

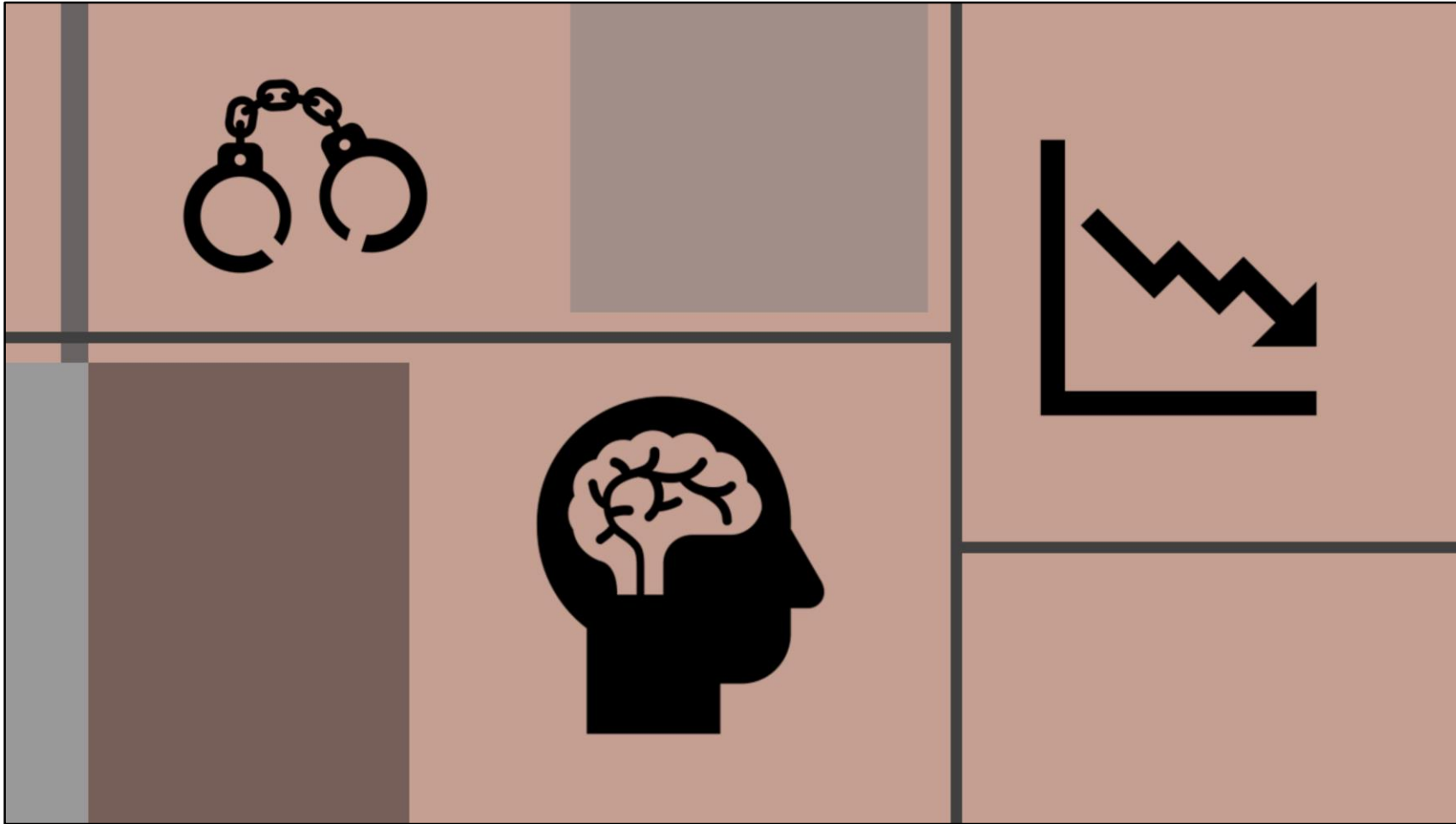
Good evening, my name is Rachelle Younie and I will be presenting my research that focuses on young women and the criminal justice system. I was introduced to this topic during a Female Offenders class that I took as a part of my undergraduate degree. An essay prompt grew into a passion which resulted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

