

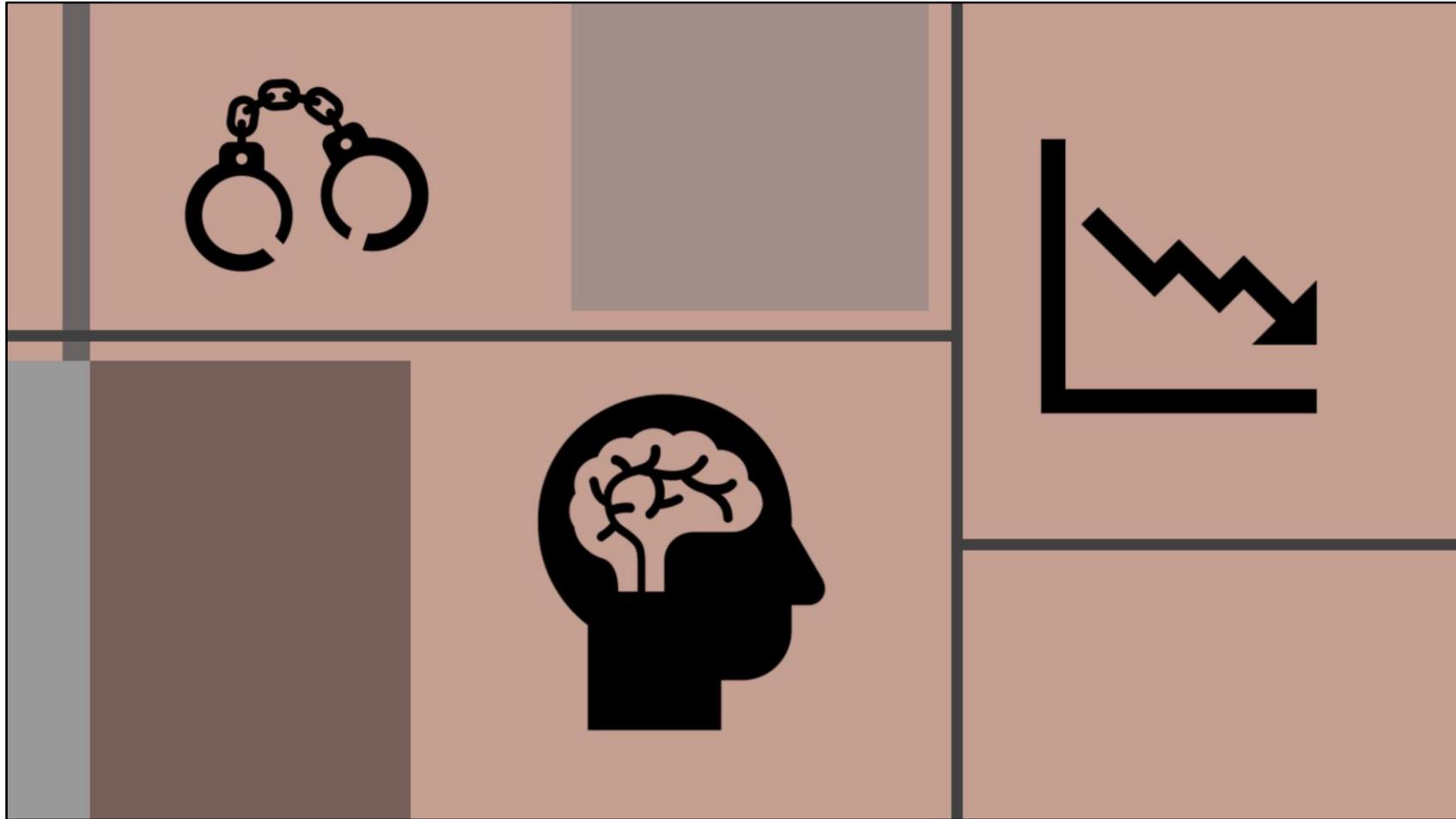
Good evening, my name is Rachelle Younie and I will be presenting my research that focuses on young women and the criminal justice system. I was introduced to this topic during a Female Offenders class that I took as a part of my undergraduate degree. An essay prompt grew into a passion which resulted in me pursuing publication for this paper.



### **Introduction to the Issues**

Crime committed by young women has been **increasing over the past several decades** and researchers have few answers as to why.

