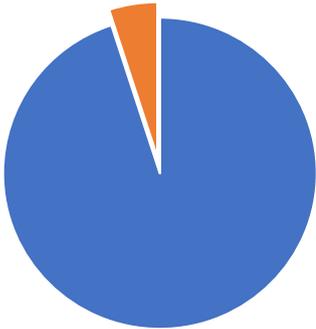


There are now over 2,200 more women in prison than there were 25 years ago.¹

Women represent less than 5% of the prison population in England and Wales.



6,465

prison sentences were given to women in England and Wales in 2018.²

600

pregnant women, on average, are held in prison each year.³

96

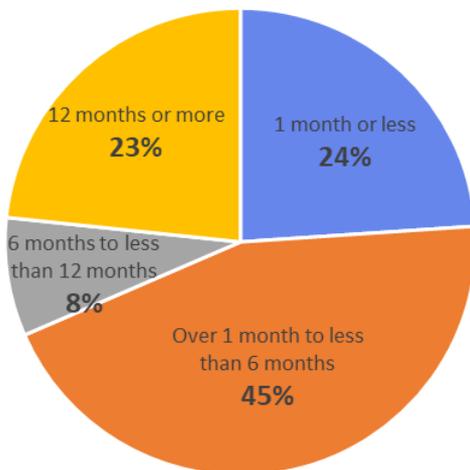
women have died in prison in England and Wales since 2008.⁴

'We have potential - no-one sees that - they just see the crimes, drugs, mental health - they won't see what's behind it'

PRT/User Voice Women's Council member

Women are more likely than men to be serving short prison sentences. In 2018,

77% of prison sentences given to women were for **less than 12 months**.⁵



Transforming Lives

- The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective penal system.
- PRT has a longstanding interest in improving criminal justice outcomes for women. Its Transforming Lives programme aims to reduce the unnecessary imprisonment of women in the UK.

An estimated **17,240** children are affected by maternal imprisonment each year.⁶

48% of women in prison committed their offence to support someone else's drug use, compared to **22%** of men.⁷

82% of women's prison sentences were for non-violent offences, compared to **67%** of men's.⁸

28% of women's offences were financially motivated, compared to **20%** of men's.⁹

"If the government turns its good intentions into action, many thousands of women and families, including victims, will benefit. That work must start immediately."

PRT comment on the Female Offender Strategy, 2018

The government's Female Offender Strategy 2018¹⁰

- Commits to reducing the women's prison population.
- Recognises women's distinct needs and vulnerabilities within the criminal justice system.
- Outlines measures that the Ministry of Justice is taking to achieve cross-government reform.
- Emphasises the importance of early intervention, including liaison and diversion, out of court disposals and a focus on community-based solutions.
- Promotes a whole system approach by local authorities and all UK governments.
- Aims to make custody as decent and effective as possible for women who do need to be there.

'I lost everything, I lost my home, I lost communication with my family, I lost my partner. I lost my job, I lost everything.'

PRT/User Voice Women's Council member

There was a **20%** increase in the number of self-harm incidents in women's prisons in England and Wales, between 2017 and 2018.¹¹

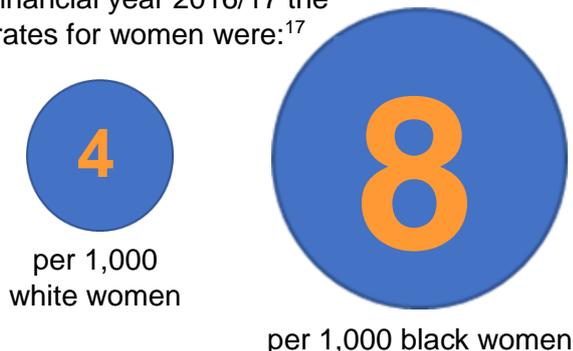
125 prison sentences were given to women, compared to **25** to men, for child truancy between 2008 and 2018.¹²

Nearly **60%** of women in prison who have had an assessment have experienced domestic abuse.¹³ The total figure is likely to be much higher.¹⁴

The rate of self-harm incidents for women in prison is nearly **five times higher** than for men.¹⁵

In 2018 **43%** of all receptions into women's prisons were women on remand. **Less than half** of these resulted in a prison sentence.¹⁶