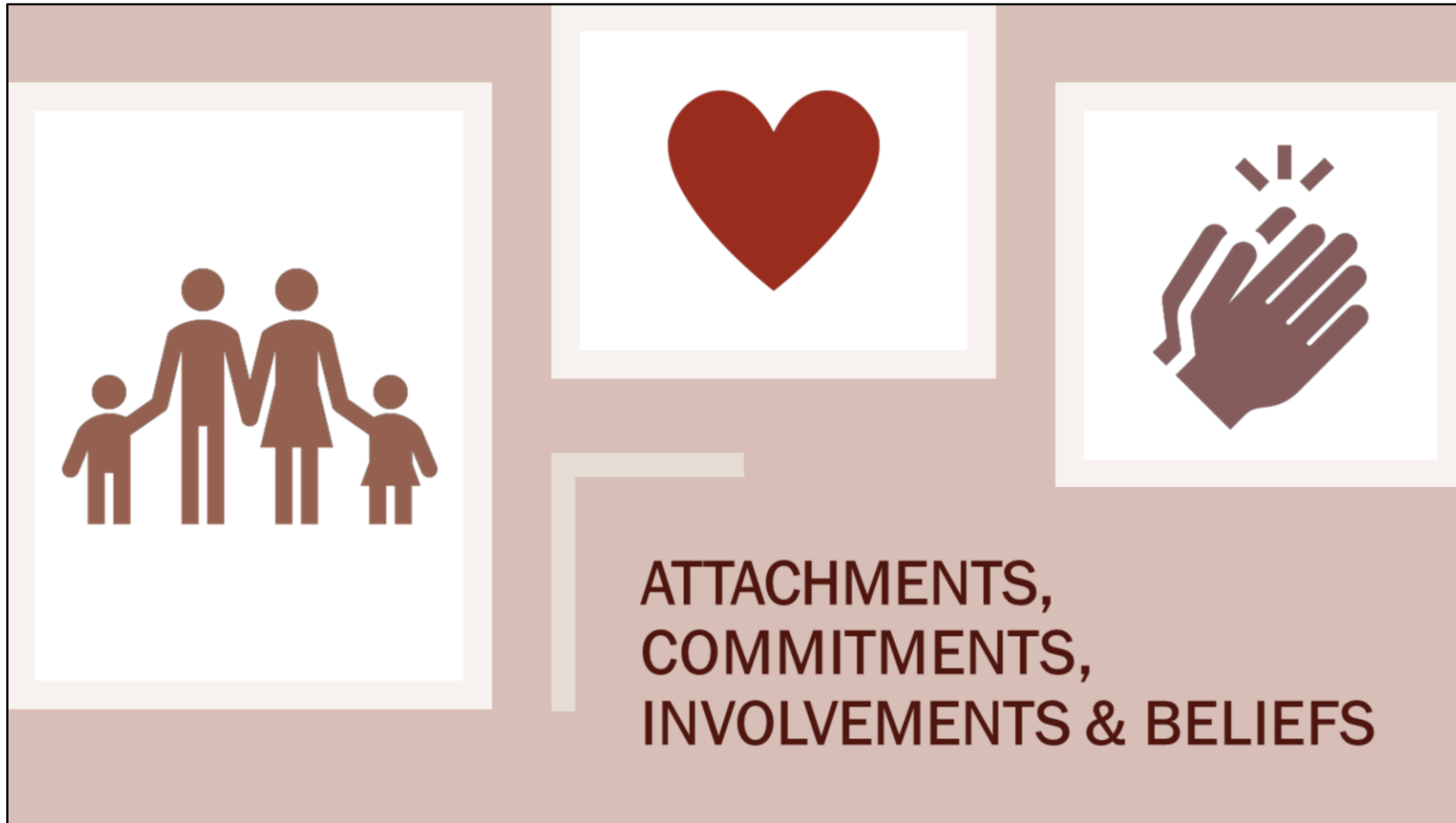
In the following slides, I will argue why revisions of this nature would be unjust.



