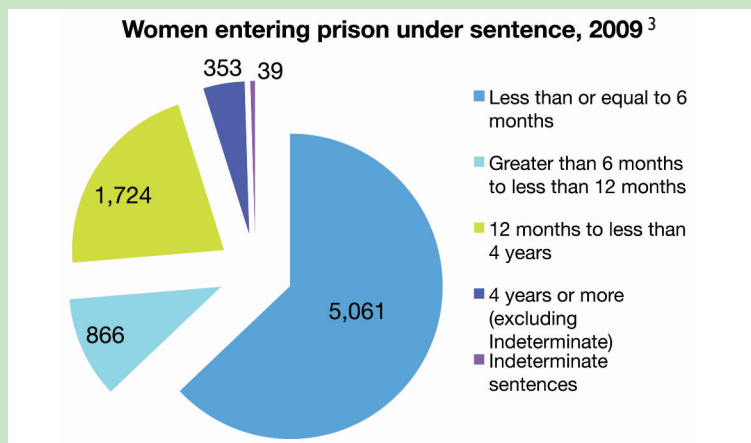


# WOMEN IN PRISON

## August 2010

On 6 August 2010 the number of women in prison in England and Wales stood at 4,230.<sup>1</sup> In the last decade the women's prison population has gone up by 33%. In 1995 the mid-year female prison population was 1,979. In 2000 it stood at 3,355 and in 2007 it was 4,283.

A total of 11,044 women were received into prison in 2009.<sup>2</sup>



Most women serve very short sentences. In 2009 61% were sentenced to custody for six months or less.<sup>4</sup>

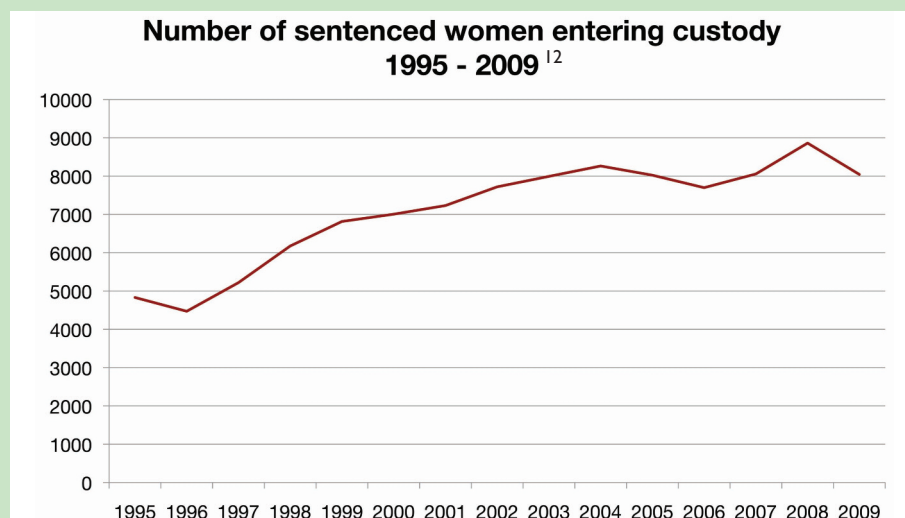
27% of women in prison had no previous convictions – more than double the figure for men.<sup>5</sup>

Over half of women entering custody each year do so on remand.<sup>6</sup> These women spend an average of four to six weeks in prison and nearly 60% do not go on to receive a custodial sentence.<sup>7</sup>

On 30 June 2010 there were 786 women on remand, 18% of the female prison population.<sup>8</sup>

In 2009, 1,052 women entered prison for breaching a court order. This represents 13% of all women entering prison under an immediate custodial sentence.<sup>9</sup>

64.3% of women released from prison in 2004 were reconvicted within two years of release.<sup>10</sup> This compares to fewer than four out of ten (38%) ten years ago.<sup>11</sup>



1. NOMS, Prison Population and Accommodation Briefing for 6 August 2010

2. Ministry of Justice (2010) Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2009, London: The Stationery Office 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid. 5. Ibid. 6. Ibid.