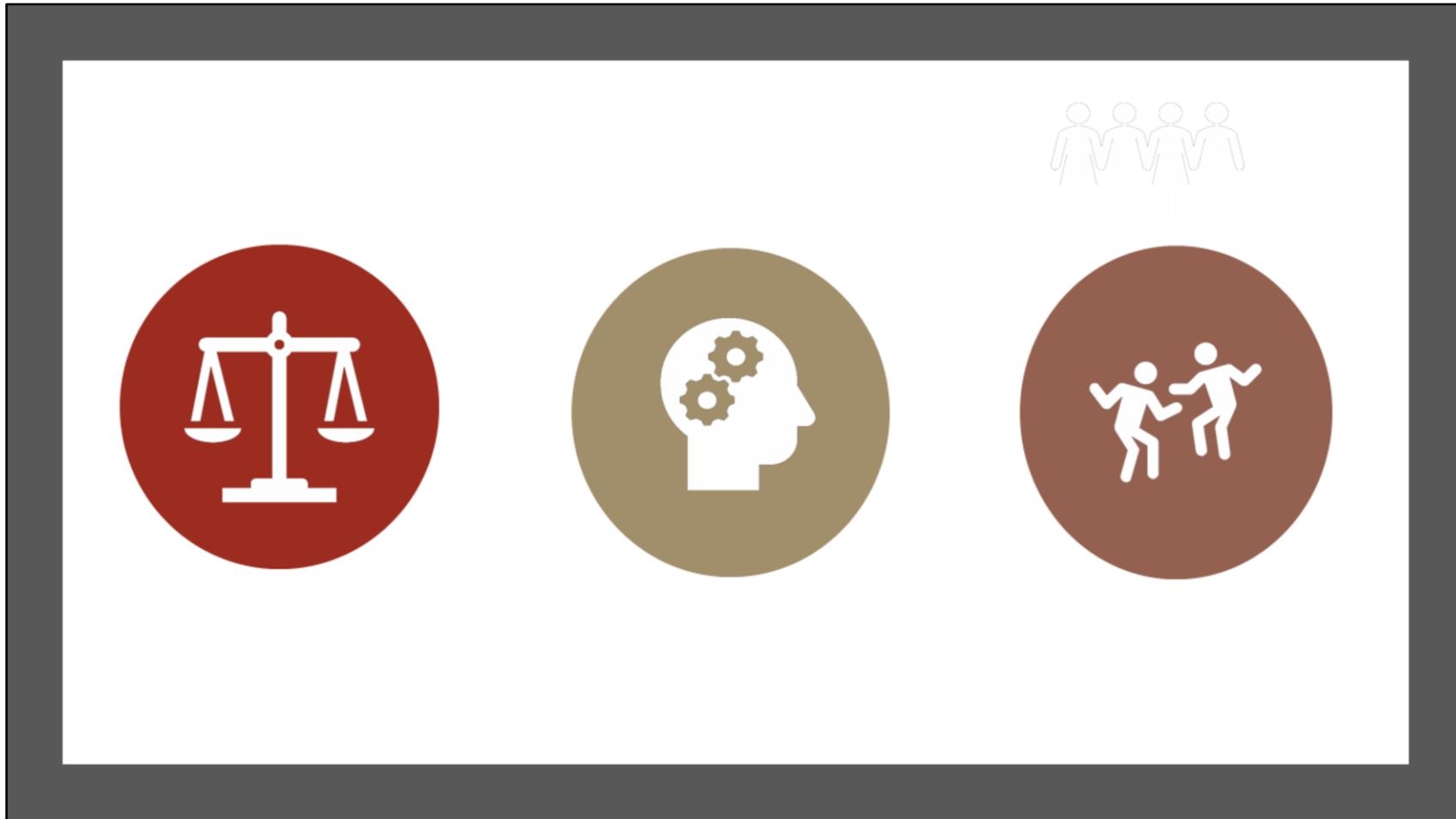
What is known about female offenders is that the **vast majority of young women** entering the criminal justice system have experienced **sexual, physical and drug abuse, and mental illness.**



**To be Discussed**

In this presentation I will be discussing:

The use of **non-profit after-school programs** including their role in decreasing crime rates and their cost-effectiveness, as well as the harms of prison environments including **worsening mental health, increasing gang involvement and removing youth from prosocial connections.**



### Why this Matters

So why does this research matter?

Criminal behaviour is a product of a number of **sociological, psychological and economic disadvantages**.

Young women need positive resources to **repair the underlying issues** that led to their criminality, not be punished for their upbringings.

## *Youth Criminal Justice Act (2002)*



### **Youth Criminal Justice Act**

The Youth Criminal Justice Act is the body of law that applies to youth who are at **least 12 years old and who are under 18 years of age**.

Some have suggested that the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (2002)* be revised to impose harsher sentences.

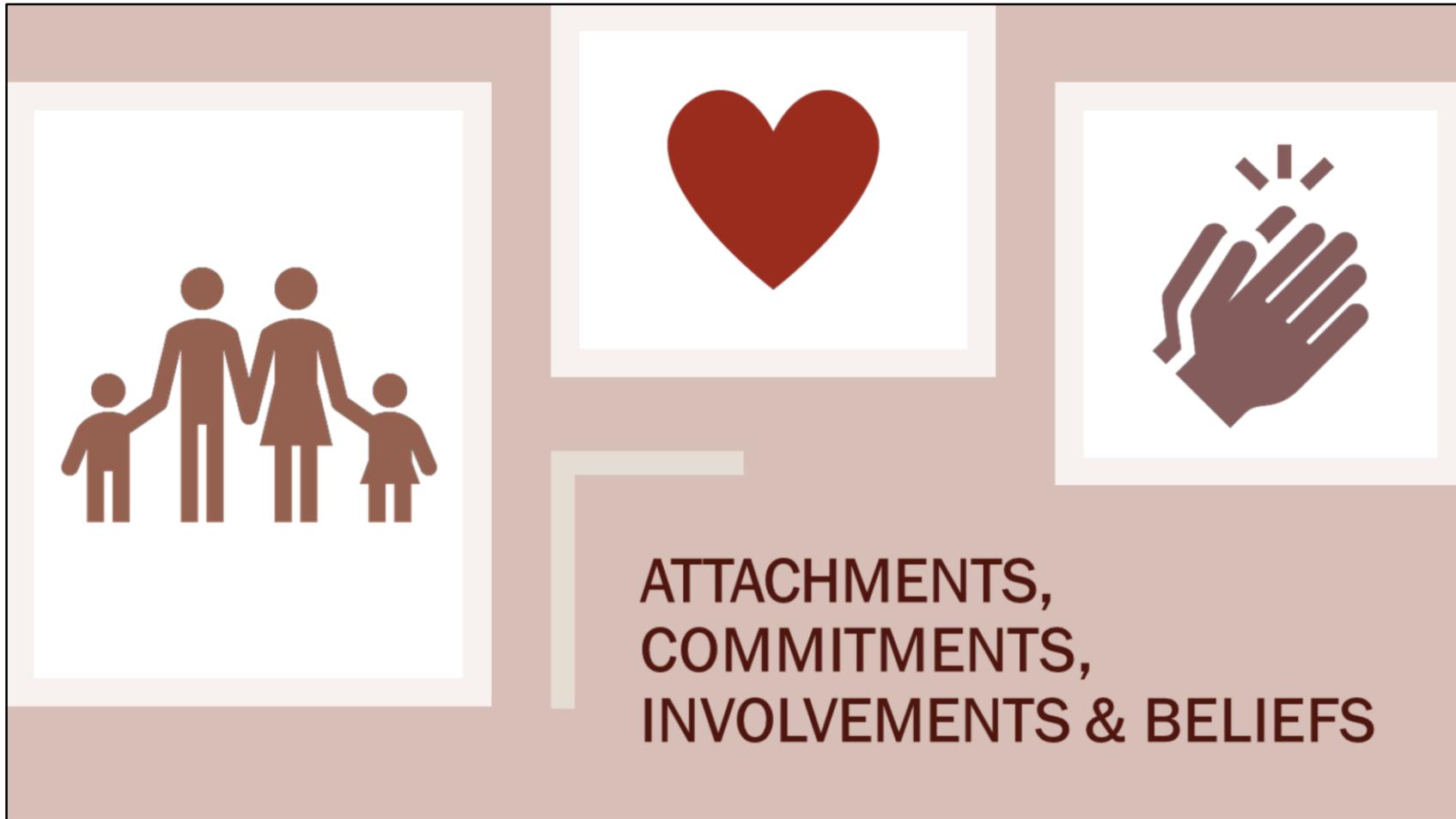
In the following slides, I will argue why revisions of this nature would be unjust.