Adverse Backgrounds

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

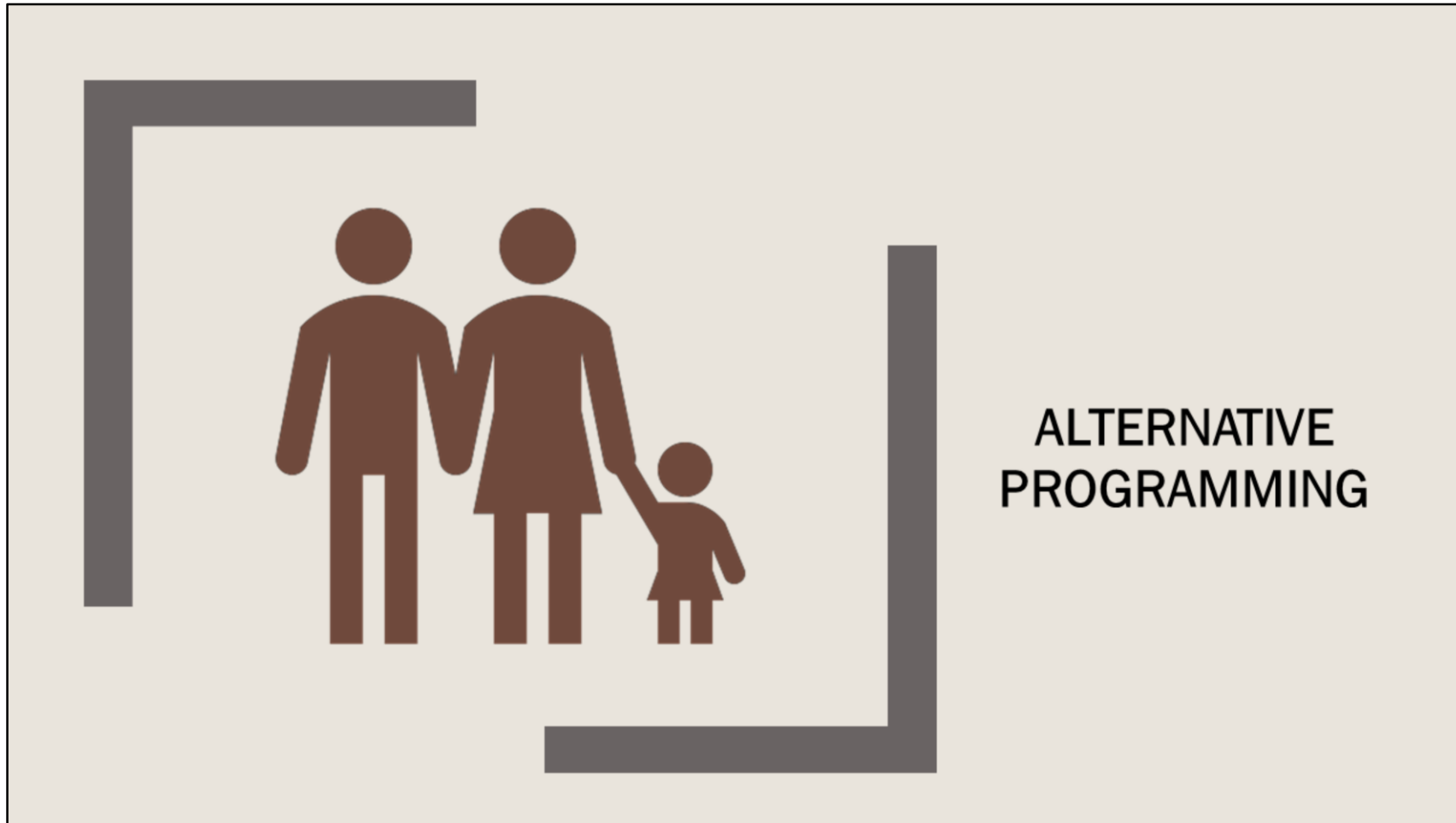
The majority of female youth in the criminal justice system have been **exposed to violence, parent incarceration, foster-care placement, parent substance abuse, sibling arrest, absent fathers and more** (Walrath et al., 2003).