7. Department of Health (2009) The Bradley Report, Lord Bradley's report on people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system, London: Department of Health 8. Ministry of Justice (2010) Population in Custody, England and Wales, June 2010, London: Ministry of Justice

9. Ministry of Justice (2010) Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2009, London: The Stationery Office

10. Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Reoffending of adults: results from the 2004 cohort

11. Home Office (2003) Offender Management Caseload Statistics, London: The Stationery Office

12. Ministry of Justice (2010) Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2009, London: The Stationery Office

**At the end of June 2010 there were 774 foreign national women in prison, 18% of the female population.<sup>13</sup>**

**63% of women are in prison for non-violent offences, compared with 45% of men.<sup>14</sup>** At the end of June 2010 the largest group, 26%, were held for offences of violence against the person.<sup>15</sup>

**More women were sent to prison in 2007 for shoplifting offences than any other crime.** They accounted for 26% of all women sentenced to immediate custody in 2007.<sup>16</sup>

**28% of women offenders' crimes were financially motivated, compared to 20% of men.<sup>17</sup>**

**Breach of license or of a community penalty comprised 60% of offences within the 'other offences' category received for women, and 42% for men.<sup>18</sup>**

**Most of the rise in the female prison population can be explained by a significant increase in the severity of sentences.** In 1996, 10% of women convicted of an indictable offence were sent to prison, in 2006 15% were.<sup>19</sup>

**There are 14 women's prisons in England and none in Wales.** Women represent 5% of the overall prison population.<sup>20</sup>

**The government's strategy for diverting women away from crime made a commitment to reduce the women's prison estate by 300 places by March 2011 and 400 places by March 2012.<sup>21</sup>**

**The average distance adult women in prison were held from their home or committal court address is 57 miles.** In 2007, around 800 women were held over 100 miles away.<sup>22</sup>

**A University of Oxford report on the health of 500 women prisoners, showed that: 'women in custody are five times from**

**likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population, with 78% exhibiting some level of psychological disturbance when measured on reception to prison, compared with a figure of 15% for the general adult female population'. 58% of women had used drugs daily in the six months before prison and 75% of women prisoners had taken an illicit drug in those six months. Crack cocaine, heroine, cannabis and benzodiazepines were the most widely used drugs... The Oxford researchers also found that women coming into prison had very poor physical, psychological and social health, worse than that of women in social class V, the group within the general population who have the poorest health.<sup>23</sup>**

**Of all the women who are sent to prison, 37% say they have attempted suicide at some time in their life.<sup>24</sup>**

**There were 55 self-inflicted deaths of women prisoners between 2002 and 2009.<sup>25</sup>**

**In 2008, there were 24,686 recorded incidents of self-harm – 11,747 for men and 12,938 for women.<sup>26</sup>**

**Nearly 80% of IPP sentences for women surveyed by the Chief Inspectors of Prisons and Probation were for offences of arson, which is often an indicator of serious mental illness or self-harm.<sup>27</sup>**

**As at 19 January 2010 there were 155 women serving IPP sentences, under 3% of the total IPP population.<sup>28</sup>**

**One in four women in prison has spent time in local authority care as a child.** Nearly 40% of women in prison left school before the age of 16 years, almost one in ten were aged 13 or younger.<sup>29</sup>

**Over half the women in prison say they have suffered domestic violence and one in three has experienced sexual abuse.<sup>30</sup>**

**Women prisoners are subject to higher rates**

13. Ministry of Justice (2010) Population in Custody, England and Wales, June 2010, London: Ministry of Justice

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Hansard, House of Commons written answers, 5 March 2009: Column 1790W

17. Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force (2009) Short Study on Women Offenders, London: Cabinet Office. Note: evidence from analysis of Offender Assessment System data

