

Working with women in (and out of) the Criminal Justice System: the role of mentoring

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Overview

- **Characteristics of women and girls in criminal justice**
- **Working with women and girls**
- **The role of mentoring**



Routes into offending

- **Financial Pressures**
 - The feminisation of poverty
- **Addictions**
 - esp. substance misuse
- **Emotional pressures/coercions (often from partners)**
 - Prostitution; Dealing;
- **Consumer pressures (often from dependents)**
- **Gaining respect from peers**
- **Risk-taking/excitement**
 - Especially for young women ('having a laugh')

(see, Batchelor, 2007; Burman and Batchelor 2009. Malloch 2004; Chesney Lind and Pasko 2004)



Characteristics of women in prison

Limited life opportunities

- social exclusion
- lack of support
- absence of relationships
- family breakdown
- limited education/work skills

Financially constrained

- poverty
- care responsibilities
- accommodation needs

Childhood experiences of institutional care

Backgrounds of abuse

- sexual and violent victimisation
- risky sexual lives

Health difficulties

- poor physical health
- addictions (drugs and alcohol)
- mental health
- self-harming



Complex life circumstances

- **Complex trauma**
- **Mental illness**
- **Backgrounds of victimisation**
- **Self harm**
- **Aggressive tendencies**
- **Learning difficulties /disabilities**
- **Suicide /Overdose risk**



Loss of children

.....Highlights need for informed, gender sensitive approaches

Best practice with women and girls ?

- **Distinctive needs**
 - What works for women doesn't necessarily work for men
- **Age and gender sensitivity**
- **Holistic approach**
- **Address complexity**
- **Flexible**
- **Practical life skills**
- **Motivated, trained staff**
- **Focus on building relationships**
- **Mentoring**
- **Trauma-informed**
- **Positive pathways out of offending**
- **Strengths-based**

Challenging Group?

- **Small numbers (but become extensive users)**
- **Particular needs**
 - (seen as individualised troubles) difficult to meet in justice settings/systems
- **‘Troublesome, challenging, intractable, malevolent, recalcitrant, difficult, demanding, manipulative, aggressive, untrustworthy, attention seeking ...’**
- **Unwilling to engage in programmes or take up support**
- **Don’t fit feminine stereotypes of passivity, chastity and submissiveness**
- **Importance of training, commitment, professionalism**

The growth of mentoring in criminal justice

CJ mentoring services used predominantly to facilitate transition of offenders from prison to community

- **Desistance-focus**
- **Relationship-building**
 - supportive relationship
 - having someone to talk to and confide in
 - practical support.
- **Trust**
 - mutually respectful.
- **Better reconviction outcomes**
 - contributes to an overall reduction in offending by increasing self confidence, self esteem and enhanced engagement with agencies that can assist with resettlement/reintegration



Mentoring is a complex relationship and factors including interpersonal skills, level of commitment to the mentoring relationship and organisational influences can all impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship

(Woolnough and Davidson, 2007).



Mentoring and women

- **Women in mentoring programmes**
 - Focused more on **family issues and support needs**, with men more concerned with financial needs.
 - Reported a higher number of needs being addressed and **longer mentoring relationships** (see Trotter 2011) .
 - Those who coped well after prison had the support of friends, family and agencies and valued these highly.
 - Encounter multiple difficulties in the absence of such support on liberation (see Brown and Ross 2010)
- **Recognising the social realities from which women come, and to which they return**
 - Abusive relationships. Addictions. Child custody/contact

Mentoring women in Scotland

- **Commission on Women Offenders (2011) recommended that**
 - **Recommendation** - mentoring should be available to women offenders at risk of reoffending or custody to support compliance with court orders
 - **Definition** - a trusted one-to-one relationship where practical and emotional support is provided by the mentor on a wide range of issues relating to offending behaviour.”

- **Mentoring now recommended by Scottish Government as a service that can address the specific ‘needs’ of women who offend.**
 - increasing marketisation of mentoring within CJS
 - context of financial instability /funding cuts

Scottish Research Base

- **Overall, limited research on mentoring but all suggests it is valuable as a means of both practical and emotional support ... e.g.**
 - Sacro's 2013 report on outcomes from 4 mentoring projects
 - Mulholland et al's (2016) evaluation of Reducing Reoffending Change Fund
 - IPSOS Mori (2015) Evaluation of SHINE
 - Tolland's (2016) exploration of the experiences of women at Sacro's Women's Mentoring Service
- **However limited evidence that it reduces reoffending of women, or facilitates significant long-term changes in their lives.**
- **Long-term research, with consistent evaluation tools are required to evidence this**

‘She helps me to cope’ (Tolland 2016)

- **Practical support**
 - helping women to respond to difficulties related to poverty and their disadvantaged circumstances
- **Outcomes**
 - engagement with agencies; increases in confidence and self-esteem and improvements in emotional well-being.
- **However - in practice,**
 - mentors helping women to resolve issues related to the welfare system and other (non-CJ) services
 - women viewed their mentor as a friend and ‘someone to talk to’ suggesting emotional support and a release from social isolation

Coping with Mentoring

- **Rewarding work ...**
- **Intensive and emotionally demanding work**
 - Close contact /engagement with highly traumatized group of women
 - Volatile working environment
- **Risk of vicarious trauma exacerbated by context of financial instability**
 - a process of psychological and somatic symptoms of stress
 - can impact on personal lives (e.g. health, relationships, emotions, self-perception)
 - and on service delivery (sick leave; loss of boundaries; feelings about work)

- **Crucial importance of intensive and structured support**
- **Mechanisms to recognise, prevent and minimise VT**
 - Importance of line management
- **Importance of education/ awareness raising**
- **Peer support**
- **Commitment to self- care**



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