Social Bonds

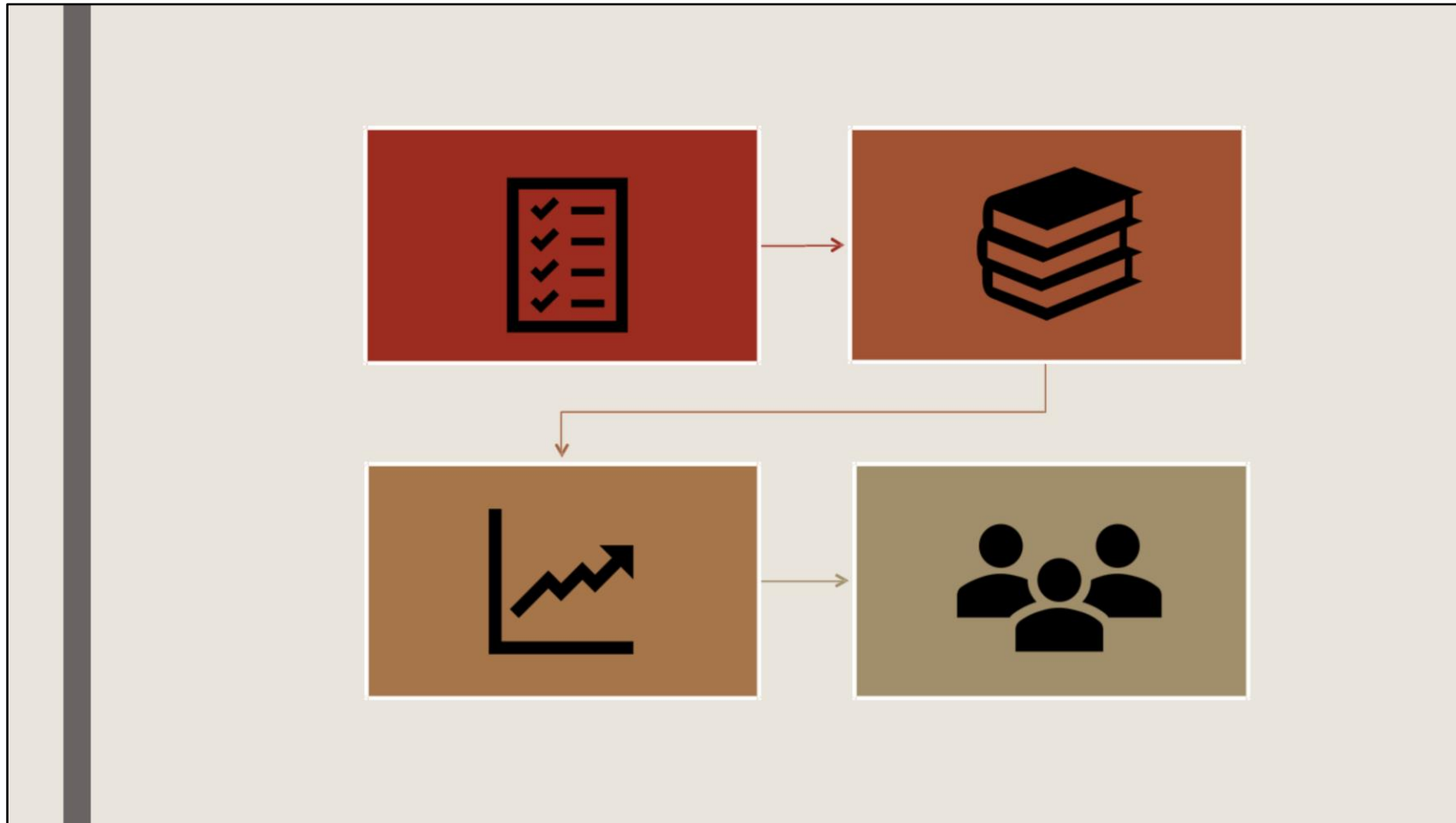
The idea that abusive homes and dysfunctional relationships resulting in criminal behaviour is not new.