### **Adverse Backgrounds**

First, children with criminal histories have the **highest rates of childhood abuse and dysfunctional families.**

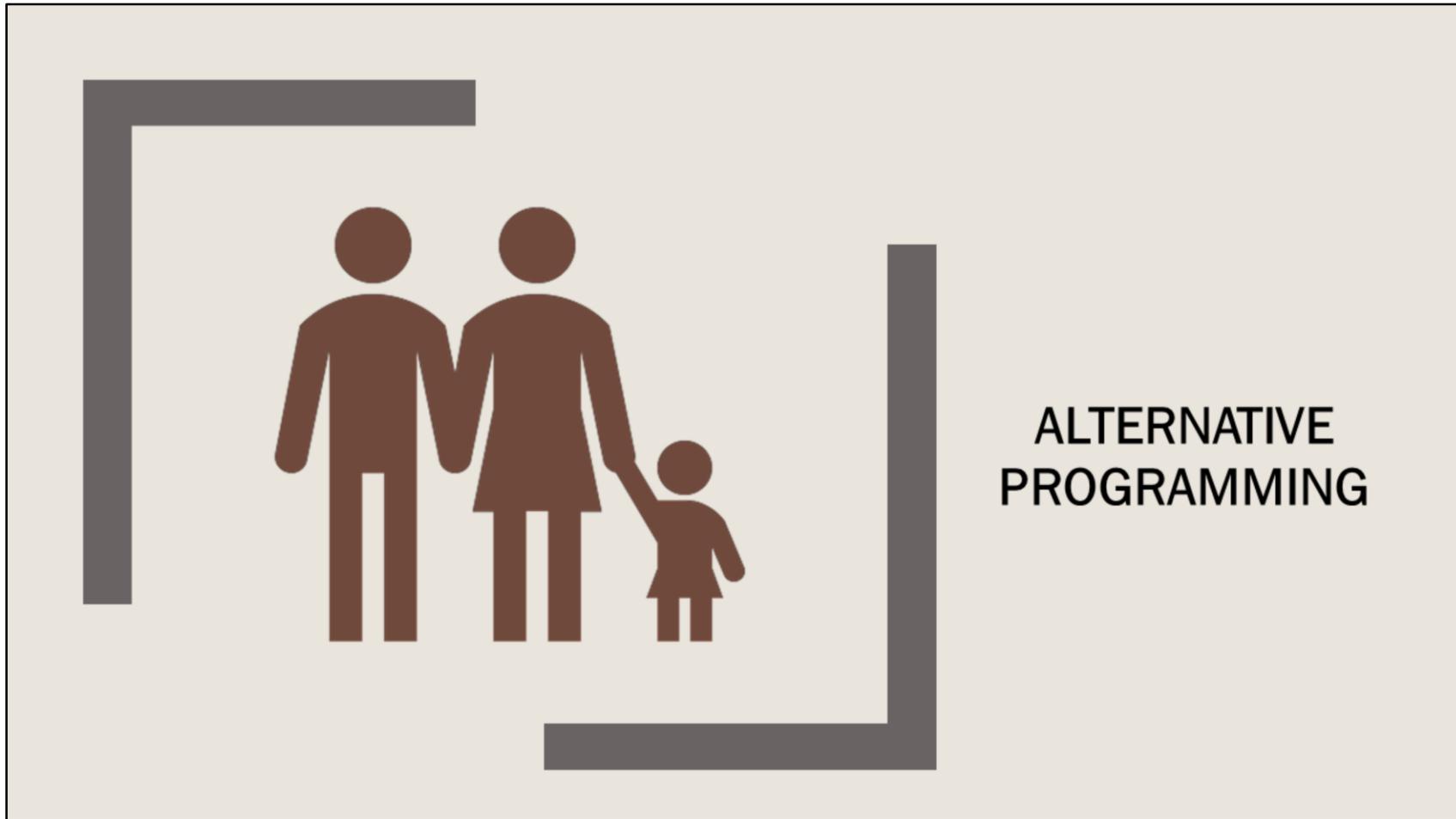
The majority of female youth in the criminal justice system have been **exposed to violence, parent incarceration, foster-care placement, parent substance abuse, sibling arrest, absent fathers and more** (Walrath et al., 2003).



