

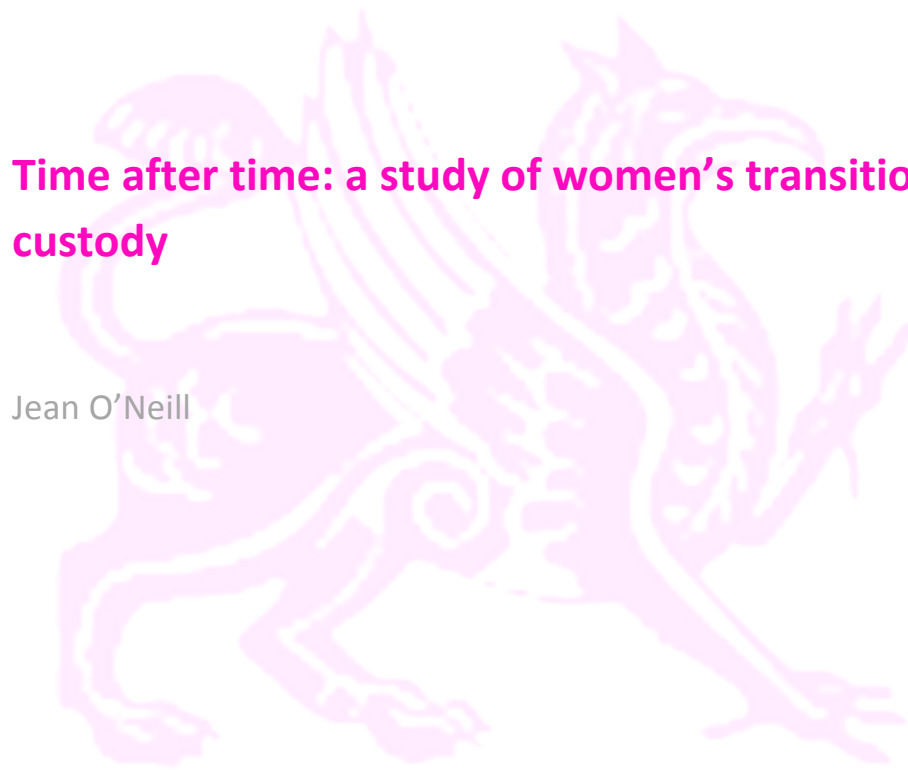
Research Paper

2015/04



Time after time: a study of women's transition from custody

Jean O'Neill



www.thegriffinsociety.org

Acknowledgements

This report documents women's journeys on leaving custody, but I too travel on a journey and there were many who assisted me on my way.

I need to thank the women who agreed to participate in this study. I thank each of you for giving up your time and for sharing your experiences with me. This was a lengthy commitment, we met over a number of occasions and you shared the many highs and lows of your lives over the year. I am grateful to each of you for sharing your personal stories with me, your openness and generosity without which this research would not have been possible.

I thank the Griffins Society for allowing me the opportunity to undertake this work. To Griffins Director Christine (Leeson) and all the Griffins Board members for their encouragement, support and interest throughout.

I am indebted to Nicola Carr, my supervisor whose guidance and critical overview of the project was invaluable. Her insightful and sensitive editing skills have shaped this final report and I owe much to her experience and knowledge.

I would like to thank the Northern Ireland Prison Service for allowing initial access to the women and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland who supported my efforts throughout.

A special acknowledgement to Dr Keith Wilson Davis, for his assistance and support – go raibh maith agat.

Finally, to the INSPIRE Probation Team, to family and friends who have been ever patient and helpful throughout – thank you.

Contents

	Page
Abstract	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
1.1 Rationale for the study	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
2.1 Criminal Justice – Northern Ireland Context	9
2.2 Women and Offending – Northern Ireland Context	11
2.3 Women in Custody – Northern Ireland	12
Chapter 3: Research Design	14
3.1 The Sample	16
3.2 Profile of Participants	18
Chapter 4: Findings	21
Key Themes	
4.1 Supporting Desistance	21
4.2 Women on Remand	31
4.3 Experiences of Custody	34
4.4 The initial weeks following release	39
4.5 Re-establishing relationships with children	40
4.6 Re-establishing relationships with partners	45
4.7 Re-establishing relationships with family – Young Adults	47

	Page
4.8 Mental Health	48
4.9 Feelings of Guilt and Shame	51
4.10 Employment	53
4.11 Experience of Post-Custody Supervised Licence	54
4.12 The Impact of Custody beyond the gates	61
Chapter 5: Conclusion	63
Chapter 6: Recommendations	65
Bibliography	70



Abstract

This report is based on an in-depth qualitative study with a group of fourteen women who spent time in prison in Northern Ireland in 2015. Using a 'life-history' approach and based on multiple interviews with women over a nine-month period it describes their experiences of imprisonment, their release from custody and their transition back into the community. In doing so it recounts the challenges and problems they faced on this journey. The study is unique in that it not only aimed to explore women's experiences of custody, but also their transition back to the community - their plans, hopes and concerns. Importantly it documents their journeys over time - how they cope with adapting back into their families and the community, the difficulties they have to face and the extent to which their reintegration is helped, or otherwise, by agencies, whether official or voluntary.