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**.

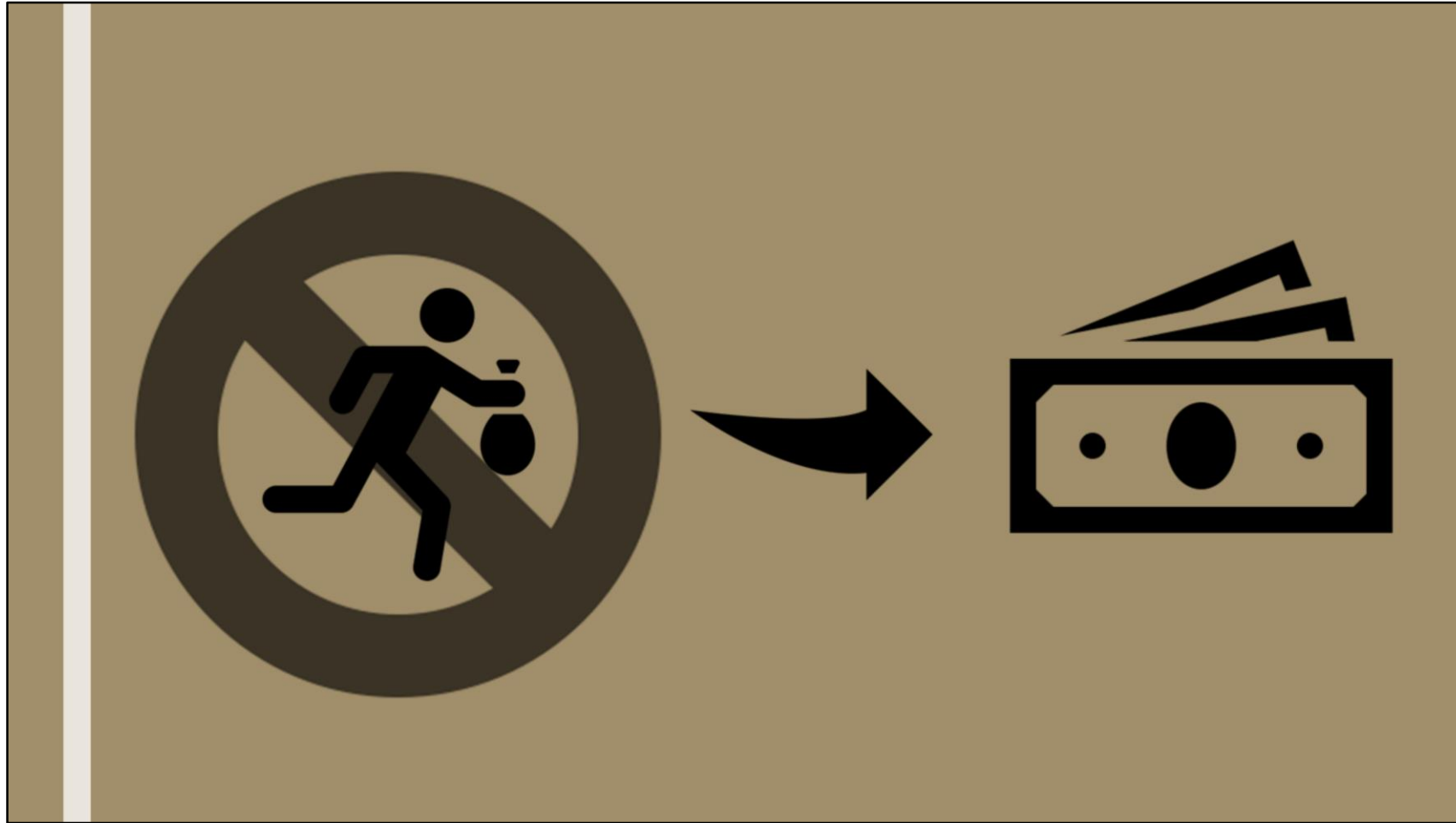
In fact, programs that use **shock tactics** such as 'scared straight' have actually been **linked to increased criminality**.