**Social Bonds**

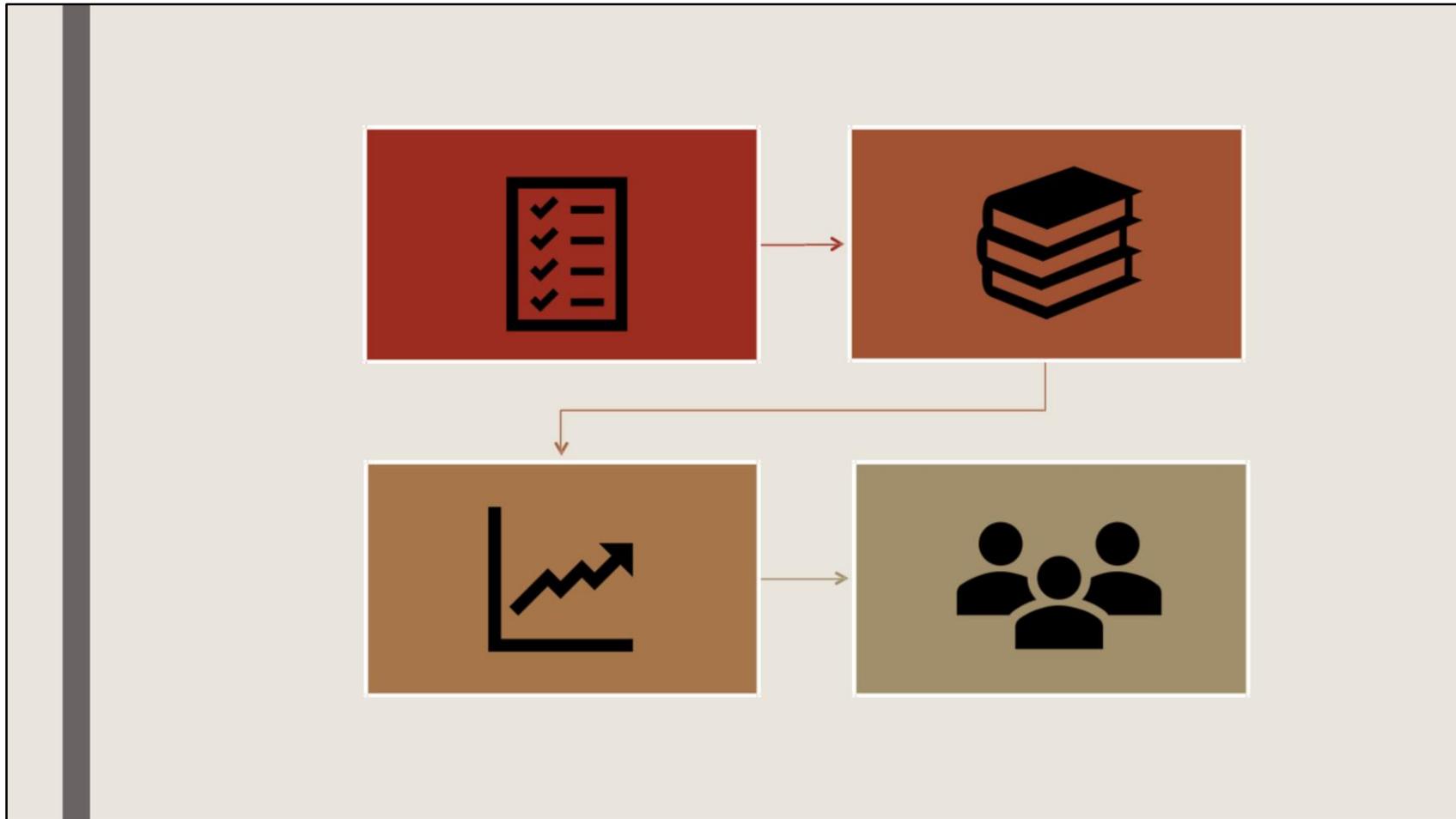
The idea that abusive homes and dysfunctional relationships resulting in criminal behaviour is not new.

For decades, criminologists have discussed the importance of **attachments, commitments, involvements and beliefs** in that **weakness in these areas of life could result in criminality and/or mental illness.**



**Alternative Programming**

As girls in the criminal justice system have been found to have **more dysfunctional families** than boys with high rates of mother-daughter conflict, programs such as the **Big Sisters program** could be useful for young women who lack positive, prosocial role models in their lives.