In the financial year 2016/17 the arrest rates for women were:¹⁷



46% of immediate prison sentences given to women in 2018 were for **theft offences**.¹⁸

Women are more likely than **men** to:

- Be identified as suffering from anxiety and depression in prison, **49%** to **23%**.¹⁹
- Report having attempted suicide at some point in their life, **46%** to **21%**.²⁰
- Need help supporting a drug problem on entry to prison, **39%** to **28%**.²¹
- Say they have a problem with alcohol on arrival to prison, **24%** to **18%**.²²
- Be in prison for their first offence, **22%** to **14%**.²³

“Simply put, locking women up for a few months many miles from home leads only to increased alienation, increased problems for families and carers, and, perhaps most damagingly, an increased likelihood of reoffending and recall. They should not be in prison to begin with.”

Kate Green MP ²⁴

Abuse and trauma – Most women in prison have been victims of much more serious offences than those they are accused of committing.

- There are strong links between women’s offending behaviour and their experience of domestic abuse both physical and emotional, coercive control and sexual abuse.²⁵ There is no effective defence for women driven to offend as a result of abuse.²⁶
- 53% of women in prison report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child, compared to 27% of men.²⁷ This is likely to be an underestimate.
- Research by the Disabilities Trust with 173 women at HMP Drake Hall found 64% had a history indicative of brain injury and for most this was caused by domestic violence.²⁸ Women with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable.²⁹
- Experience of abuse and trauma can lead to problematic substance use, either as a result of coercion or as a coping mechanism to deal with trauma. A woman’s situation is often worsened by poverty, substance dependency or mental ill health.³⁰
- Lack of funding for services in the community means that women cannot access support and treatment, increasing their chances of coming into contact with the police and criminal justice system.
- A lack of training for those involved at all stages of the criminal justice system, can mean opportunities are missed to identify serious mental health issues at early stages such as arrest, prosecution and sentencing.

For further information on this please read:



- [There's a reason we're in trouble - Domestic abuse as a driver to women's offending](#)
- [Leading Change: the role of local authorities in supporting women with multiple needs](#)
- [Out of the Shadows: Women with learning disabilities in contact with or on the edges of the criminal justice system](#)

Race and ethnicity - Asian women are **26%** more likely to be arrested than white women. Black women are **25%** more likely than white women to receive a custodial sentence at crown court if convicted.³¹

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women comprise 11.9% of the women’s population in England and Wales, but 20% of the snapshot women’s prison population.³²
- Black women are 29% more likely to be remanded in prison at crown court than white women.³³
- BAME women face racial and religious discrimination from staff and other prisoners, and report feeling less safe in prison.³⁴
- Foreign national women make up 8% of the women’s population in England and Wales and over 12% of the women received into prison each year.³⁵ Some foreign national women are known to have been coerced or trafficked into offending.³⁶
- Foreign national women in prison experience particular vulnerabilities, including insecure immigration status, and often report feeling isolated, unsafe and confused about the criminal justice process.

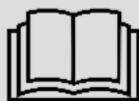
For further information on this please read:



- [Still no way out: Foreign national women and trafficked women in the criminal justice system](#)
- [Counted Out: Black, Asian and minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system](#)

Mothers in prison - on 31 December 2017 there were **93** pregnant women in prison.³⁷

- Women in prison are far more likely than men to be primary carers of children. A Ministry of Justice survey found that around 60% of women compared with about 45% of men in prison had children.³⁸ Whether or not women have dependent children is still not recorded or routinely asked by criminal justice agencies.
- A fifth of mothers in prison are lone parents before their imprisonment.³⁹
- Only 9% of children are cared for by their father when their mother goes to prison.⁴⁰ In contrast research has found that nearly three-quarters of children live with their mother when their father is imprisoned.⁴¹
- Research indicates that children who have experienced maternal imprisonment are at greater risk of unemployment, drug use, alcoholism and coming into contact themselves with the criminal justice system in later life.⁴²
- The impact on mothers of being imprisoned is significant, increasing the levels of distress and exacerbating any existing ill-health.⁴³
- The UN Bangkok Rules specify that non-custodial sentences are preferable for pregnant women and those with dependent children, but the law and sentencing guidance are inconsistently applied.⁴⁴
- The 2019 Farmer review for women made helpful recommendations to improve outcomes for children whose mothers are in contact with the criminal justice system.⁴⁵