Cost Benefits to Alternative Sentencing

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

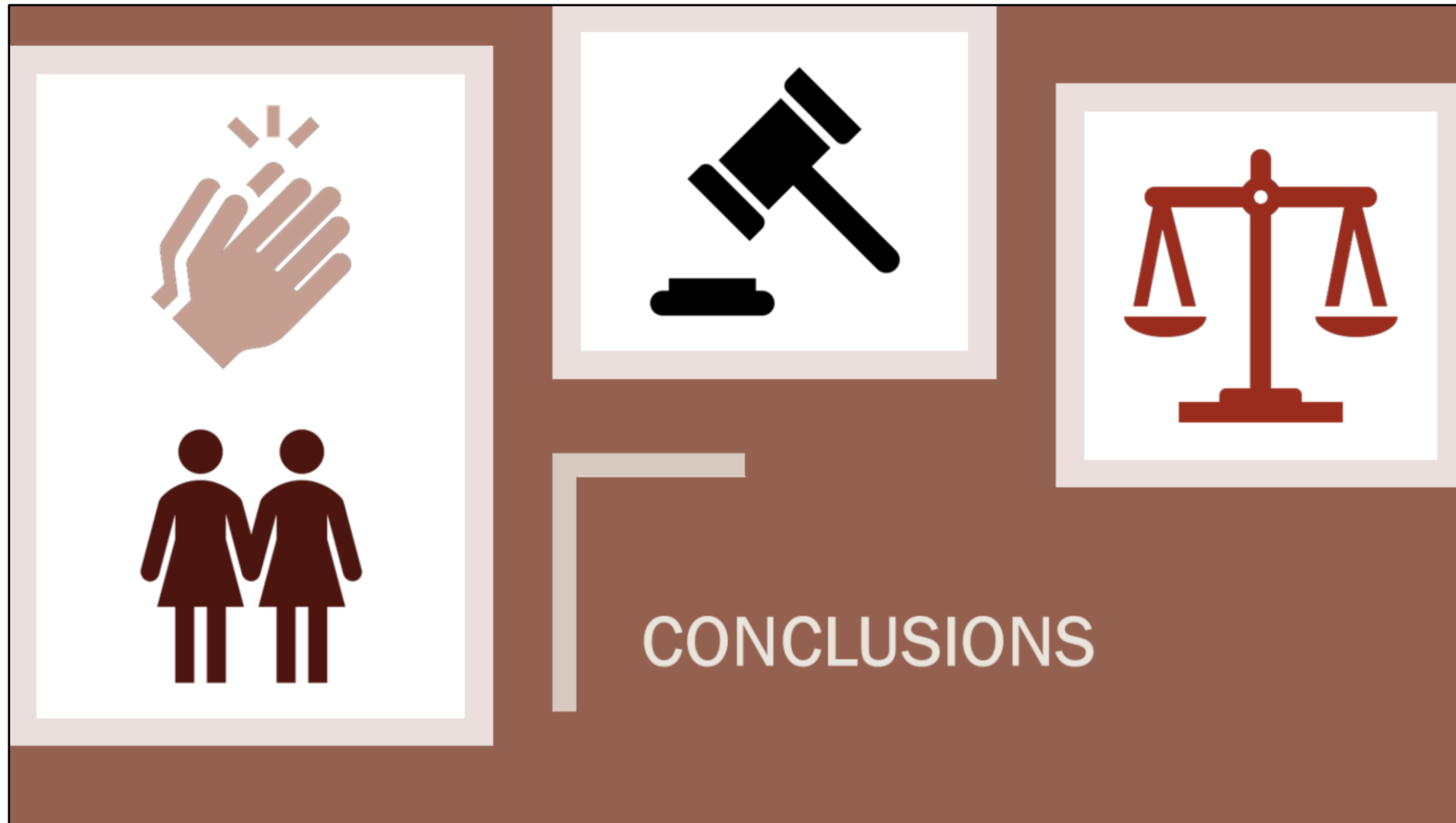
Should a girl continue to commit crime into adulthood, Canadians can expect to pay up to **\$250,000 per year** to incarcerate her in federal prison. However, girls who are active in afterschool programs can actually save money for their communities.