18. Ministry of Justice (2009) Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System, London: Ministry of Justice

19. Ministry of Justice (2007) Sentencing Statistics 2006, London: The Stationery Office

20. NOMS, Prison Population and Accommodation Briefing, 22 May 2009

21. Ministry of Justice (2009) A Report on the Government's Strategy for Diverting Women Away from Crime, London: MoJ

22. A prisoner's home area is defined as their home address on their reception into prison. For prisoners with no address, the address of the relevant committal court is used as the home address. Hansard, House of Commons written answers, 31 January 2008, and 18 March 2009: Column 1222W

23. <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/po/070213%20prison.shtml>

24. Corston, J. (2007) The Corston Report, London: Home Office

25. Ministry of Justice (2009), Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System, London: Ministry of Justice, and

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease010110a.htm>

26. Ministry of Justice (2010) Safety in custody statistics 2008-09, London: Ministry of Justice

27. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, HM Chief Inspector of Probation (2008) The indeterminate sentence for public protection: A thematic review, London: HMIP

28. Hansard, House of Commons written answers, 26 January 2010 Column 731W

29. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

30. Ibid.

**of disciplinary proceedings than men.** In 2007 there were 189 proven breaches against discipline per 100 women in prison compared to 133 per 100 men. According to the Ministry of Justice, 'women may be less able (due for example to mental health issues) to conform to prison rules.'<sup>31</sup>

**The proportion of women prisoners aged 40 and over has risen from 18% in 2002 to 25% in 2007.**<sup>32</sup>

**Around one-third of women prisoners lose their homes, and often their possessions, whilst in prison.**<sup>33</sup>

**Home Office research has found that 66% of women and 59% of men in prison have dependent children under 18.** Of those women, 34% had children under five, a further 40% children aged from five to 10.<sup>34</sup>

**Each year it is estimated that more than 17,700 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment.**<sup>35</sup>

**Just 5% of women prisoners' children remain in their own home once their mother has been sentenced.**<sup>36</sup>

**Only 9% of children whose mothers are in prison are cared for by their fathers in their mothers' absence.**<sup>37</sup>

**Women with babies in prison may be unable to claim benefits for their children.**<sup>38</sup>

**At least a third of mothers are lone parents before imprisonment.**<sup>39</sup> Black and ethnic minority women are particularly likely to be single mothers, as more than half of black African and black Caribbean families in the UK are headed by a lone parent, compared with less than a quarter of white families and just over a tenth of Asian families.<sup>40</sup>

**Black, minority ethnic and foreign national women reported more problems ensuring dependants were looked after than white and British women.**<sup>41</sup>

**Only half of the women who had lived, or were in contact with, their children prior to imprisonment had received a visit since going to prison.**<sup>42</sup>

**One Home Office study showed that for 85% of mothers, prison was the first time they had been separated from their children for any significant length of period.** It also showed that 65% of mothers in prison were receiving their first custodial sentence.<sup>43</sup>

**An ICM public opinion poll, commissioned by SmartJustice in March 2007, found that, of 1,006 respondents, 73% thought that mothers of young children should not be sent to prison for non-violent crime.**<sup>44</sup>

**Imprisoning mothers for non-violent offences has a damaging impact on children and carries a cost to the state of more than £17 million over a ten-year period.**<sup>45</sup>

**The main social cost incurred by the children of imprisoned mothers – and by the state in relation to these children – results from the increased likelihood of their becoming 'NEET' (Not in Education, Employment or Training).**<sup>46</sup>

**Additional savings can be made with non-custodial sentences because of the reduced likelihood of children becoming problem drug users, or becoming involved in crime, if their mothers avoid prison.**<sup>47</sup>

**There are eight mother and baby units located within prisons and secure training centres in England providing accommodation for up to 75 women and their babies at any one time.**<sup>48</sup> There is no automatic eligibility for a place within a mother and baby unit.<sup>49</sup>

**Between April 2005 and July 2008, 283 children were born to women prisoners.** This is a rate of almost two births a week in England and Wales.<sup>50</sup>

31. Ministry of Justice (2009) Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System, London: Ministry of Justice

32. Ibid.

33. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

34. Home Office Research Study 208, and Hansard, House of Commons, 28 April 2003

35. Ibid.

36. Prison Reform Trust (2000) Justice for Women: The Need for Reform, London: Prison Reform Trust

37. The government's response to the report by Baroness Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System, December 2007

