

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Profiadau menywod yn y system cyfiawnder troseddol](#)

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [Women's experiences in the criminal justice system](#)

WECJS 02

Ymateb gan: Royal College of Psychiatrists | Response from: Royal College of Psychiatrists



Royal College of Psychiatrists Wales
Response to: Women's Experiences in the Criminal Justice System

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1. Females make up just 5% of the total prison population system in England and Wales¹; the design of the system therefore does not account for the gender-specific roles and responsibilities of women. There are no women's prisons in Wales, women's ties with their local communities and children are often severed as they are incarcerated several hours away from home in England.
2. The number of women receiving prison sentences of less than 6 months has doubled in Wales since 2007². More than three quarters of women prisoners have been given a sentence of less than a year over the last decade³, which although short, will majorly disrupt families. Twenty thousand children a year are affected by maternal incarceration (up from 6,000 in 1995); the emotional harm through separation significantly impacts on the psychosocial functioning of the child and the development of an increasing population with a fragile sense of self and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Women need to retain links with their children in order to break the cycle of trauma which too often leads to the disintegration of lifetimes and families. Baroness Corston, 2007 reported the impact of a brief period of imprisonment on mothers and children as "significant and destructive". Corston urged that shorter sentences for women be replaced with sentencing to "one stop shops" in local community centres.
3. The development of centres, providing counselling, mental health services, drug treatment, employment skills, education, training, childcare and housing assistance was identified in the Corston Report as being the best intervention for women in the justice system. The central aim providing a safe space for women where they are treated as individuals and their needs can be addressed holistically. One of the key recommendations of the report was that women's centres be developed, expanded and increasingly used as an alternative to imprisonment. The Corston Report has informed the female offending blueprint for Wales and the proposal for a Swansea Women's Centre, where Welsh women will be able to retain links with their local communities and receive appropriate mental health support is welcomed.

¹ [Women and the Criminal Justice System, 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

² [Women who commit minor crimes 'need help not prison' - BBC News](#)

4. Mental ill health is prevalent in women in prison. Women prisoners experience higher rates of both self-harm and suicide than male prisoners, 50% of all self-harm incidents in prison are by women⁴. The female offender population and especially the prison population contains some of the most disadvantaged, damaged and vulnerable people in society which informs the need for early interventions from health and social care which need to be accessible in the community to Welsh offenders in Wales.
5. The pathway for Welsh female offenders echoes the pathway for Welsh females in secure mental health services, with many patients being placed in locked, low and medium secure hospital beds hundreds of miles away from their families, homes and communities in England.
6. Women's secure mental health services are underdeveloped in Wales. Development and improvement of medium secure services for women in Wales rests on the potential to develop integrated care pathways, including appropriately designed and commissioned community-based services. The evidence for what works for female offenders with complex mental health needs points to the need for service development based on principles of a trauma informed approach and interventions to break the cycle of trauma, turning the growing trend of children and adolescents with a fragile sense of self with maladaptive coping mechanisms into individuals who are more resilient and robust.
7. There is an overwhelming need in Wales to develop seamless pathways for women into and out of secure mental health care, community-based interventions that reduce the number of females finding themselves entering into secure mental health services. The Caswell Clinic is a Medium Secure Unit hospital commissioned by WHSSC and provides 61 medium secure beds in SBUHB. Newton Ward is an 11 bedded female ward in the Caswell Clinic; the discharge pathway for these women is fractured and fragmented. The development of pathways to meet the complex mental health needs of females needs to be approached from a bottom up, community approach and top-down approach, with the development of a secure mental health pathway for women requiring hospital treatment.
8. There have been a number of reviews of mental health services, including "Improving Lives Improving Care" and "Making Days Count". WHSSC have recently released a 3-5 year mental health strategy, which is out to consultation, to meet the needs of Tier 4 mental health services over the next 5 years.
9. Working with WHSSC, the Caswell Clinic and partners in the Welsh Local Health Boards developed a 3-5 year mental health strategy to meet the needs of females in Tier 4 Mental Health Services. The Women in Justice Group were invited to attend a workstream meeting and shared the Female Offending Blueprint for Wales. The work undertaken in the female

workstream made a number of recommendations, including the of commissioning a regional secure service for both medium and low secure women and identified the need to establish a robust community model pathway for women. It is hoped that the recommendations made by the female workstream can integrate into the blueprint, creating an integrated pathway for females with complex needs.

10. The work undertaken so far through the whole system approach is inspiring and innovative, the focus on early intervention, prevention and community-based solutions. The Female Offending Blueprint works to address these concerns by aspiring to reduce the number of women in the system by intervening earlier to keep them safe and address the vulnerabilities that often lead to crime and ultimately reduce the number of females entering into secure mental health services. A pathway which can sustain community-based solutions to keep women and communities safe and reduce offending behaviour.
11. It is hoped that the commissioning of a pathway through collaborative working of key stakeholders will lead to the development of a more detailed plan for specialist women's services that will provide both local, accessible support services and more specialist regional secure services that will function to meet the complex mental health needs of high-risk vulnerable females. Developing pathways in Wales to meet the mental health needs of female offenders in Wales is essential for this and future generations to come.
12. Recommendations:
 - Shorter sentences for women should be replaced with sentencing to "one stop shops"⁵ in local community centres.
 - Women's centres should be developed, expanded and increasingly used as an alternative to imprisonment.
 - Service development must be based on principles of a trauma informed approach and interventions to break the cycle of trauma.
 - The development of pathways to meet the complex mental health needs of females needs to be approached from a bottom up, community approach and top-down approach, with the development of a secure mental health pathway for women requiring hospital treatment.
 - A regional secure service for both medium and low secure women should be commissioned.