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.**

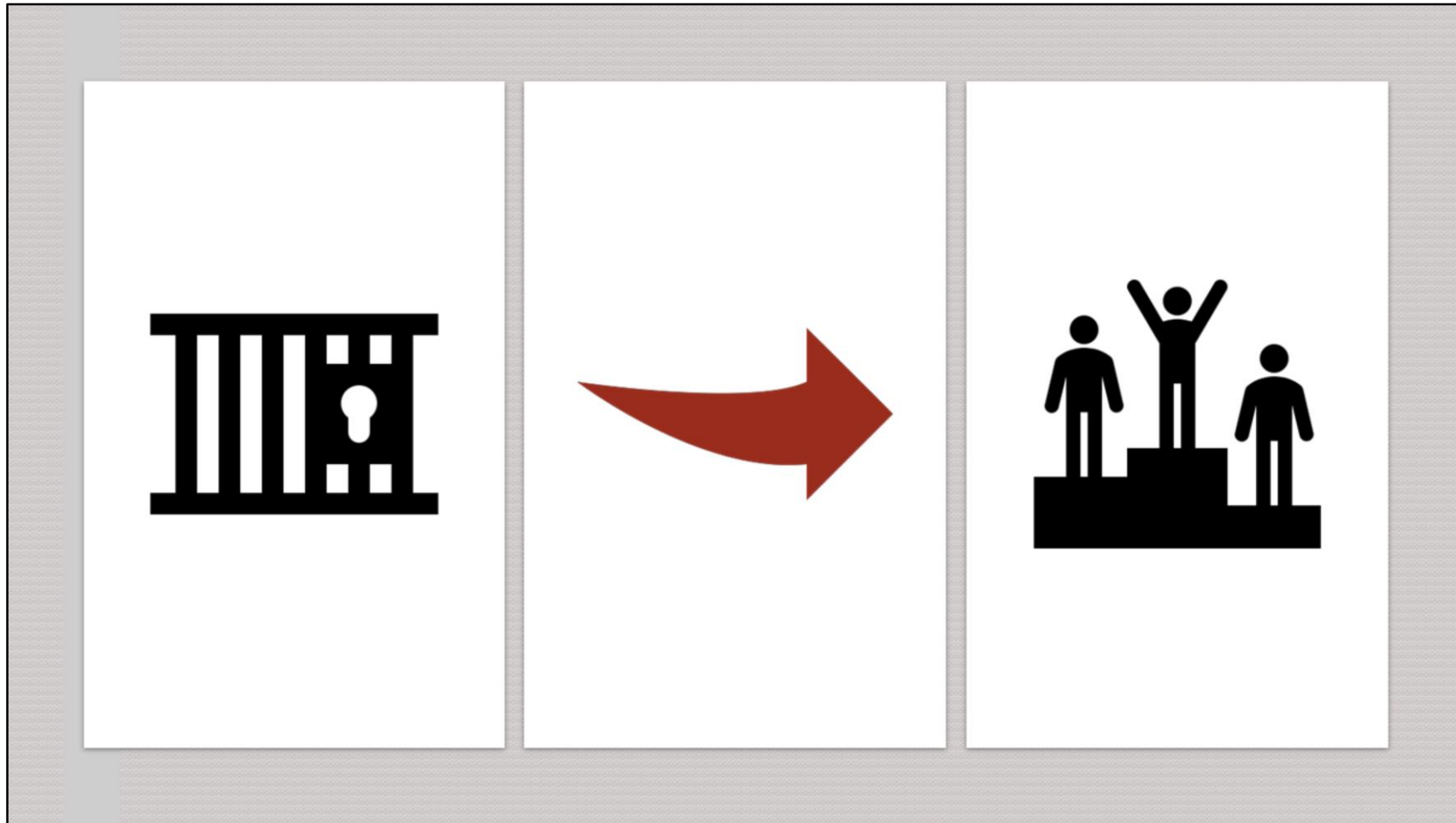
So, not only is alternative programming effective for rehabilitation, but it is also **cost effective and profitable to communities.**



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.