For further information on this please read:

- [What about me? The impact on children when mothers are involved in the criminal justice system](#)

Women on remand - In 2018, **43%** of women entering prison did so on remand.⁴⁶

- In 2018, 63% of women remanded into prison by the magistrates' courts and 38% remanded by the crown courts did not go on to receive an immediate custodial sentence.⁴⁷
- As a snapshot 13% of women in prison, compared to 10% of men, are being held on remand.⁴⁸
- Almost 9 in 10 women on remand are low to medium risk of serious harm.⁴⁹
- 14% of self-harm incidents by women in prison in 2018 were committed by those held on remand.⁵⁰

Women recalled to prison - make up around **8%** of women in prison.⁵¹

- The Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 introduced a one-year mandatory post-custody supervision period for all those sentenced to less than 12 months in prison.
- As women mostly receive short prison sentences, they have been disproportionately affected by this change.
- In 2018, there were 1,924 recalls of women to custody, there has been a year-on-year increase in the number of recalls. There were 1,155 recalls in 2015, 1,378 in 2016 and 1,651 in 2017.⁵²
- Between 2016 and 2018 there was a 44% increase in the number of recalls of women to prison, for those who had been sentenced to less than 12 months.⁵³

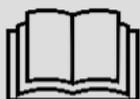


For further information on this please read:

- [Broken Trust: The rising numbers of women recalled to prison](#)

Accommodation and employment for women on release - In the financial year 2017/18, official data suggests **55.8%** of women were released from prison with settled accommodation.⁵⁴

- A 2018 Independent Monitoring Board report on HMP and YOI Bronzefield found that 40-50% of women were discharged with no fixed abode.⁵⁵
- Lack of accommodation increases the risk of reoffending and jeopardises women's ability to engage in employment, training and support services and to care for their children.
- Many women lose their homes and possessions as a result of imprisonment. Women who are sent to prison continue to be considered 'intentionally homeless' in some local authorities. Others are deemed ineligible for housing or cut off from Housing Benefit and evicted for rent arrears.⁵⁶
- Employment outcomes for women following short prison sentences are worse than for men. 9.4% of women released from a local prison have a positive employment outcome compared to 26.2% of men.⁵⁷
- 50% of women who have been involved in the criminal justice system, including conviction, caution or prison sentence, are claiming out-of-work benefits two years later, compared to 35% of men.⁵⁸



For further information on this please read:

- [Home Truths: Housing for women in the criminal justice system](#)
- [Working it out: Employment for women offenders](#)

“The commitment in the Female Offender Strategy to reduce the use of short sentences for women by taking a more preventive, community-based approach represents an opportunity to do something radical in seeking to shrink the prison population.”

Justice Committee, 2019 ⁵⁹

Impact of imprisonment on women - The average distance a woman is held from her home is **64 miles**.⁶⁰

- Women are imprisoned further from home than men and receive fewer visits, limiting their capacity to maintain relationships and family contact. Prisoners who receive visits from family members are 39% less likely to reoffend than those who do not.⁶¹
- The overall reoffending rate for women in 2016 averaged 23%,⁶² yet the reoffending rate for women sentenced to less than 12 months was much higher at 70.7%.⁶³
- Women are much more likely than men to self-harm whilst in prison. In 2018, women comprised 19% of all self-harm incidents in England and Wales despite accounting for only 5% of the prison population.⁶⁴
- Research on the impact of long-term imprisonment found that women reported an acutely more painful experience than men. This was linked to separation from their children and family, the loss of relationships, experiences of abuse and trauma in pre-prison life, the strain on their mental health, and the lack of control, privacy and trust inside prison.⁶⁵

“The exorbitant costs of prison are sucking up resources that could be used for community alternatives that work.”

