

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 03

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol Meddygon Teulu Cymru | Response from: Royal College of General Practitioners Wales

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## **Women's experience in the Criminal Justice System; RCGP Cymru Wales Response**

1.As described in the consultation documents while Criminal Justice is a matter for Westminster, Welsh Government is responsible for prison healthcare and social services. We therefore recognise the difficulty in exercising the duty to ensure health for women who are incarcerated in England, while there remain to be no women's prisons in Wales.

2.RCGP Cymru Wales has consulted with GPs who have recently worked within a prison setting, most notably HMP Eastwood Park where women from South Wales given prison sentences are incarcerated.

3. The consultation has asked for comment on the following points:

a. The progress being made, if any, by the Welsh Government in realising its ambitions for the transformation of services for female offenders including implementation of the Female Offending Blueprint.

b. The evidence for the development of Women's Rehabilitation Centres and arguments for reducing custodial sentences for women in Wales, including views on the Women's Centre that will open in Swansea.

c. The availability of appropriate custodial provision and support for different groups of women including girls under the age of 18, disabled women, those with mental health problems, women from ethnic minorities, those who have experienced sexual violence or domestic abuse, women with alcohol or drug problems and Welsh speaking women.

4. As reported by the Ministry of Justice in 2013 49% of women who receive prison sentences present with issues relating to drug misuse, compared with 29% of men<sup>1</sup>. Our members also notes that more often than note women sent to prison have a history of poor mental health prior to incarceration.

5.One member states: "In my experience, very little progress has been made to invest appropriately in community-based services supporting the mental health and substance misuse services often required to address the over-represented group for women within

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners, 2013 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/220060/gender-substance-misuse-mental-health-prisoners.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220060/gender-substance-misuse-mental-health-prisoners.pdf)

the criminal justice system and as a consequence, there continues to be a steady flow of women service short sentences or license recall for offences that could/should otherwise be address in the community setting either by Court order (DRR, ATR, CSTR) or by other mechanisms of diversion."

6. Our members believe that lack of adequate community services can lead to incarceration, which removes women from their support systems and any services they were previously using. This can lead to a viscous cycle of offending and incarceration without prospect for proper rehabilitation.

7. Women continue to be disproportionately affected by having to be separated from the families and communities owing the small number of custodial spaces within the prison estate (as already described by Corsten in 2007<sup>2</sup>).

8. One RCGP member expressed reservations about the effectiveness of a specific Women's Centre:

"This is a good initiative although I have yet to see how this will be implemented in practical terms. It is not clear whether the emphasis will be to avoid transfer to prison, i.e., HMP Eastwood Park or beyond, or whether it will be used for step-down from the prison estate. Whilst it could be a valuable step in the right direction for reducing the geographical displacement of women from their support networks, I am minded that the number of places seems limited and given that there is only one unit, the overall benefit to the population of women in contact with the criminal justice system will be limited.

9. There is currently no cross-border link with the English RECONNECT programme, which is a significant failure for those women who are returning to Wales (c. 50% of the population in HMP Eastwood Park)."

10. On speaking to our members, it is clear there are concerns about the suitability of prison for women generally as well as specific concerns about the groups mentioned above.

11. "Currently, all women who are incarcerated go to the English prison estate, where there is no legal requirement to provide any Welsh-specific services. Prisons are generally built to the standard of the 'male' prisoner in mind and have not been designed with the specific requirements for women who are incarcerated. This ultimately has a negative impact on the so-called attempt at a 'rehabilitative culture' so often

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<sup>2</sup> The Corsten Report, 2007 <https://www.asdan.org.uk/media/ek3p22qw/corston-report-march-2007.pdf>

attempted. Prisons are bleak, sterile, and unfriendly environments and are not therefore conducive to ensuring that they are in themselves not re-traumatising to the population they hold."