Research on women's pathways into crime indicates that gender matters significantly in shaping involvement in the criminal justice system. More recent studies have focused on the problems women face in custody and the impact of custody on families and community at the time of release.

This research reveals that on leaving custody, women face lives which are often more difficult and stressful than they experienced prior to imprisonment, especially with regards to accommodation, employment, substance misuse, partner violence, ill-health and trauma.

1 Introduction

Imprisonment is a 'a dynamic process that unfolds over time' (Parke et al, 2003:199)

There is an increasing body of academic research that focuses on women's involvement within the criminal justice system. Some of the themes of this literature include the nature of women's offending, experiences of women in custody and strategies for desistance (Corston, 2007; Convery, 2009, and Scraton and Moore, 2005). More recently, attention has centred on: women exiting prison (Carlton and Seagrave 2013); the secondary impacts of custody on families and community (Breen, 2010; Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002). A number of similar studies that have focused on themes such as the re-integration of offenders into society have emphasized the importance of accommodation, substance treatment and trauma counselling in encouraging desistance (Weaver and McNeill 2010). However some researchers have questioned the validity of this given that people are being returned back to the same environment, which influenced their offending in the first place (Carlen, 2013).

Whilst men and women may encounter similar challenges upon release from custody, women's experiences are qualitatively different from that of men (Loucks, 2004). Recent reports from the UK suggest that approximately one-third of women in custody lose their homes whilst in prison and many do not have any accommodation arranged prior to their release (Prison Reform Trust, 2011). They are more likely to be single parents and the main carers for children; it is estimated that over 17,240 children were separated from their mothers in 2010 as a result of imprisonment (PRT, op. cit.). In contrast to men in prison, whose children usually remain in the care of their mothers, women rely heavily on temporary carers to look after their children. Only 9% of children whose mothers are in prison, are cared for by their fathers during the period of imprisonment (Fawcett Society, 2009).

On leaving custody, women face lives which are often more difficult and stressful than they experienced prior to imprisonment, especially in regards to accommodation, employment, substance misuse, partner violence, ill-health and trauma. Moreover, the support post-custody, which they require from family, peers, the community and professionals, is often inadequate (Carlton and Seagrave, 2013; McIvor et al, 2009; Kerr, 2014).

1.1 Rationale for study

The Criminal Justice (NI) Order (2008) introduced new post-release supervision for prison sentences in Northern Ireland. This includes Determinate Custodial Sentences, Extended Custodial Sentences and Indeterminate Custodial Sentences, all of which involve periods of imprisonment followed by supervised licence. During the licence period a person is liable to be recalled to custody if they breach their licence conditions. From April 2013 to March 2014, there were a total of 809 licences issued in relation to 761 people, the majority being for men with 21 licences for women. During 2013, only 3 women were recalled to custody. Whilst this may present as being a low figure, it represents 14% of the total, no matter what the figure there is an onus to be mindful that behind each statistic is a woman who faces the consequences of returning to prison.

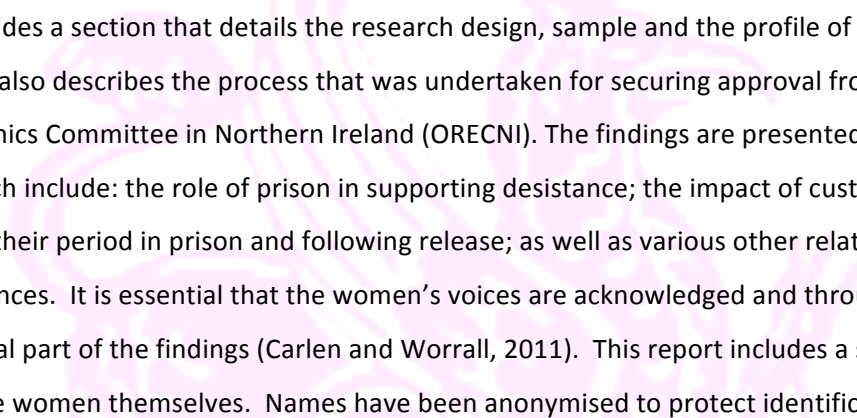
Interest for this research stems from my work as a Manager with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), with particular responsibility for managing the INSPIRE Women's Project. PBNI established this project in 2008 to deliver gender-specific community supervision and interventions to women to women subject to court orders. Over the past 8 years PBNI, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and other statutory, voluntary and community agencies have worked together to provide quality interventions for women offenders in the community. Based on my experience of working with women offenders I have observed that if women can sustain periods in the community following release beyond twelve weeks, the likelihood of successful re-integration is significantly improved.