### **Benefits of Alternative Programming**

Research into the effectiveness of afterschool programming for at-risk youth has shown:

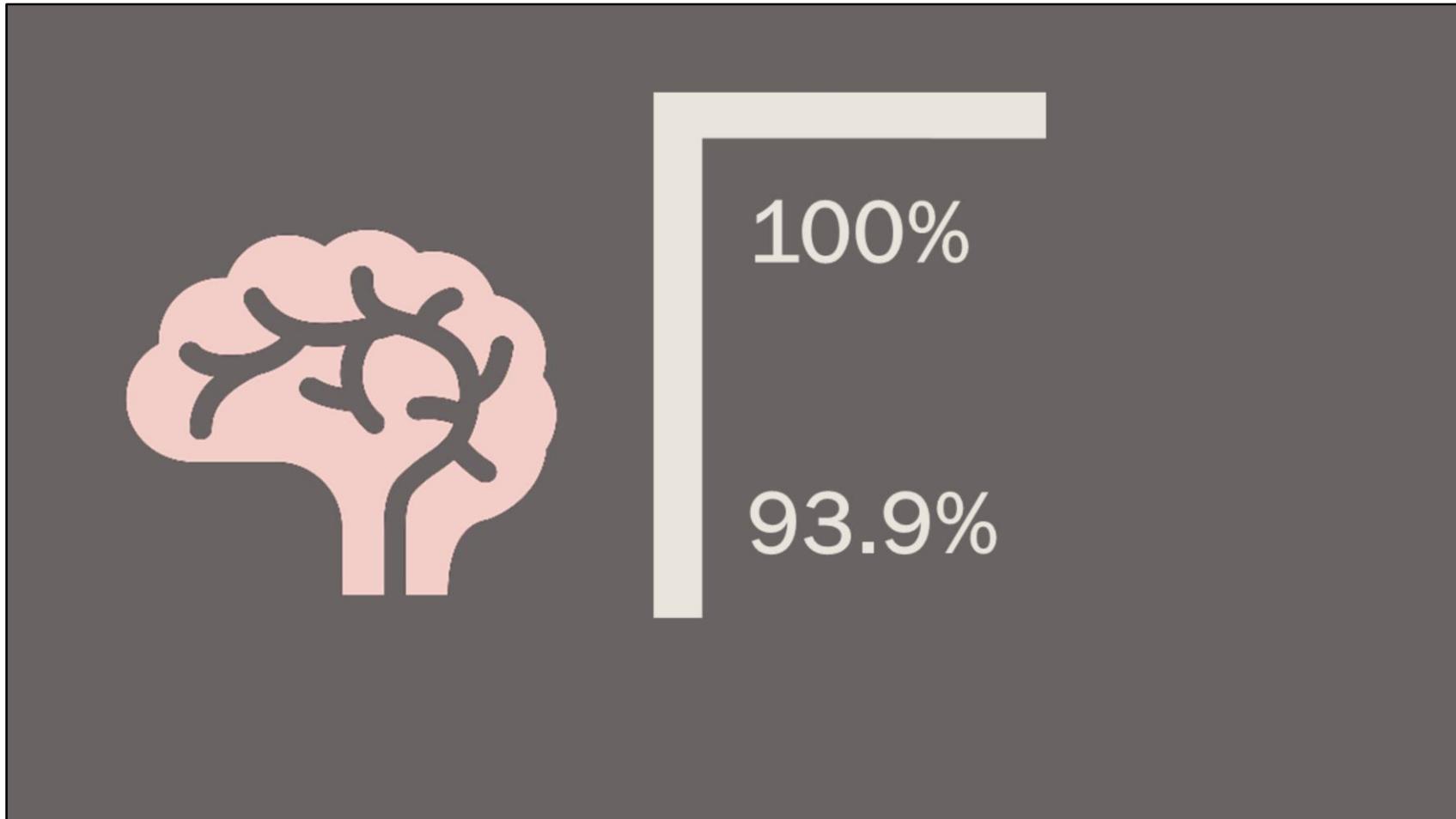
**More protective factors and fewer risk factors upon completion of programs, significant increases in school attendance, higher rates of probation completion, and improved social, family, and relationship support.**



### **Mental Health**

As a result of challenging home lives, incarcerated girls are more likely to receive clinical diagnoses of **major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and disruptive disorders.**

Additionally, girls have significantly higher rates than boys of being **above the caution cutoff for depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.**



### **Alternative Treatments**

In light of these findings, **therapy and counselling for mental health** are likely to be beneficial.

In one British Columbia youth prison it was found that nearly **100% of incarcerated girls met diagnostic criteria for at least one mental disorder**, while approximately **90% met diagnostic criteria for at least two**.



### **Trauma Informed Care**

Trauma-informed care is one type of therapeutic intervention that is aimed to help youth **identify their unmet emotional needs** in ways that are healthy and do not harm others.

Staff are encouraged to **avoid excessive authoritarian interactions** while modelling boundaries and effective use of **communication to express feelings**.



### **Problems with Prisons**

Not only are alternative programming and treatments promising, but the problems with prisons are significant.

Nearly **30% of girls incarcerated in British Columbia have clinically significant levels of suicidal ideation** which is **two to four times greater than the rates of suicidal ideation among youth in the community.**



