

England and Wales: Fact Sheet on Women and Incarceration

- There are 12 women's prisons in England and none in Wales. Six have Mother and Baby Units. Women are held, on average, [63 miles](#) from their homes, with a significant number held more than 100 miles from their home, making it difficult for their families to visit.
- Despite a recent decline there are still [twice as many](#) women in prison today as there were 28 years ago.
- Women make up 51% of the population of England and Wales, and [4%](#) of the prison population. They are a marginalised minority in a system that is designed for men.
- [In 2019](#), 15% of all arrests made were of women, whilst 26% of all prosecutions were against women, and 27% of all convictions.
- Around [40%](#) of arrests of women and girls result in no further action. Women are being arrested when they are showing signs of distress or have been victims of crime, including domestic abuse.
- In July, the UK's Justice Committee reported that women in the criminal justice system 'are often the most vulnerable in society and have varied and complex needs. Many have experienced mental health problems, substance misuse, homelessness, abuse and trauma in their lives.'
- Women are far more likely than men to be sentenced to short sentences. [Half](#) of women entering prison in 2021 had received a sentence of less than six months. Even a short sentence can lead to a woman losing their home, job, and custody of their children.
- [53%](#) of women in prison, compared to 27% of men, report experiencing emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child. There are strong links between women's offending behaviour and their experience of domestic abuse, coercive control and sexual abuse. It is thought that almost two in three women in the criminal justice system have experienced domestic abuse.

With grateful thanks to Olivia Dehnavi for compiling this fact sheet. You can follow her on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#)

* 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.

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- Women account for a disproportionate number of self-harm incidents in prison – they make up [22%](#) of incidents, despite making up only 4% of the total prison population. Rates of self-harm amongst women are at the highest level since available records began in 2004.
- [Seven in ten](#) women in prison have a mental health issue, compared with less than half of men.
- Many women are imprisoned despite having mental health issues. [Sarah Reed](#) was a 32-year-old mixed-race Black woman who struggled with mental ill health, which had worsened after being assaulted by a police officer in 2012. She died in Holloway Prison on 11 January 2016 while on remand for an alleged offence which took place whilst she was a sectioned inpatient at a mental health unit. She was found dead in her cell with a ligature around her neck. The prison had treated her deterioration in mental health as a discipline issue and cut off her visits.

Mothers and babies in prison

- [One in ten women](#) give birth inside their cell or on the way to hospital, and in the last two years, two babies born inside prison have died.
- It is estimated that [60%](#) of women in prison are primary carers of children, that every year around 600 pregnant women are held in prison and around 100 babies are born to women prisoners. It is very difficult for mothers in prison to secure a place on a Mother and Baby Unit.
- Every year an estimated [17,000](#) children experience their mum being sent to prison. [95%](#) of children have to leave the family home when their mother goes to prison.

Racially minoritised women

- Racially minoritised women in prison are over-represented and face a double stigma of their gender and race
- [18%](#) of the women's prison population are from a minority ethnic group, compared to 14% of the general population.

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- Women recalled to prison (returned to custody after release) make up around [12%](#) of women in prison. Women serving a sentence of less than 12 months accounted for just under half (44%) of recalls.

Life after prison

- Women make up [9%](#) of people on probation, meaning women tend to be supervised by probation practitioners without specialist gender-based expertise.
- Reconviction rates for women within a year of release are high at [58%](#), with the highest rates for those of sentences of less than 12 months.
- [Over half](#) of women leave prison without settled accommodation. One in 10 leave prison homeless.
- [Only half](#) of employers say that they would recruit someone with a criminal record. Yet 86% of employers who had previously recruited someone with a conviction reported a good experience. People with convictions have the lowest interview to hire conversion rate, out of a range of groups generally considered to be disadvantaged in the labour market.
- Women are [three times](#) less likely to get a job after prison than men.

Organisations and links to find out more

- [Advance](#)
 - Advance is a national charity supporting women and girls who have experienced domestic abuse and those who are in contact with the criminal justice system ...
- [Agenda Alliance](#)
 - Agenda is a bold, ambitious feminist organisation, working to end the cycle of harm so that all women and girls can thrive.
- [Bent Bars Project](#)
 - Bent Bars is a letter-writing project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer prisoners in Britain.

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- [Hibiscus Initiatives](#)
 - Hibiscus empowers and champions the rights of foreign national and black, minority ethnic and refugee women and families at the intersection of the immigration and criminal justice systems.
- [One Small Thing](#)
 - One Small Thing's vision is a justice system that can recognise, understand, and respond to trauma. Their mission is to redesign the justice system for women and their children.
- [Women in Prison](#)
 - Women in Prison is a national charity that delivers support for women affected by the criminal justice system in prisons, in the community and through Women's Centres. They campaign to end the harm caused to women, their families and our communities by imprisonment.
- [Working Chance](#)
 - Working Chance is the UK's only employment charity solely for women with convictions.

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