This study presented a unique opportunity to explore the issues and challenges that women face in their transition from custody into the community. In order to achieve this I listened to women in order to identify which services and circumstances assisted their re-integration into the community as well as supported their efforts to desist from further offending. This research also provided an opportunity to elicit and examine the specific issues faced by women in Northern Ireland, where communities have their own particular identity formed by locality, economic, political and religious make-up.

Using a longitudinal qualitative methodology centred on in-depth, life history interviews with women pre- and post- custody this research charts some of the individual journeys and highlights the main themes that emerged.

In Northern Ireland, it is necessary to take into account that women's offending takes place within the context of a society emerging from a period of civil and political conflict, (sometimes referred to as the 'Troubles'). It is therefore important to provide an overview of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and comment on the impact that the political conflict has had on the system particularly in relation to prisons and the female custodial estate. The number of women offenders in Northern Ireland is relatively small compared to men; women comprise approximately 3% of the total prison population (NIPS). It is therefore important to include an overview of women held in prison and highlight the particular gender differences.

The report includes a section that details the research design, sample and the profile of the participants. It also describes the process that was undertaken for securing approval from the Office for Research Ethics Committee in Northern Ireland (ORECNI). The findings are presented by a series of themes, which include: the role of prison in supporting desistance; the impact of custody on women during their period in prison and following release; as well as various other related aspects of their experiences. It is essential that the women's voices are acknowledged and throughout this forms an integral part of the findings (Carlen and Worrall, 2011). This report includes a selection of quotes from the women themselves. Names have been anonymised to protect identification.



2 Literature Review

2.1 Criminal Justice – Northern Ireland Context

The criminal justice system is considered pivotal to the political and constitutional integrity of any state (Walker and Telford, 2000), and especially so for societies which continue to be characterised by decades of violence and societal conflict (Dwyer and McAlinden, 2015). Any examination of women's experiences within the criminal justice in Northern Ireland would be incomplete if it failed to take into consideration this historical background (Kerr and Moore, 2013). As well as being tied into the constituent legal system of the United Kingdom, criminal justice in Northern Ireland is influenced by its history and its interaction with the Republic of Ireland. Since its inception in 1921, Northern Ireland's legal system has remained broadly similar to that in England and Wales (Dickson, 2013). However, criminal justice systems both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have adopted features reflecting the political instability and violence that has existed during the period of conflict (Dwyer and McAlinden, 2015; O'Mahony et al, 2000; Scraton and Moore, 2013).

The '*Cost of the Troubles Study*' reported that nearly 3,585 people were killed of which 200 were women, and an estimated 40,000 persons were injured over the thirty-year period 1969-1999 (Fay et al., 1999). Many more were affected socially, psychologically and economically (Social Services Inspectorate, 1998). The psychological impact was compounded by physical and social problems such as unemployment, the loss of a home and/or displacement (Smyth et al., 2001). In addition, other forms of trauma were derived from grief, imprisonment or intimidation (Smyth and Hamilton, 2002). It is estimated that nearly half of the Northern Ireland population, and in some areas up to 80%, know someone who has been injured or killed during the conflict (Ruane and Todd, 1996).

Throughout the conflict the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) had to deal with unique demands due to the intensive security arrangements, arising from the management of politically motivated prisoners alongside men and women who committed so-called 'ordinary' crimes (O'Mahony et al, 2000; Corcoran, 2006). One high profile example was the conflict that occurred during the Republican Hunger Strikes. Prison Officers were deemed to be legitimate targets and were continually subject to constant threats and over the course of the conflict 31 prison staff were murdered. It is worth noting that the report of a Prison Review (PRT, 2011) commented that this security focus continues within Northern Irish prisons to the present day.

Women's experiences in custody have also been documented, in particular those who were held as political prisoners (Brady, 2011). However, there is less known of the experiences of women who were detained for committing 'ordinary crime' but were detained alongside political prisoners. Initially, women were housed in Armagh Jail until its closure in 1986. They were then moved to Mourne House in 1988, a purpose-built, high security unit on the grounds within Maghabery Prison that is a larger high security male prison.