38. Citizens Advice (2007) Locked Out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders, London, Citizens Advice

39. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

40. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2009) Race relations in prisons: responding to adult women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, London: The Stationery Office

41. Ibid.

42. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

43. Home Office Research Study 162 (1997), Imprisoned Women and Mothers, Home Office: London

44. SmartJustice (2007) Public say: stop locking up so many women, London: Prison Reform Trust

45. new economic foundation (2008) Unlocking value: How we all benefit from investing in alternatives to prison for women offenders, London: new economics foundation

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. 11 Million (2008) Prison Mother and Baby Units, London: 11 Million

49. Citizens Advice (2007) Locked Out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders, London: Citizens Advice

50. <http://www.libdems.org.uk/home/200-babies-due-to-be-born-to-prisoners-this-year-howarth-37047303;show>

**However, between April 2008 and June 2008, 49 women in prison gave birth, at a rate of nearly four a week.<sup>51</sup> 23 births were to mothers aged 18 and 19.<sup>52</sup>**

**Seven young women aged 16 and 17 years old in secure training centres gave birth and one in a secure children's home gave birth between April 2006 and March 2009.<sup>53</sup>**

**There are no women's prisons in Wales, and Welsh mothers and babies either serve their sentences within units in England or serve a community sentence in one of three non-residential women's centres in Wales.<sup>54</sup>**

**Women prisoners are often inadequately prepared for release.** According to the Social Exclusion Unit report only 24% of women with a prior skill had the chance to put their skills into practice through prison work. Just 11% of women received help with housing matters whilst in prison. Home Office research has found that 41% of women in prison did not have accommodation arranged on release. Only a third of women prisoners who wanted help and advice about benefits and debt received it.<sup>55</sup>

**In March 2007, the Corston review of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system, commissioned by the Home Secretary following the deaths of six women at Styal prison, stated: 'Community solutions for non-violent women offenders should be the norm', and; 'There must be a strong consistent message right from the top of government, with full reasons given, in support of its stated policy that prison is not the right place for women offenders who pose no risk to the public.'<sup>56</sup>**

**There are 36 women's centres across the country providing a one stop approach to offending behaviour, with a variety of services available.** These centres are delivering positive results. For example, during two years of the Evolve Project in West Yorkshire, only ten of 218 women engaged in the service were known to have reoffended.<sup>57</sup>

**An ICM public opinion poll commissioned by SmartJustice in March 2007 found that, of 1,006 respondents, 86% supported the development of local centres for women to address the causes of their offending. Over two thirds (67%) said that prison was not likely to reduce offending.<sup>58</sup>**

**In 2007 a higher proportion of women than men completed their community sentence successfully or had their sentences terminated for good progress on both community orders and suspended sentence orders.<sup>59</sup>**

**The new economics foundation has found that for every pound invested in support-focused alternatives to prison, £14 worth of social value is generated to women and their children, victims and society generally over ten years.<sup>60</sup>**

**If alternatives to prison were to achieve an additional reduction of just 6% in reoffending, the state would recoup the investment required to achieve this in just one year.<sup>61</sup>**

**The long-run value of these benefits is in excess of £100 million over a ten-year period.<sup>62</sup>**

51. <http://www.libdems.org.uk/home/200-babies-due-to-be-born-to-prisoners-this-year-howarth-37047303;show>

52. Ibid.

53. Hansard, House of Commons written answers, 29 April 2009: Column 1332V

54. Ibid

55. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

56. Corston, J. (2007) The Corston Report, London: Home Office

57. Information on the Evolve Project in West Yorkshire - evaluation research undertaken by Nacro research (2009) and West Yorkshire Probation (2010)

58. SmartJustice (2007) Public say: stop locking up so many women, London: Prison Reform Trust

59. Ministry of Justice (2009) Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System, London: Ministry of Justice

60. new economic foundation (2008) Unlocking value: How we all benefit from investing in alternatives to prison for women offenders, London: new economics foundation

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

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