Dr Kate Paradine, CEO of Women in Prison ⁶⁶

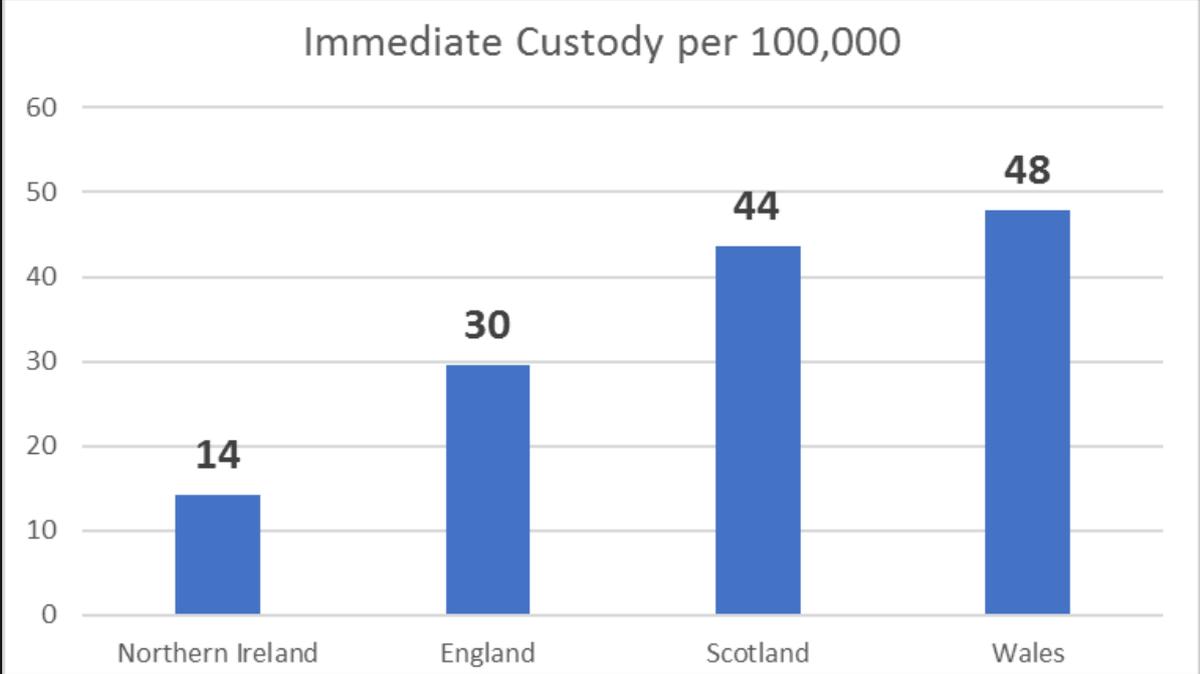
Community solutions- Across England and Wales, a **10%** reduction in women’s imprisonment could save **£9.5-14.7million**.⁶⁷

- Out of court disposals can offer a simple, swift and proportionate response to women’s minor offending. The proportion of women dealt with by out of court disposals is small and decreasing. 52,336 cautions were given to women in 2008 and only 13,862 in 2018, a 74% decrease over 10 years.⁶⁸
- The use of suspended sentences for women in England and Wales was steadily increasing until 2016, when it started decreasing. There has been a 15% decrease in the use of suspended sentences since 2016.⁶⁹
- The use of community sentences decreased by 43% from 2010 to 2018.⁷⁰ This is disappointing given that they allow women to maintain community ties, employment and accommodation, whilst reducing the disruption to their families and children.
- Academic research has shown that 55.8% of women released from prison reoffend within a year compared to 26% of those sentenced to a community order.⁷¹
- Women’s community centres can provide effective support programmes for those at risk of offending and play a vital role in reducing women’s reoffending. They can provide safe, non-stigmatising settings for women to address issues that can drive their offending such as problematic substance use or accessing support with abusive relationships.⁷²
- Indicative research on Greater Manchester estimates that over £6 is saved for every £1 spent on the Together Women Project women’s centre.⁷³
- Women’s centres offer a holistic approach to women’s resettlement, providing a wraparound service. They can also support women who have had contact with the criminal justice system to move away from offending.
- The Restorative Justice Council recommends that more women who offend should be offered a chance to take part in appropriate restorative justice programmes and these should be delivered by women’s centres.⁷⁴

“...Despite this recent evidence on the effectiveness of Women’s Centres, their future remains uncertain – not helped by commissioning and contracting arrangements that fall foul of basic market stewardship principles.”

The Centre for Social Justice, 2018⁷⁵

Rate of immediate custody- for women per 100,000 of the population.⁷⁶



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