### **Problems with Prisons**

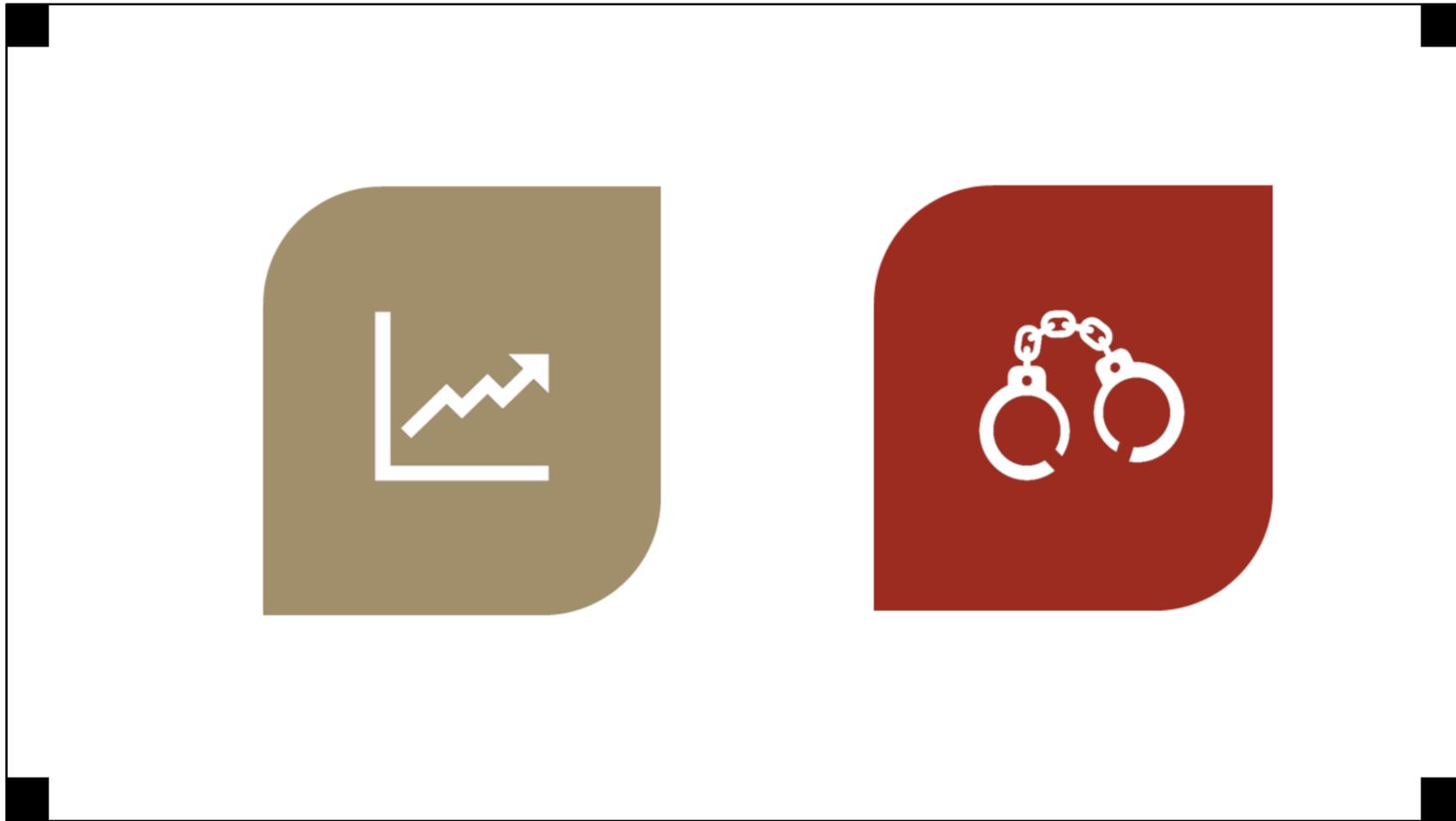
Furthermore, female youth are faced with **poor living conditions**, increased **health issues**, and more **youth-on-youth incidents** as a result. Because of the lack of supportive programs and positive role models, detained girls are seeking relationships by **engaging in gang activities**.



**Prison Gang Involvement**

Seeking security and sense of belonging in gang membership is a consequence of having **dysfunctional, abusive families, absent or uninvolved parents,** and coming from **disadvantage and poverty.**

Young women may turn prison gangs to **fulfil their need for affiliation, achievement, and social support.**



### **Prisons Ineffective in Reducing Crime**

Additionally, research has shown that programs that focus on **deterrence and discipline can have the opposite effect** and lead to an **increase in criminal behaviour**.

