierarchies are always repressive and counterproductive.

Findings (Schnittker, 2025) indicate that in certain contexts, more facilitative and humanistic relationships between officers and inmates can actually become a significant source of support in the process of stigma transformation (Zulfedryan & Santoso, 2025). This shows that the dynamics of power relations in correctional institutions are contextual and can be changed through rehabilitation practices that focus on recognition and empowerment.

Theoretical Contribution: Toward a Contextual Understanding of Stigma Transformation

Theoretically, this research establishes that changes in stigma are mediated by institutions, social relations, and local cultural contexts. This aids the development of research on stigma and the sociology of corrections. This research not only affirms the relevance of stigma and desistance theories but also expands them by demonstrating that correctional institutions can function as arenas of social transformation rather than merely spaces of control. By considering the subjective experiences of female inmates, this research offers a contextual perspective that complements the macro and evaluative approaches that have long dominated the literature.

Implications for Correctional Practices and Policies

This research shows that effective mentoring methods not only require technical skills but also the enhancement of identity, social relationships, and sustainable institutional support. These results, for correctional practices, emphasize the importance of creating a rehabilitative environment that allows female inmates to be recognized, actively engaged, and have meaningful experiences. From a policy perspective, this research states that gender-sensitive and context-aware policies for female inmates, as well as encouraging collaboration with local communities, are essential.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to analyze how the stigma experienced by female inmates can be transformed into opportunities through rehabilitation strategies at the Class IIA Women's Penitentiary in Kerobokan, Bali. The research findings indicate that stigma not only exists as external social pressure but is also internalized in the construction of inmates' self-identity. However, through an integrated rehabilitation approach that includes the development of productive skills, strengthening of positive identity, and institutional support, the stigma not only diminishes but also undergoes an active reconstruction of meaning within the individual.

The main findings of this research affirm that stigma is not a static condition that can only be minimized, but rather a social construct that can be processed and reshaped through appropriate institutional interventions. In this context, correctional institutions play a role not only as spaces of control but also as arenas of social transformation that allow the formation of new, more adaptive, and productive identities. This process is mediated by supportive social interactions, experiences of recognition, and the active participation of inmates in rehabilitation programs.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of penology studies and stigma studies by demonstrating that stigma transformation is a dynamic process

influenced by institutional relations and socio-cultural contexts. This research expands the understanding that identity change in the process of social reintegration is not only individual but also the result of institutional design and practices oriented toward empowerment.

Practically, these findings emphasize the importance of developing mentoring models that do not only focus on technical skills but also on psychosocial and relational dimensions. Prison policies need to be directed toward a more holistic, gender-sensitive, and contextual approach to ensure the sustainability of the post-release social reintegration process.

Further research is recommended to adopt a longitudinal approach to trace the continuity of the stigma reconstruction process after inmates return to society, as well as to expand the research context thru comparative studies between correctional institutions.

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