

Sierra Leone: Fact Sheet on Women and Incarceration

In 2019, AdvocAid and the Vance Centre interviewed 88% of women in prison in Sierra Leone. The [report](#) found:

- 62% of women interviewed were held in pre-trial detention. Court backlogs and strict bail conditions lead to women languishing in pre-trial detention for excessive time periods. This is a main cause of overcrowding, which, combined with limited access to water and sanitation, is putting detained women in alarmingly precarious conditions as the current COVID-19 pandemic rages on.
- Criminalisation of poverty is one of the main reasons for overincarceration of women, with 71% of interviewees saying that before going to prison they could only afford one or two meals per day. Almost half had been the main earners of their households and 88% were taking care of at least one child before their arrests.
- 34% interviewees had been arrested and detained for survival economic or petty crime.
- Almost three quarters of women interviewed had suffered from intimate partner violence as adults.
- 54% of women said a mental health condition started or deteriorated while detained.
- One in 20 women had attempted suicide or had self-harmed while in prison.
- More than half of the women interviewed were illiterate.
- 52% feared retaliation post-release.

** Please note that the actions and viewpoints of these organisations do not necessarily represent those of Women Beyond Walls and nor do we bear any responsibility for materials published on their websites.*

Voices from women with lived experience of the criminal justice system

To hear more from women themselves, watch Voices from Inside, a [series](#) by AdvocAid, sharing views from women in prison in Sierra Leone, and [Kolonko](#), a documentary which shares sex workers' experiences of harassment by the police.

Women on Death Row

You can find out more about MK's story - the longest serving woman on death row who was freed, via this AdvocAid [case summary](#) and [BBC Outlook interview](#) with Simitie and MK.

You can also read Aminata's powerful [story](#), who was freed after 9 years in detention.

On 23 July 2021, Sierra Leone's Parliament voted unanimously to [abolish the death penalty](#), following years of advocacy by civil society organisations.

Pandemics and Prison

To find out more about how the Ebola and COVID-19 pandemics have impacted women and led to numerous human rights issues, read [Law in the Time of Ebola](#), the [Kamara family story](#) and AdvocAid's [COVID-19 stories](#).

Children Detained in Prison with a Parent

The podcast touched on this issue. For more information, read the [Global Study on Children Deprived of their Liberty](#) and visit Dr Shona Minson's [website](#), a leading academic on this issue.

For further information on supporting Simitie's work, please visit:

AdvocAid - <https://advocaidsl.org>

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone - <http://hrc-sl.org>

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