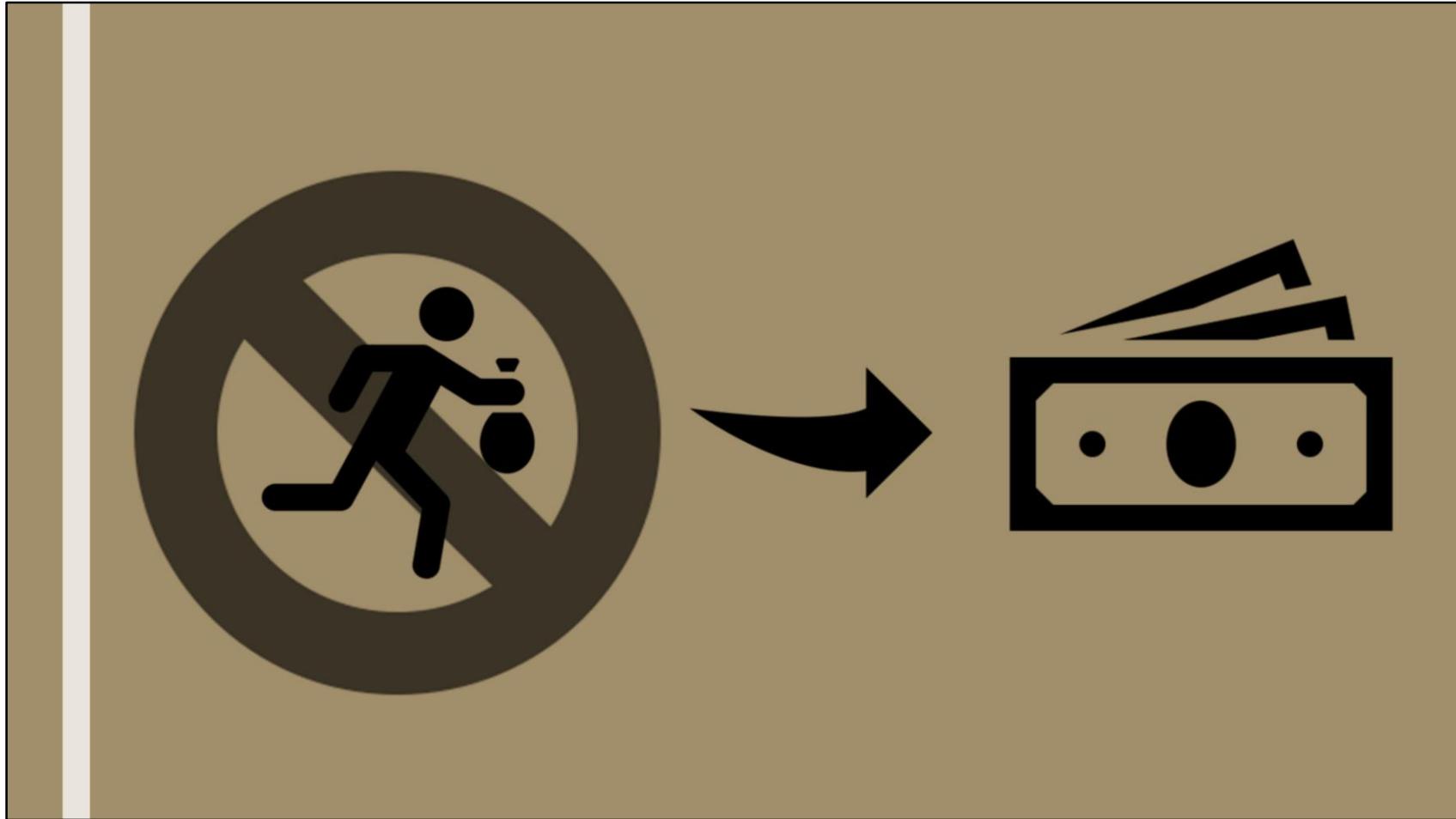
In fact, programs that use **shock tactics** such as 'scared straight' have actually been **linked to increased criminality**.



### **Cost Benefits to Alternative Sentencing**

Not only are there many problems with prisons for female youth, but they are also **extremely expensive**.

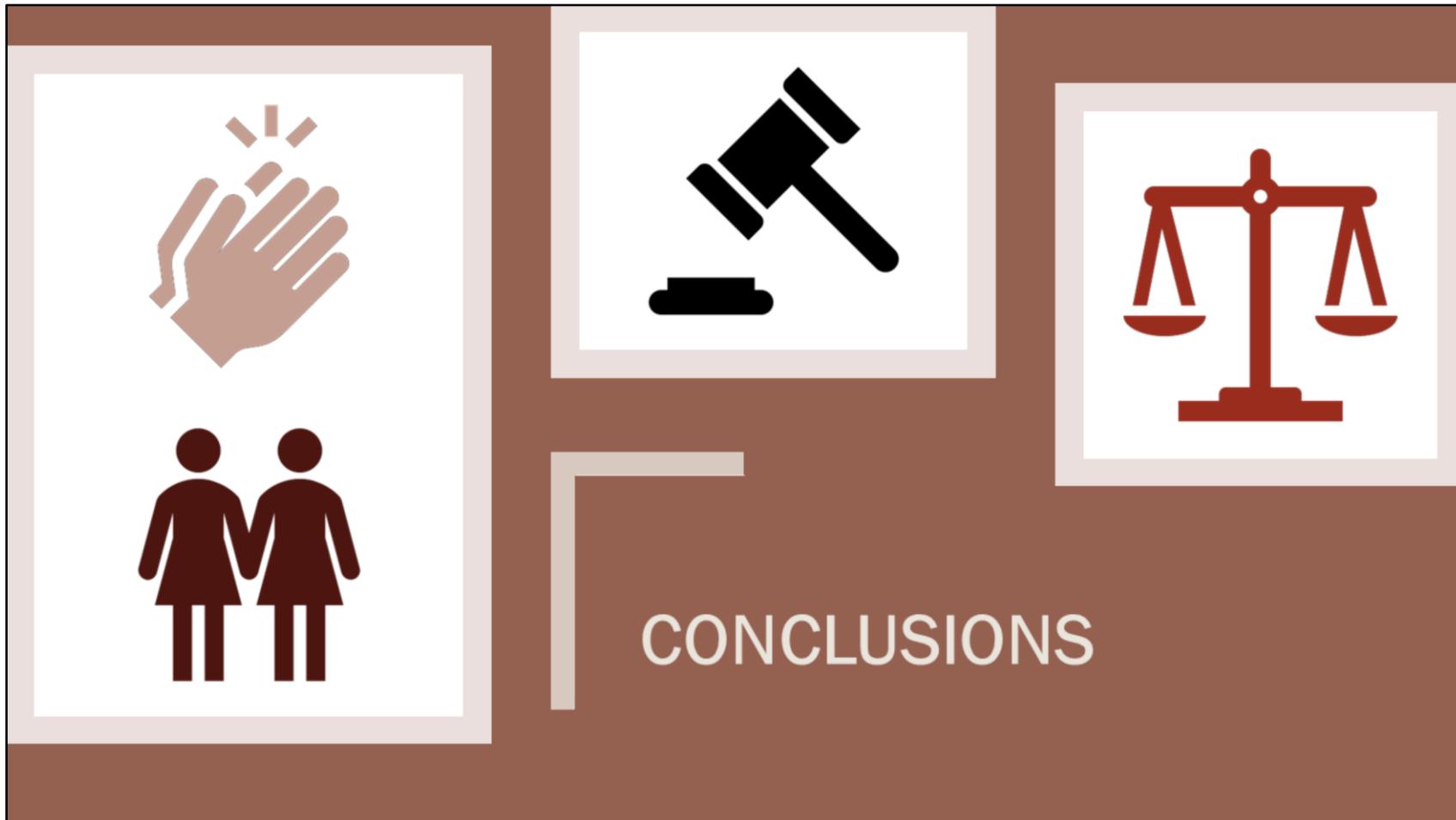
Should a girl continue to commit crime into adulthood, Canadians can expect to pay up to **\$250,000 per year** to incarcerate her in federal prison. However, girls who are active in afterschool programs can actually save money for their communities.



### **Returning Money to Communities**

After school is considered to be a peak time for girls to commit a crime. When girls are involved in afterschool programs however, **money is actually saved in the community from costs avoided due to youth crime.**

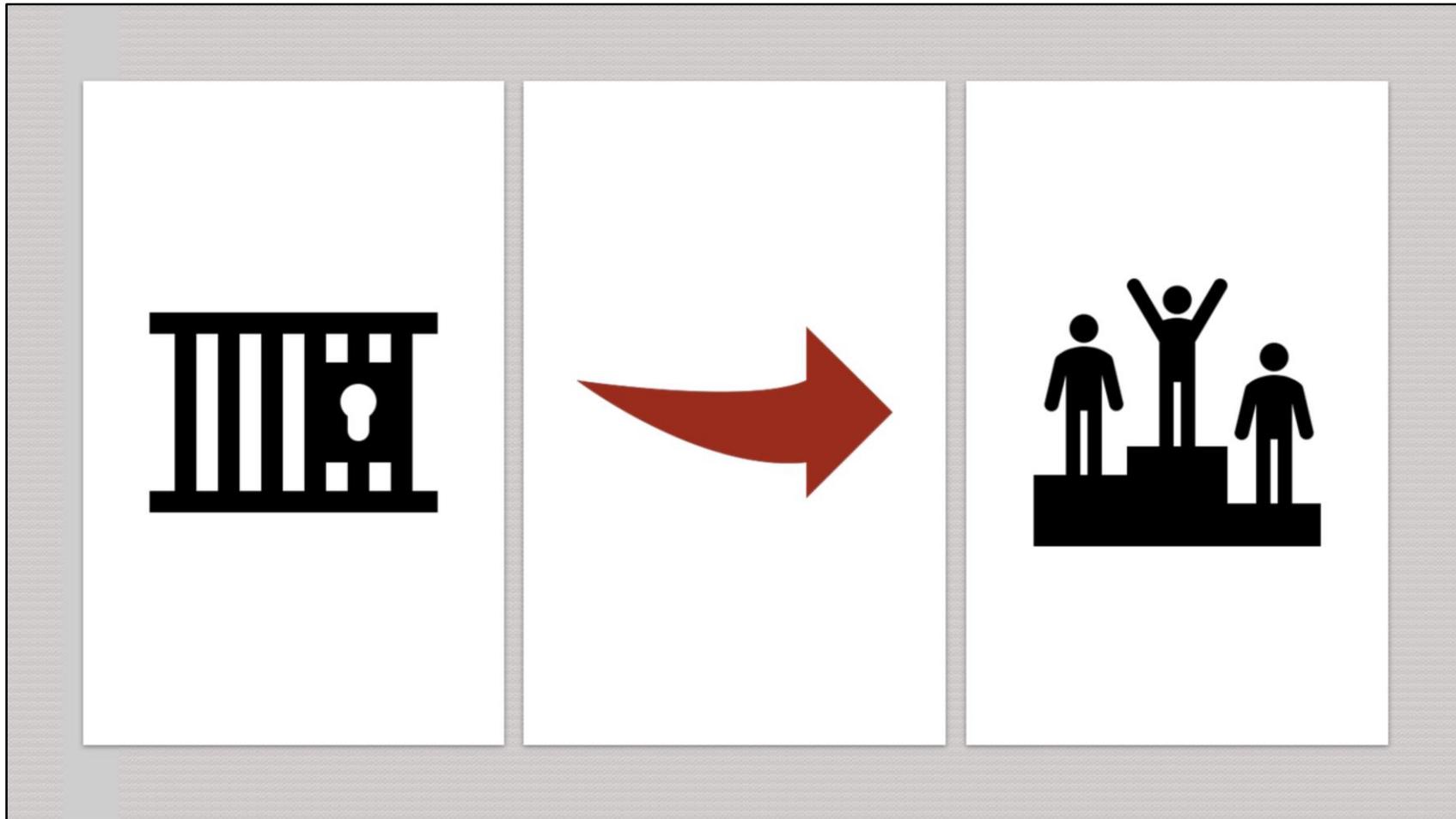
So, not only is alternative programming effective for rehabilitation, but it is also **cost effective and profitable to communities.**



### Conclusions

My research is not to say that there should not be consequences for criminal behaviour. Rather, there needs to be a **balance between safe, rehabilitative environments** and sanctions that will provide logical **consequences**.

Girls in the system need **role models, mentors and therapeutic treatments, along with consequences** that consider their histories.



### Conclusions

Prison sentencing is **increasing female youth's involvement in criminal activity**, is **harmful to inmates' mental health**, and is **expensive** to maintain.

Any revision to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* should involve ways to help female youth move past the criminal justice system, **not keep them there longer**.

Thank you.