The Belfast Agreement 1998, also known as the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 led to the release of politically motivated prisoners, leaving the remanded and sentenced women offenders, including those seeking asylum and fine defaulters, in custody. With an average daily population of 30 women, and the majority of those serving sentences for less than 3-months, criticism was aimed at the regime, staffing levels and overall atmosphere of the Mourne House which continued to operate as a maximum security facility (Scraton and Moore, 2009). Following a number of significant incidents, including the suicides of two women, women prisoners were transferred to their current site, Ash House, in Hydebank Wood Prison. This is a stand-alone residential unit on a shared site with young offenders, known as Hydebank Secure College.¹

Women have remained in Ash House since 2004. However, despite the change of venue, criticisms continue to be directed at the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) for retaining many of the policies and practices of the past (PRT, 2011). NIPS has been subject to considerable scrutiny in the last decade. Since 2005 there have been over twenty external reviews and Inspection Reports, most of which have identified deficits in policy and practice. In April 2010 policing and criminal justice powers were devolved from Westminster to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Given the historical concerns in relation to the Prison Service, Justice Minister David Ford announced a review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons. Led by Dame Anne Owers, former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales, the team was tasked to review the 'conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons... [and] consideration of a women's prison which is fit for purpose and meets international obligations and best practice'.

The Prison Review Team published its final report in October 2011 and noted that the arrangements for accommodating women prisoners were unsuitable and recommended:

¹ Previously known as Hydebank Young Offenders Centre, NIPS changed the name to Hydebank Secure College in 2015. Both terms, Ash House and Hydebank are used interchangeably within this report to refer to the female prison unit.

A new small custodial facility for women should be built, staffed and run around a therapeutic model. It should be supported by an acute mental health facility and draw on a network of staff, services and support in the community. (PRT, 2011:36)

NIPS has accepted the need for a new purpose-built female facility but given the current financial climate; there is no formal indication of when this might be achieved. Structural changes to the current site have been made in order to provide additional resources and a step-down facility was opened in October 2015.

2.2 Women and Offending - Northern Ireland context

Researchers who have investigated gendered pathways to crime and imprisonment have identified that the problems that underlay women's offending are complex (Byrne and Trew, 2008). Women who offend are not a homogeneous group and are subject to a range of factors, which influence offending such as: victimization; poverty; substance abuse; addictions; relationship and child care responsibilities; mental and emotional health; experience of trauma, including physical and sexual violence, and bereavement. These factors which can be present on their own, or combined, are often prime motivators in women's involvement in criminality (Belknap, 1996; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Owen, 2006).

Women who offend in Northern Ireland are also affected by the challenges faced by a society emerging from conflict, where peace-building continues despite setbacks and community violence (Kerr and Moore, 2013). The whole subject of women's offending in Northern Ireland needs to take into account the particular difficulties and traumas faced by women who grew up "*under the spectre of war and trauma of bereavement, displacement and violence*" (McAlister et al. 2009:4)

On the whole, the level of recorded crime in Northern Ireland is significantly lower than in the UK. Despite the political instability over the last seventeen years, crime figures have followed a downward trend. The most recent data available for 2014/15 shows reported crime to be at its fifth lowest annual level since the new Home Office counting rules were introduced in 1998/99 (PSNI, 2015). As in the other parts of the UK and Ireland, women in Northern Ireland commit fewer crimes than men, and the offences are of a less serious nature (O'Neill, 2011). In 2014 males constituted the majority of people prosecuted (83.2%), 16.8% were female.

2.3 Women in Custody – Northern Ireland

Women account for only a small proportion of the overall Northern Irish prison population (3%). Although this figure is low, the average number of women in custody has risen over the past eleven years. Records show an overall 200% increase in the average daily population from 22 in 2003 to 67 in 2014. The male prison population has increased over the past four years, but at a slower rate (DOJNI, 2015). There are differences by gender in relation to age, offence type and the length of sentence. Women tend to be older, 31% of the total female prison population was between 40-49 years, for males the highest percentage (38%) was in the 21-29 age category. On average women were sentenced to shorter periods in custody: 41% of women were sentenced to between three and six months, compared to 31% of males. Fewer women were sentenced to longer periods of 1-5 years: 13% of females compared with 21% of males. The most common offences that women were sentenced for fell within the theft category: 20% of women compared to 4% of males (DOJNI, Statistical Bulletin, 2015). This is similar to the number of women in the UK, where the majority of those entering prison under sentence, (83%) committed a non-violent offence and in 2013, 40% of women entering custody under sentence were for theft and handling stolen goods (Prison Reform Trust, 2014).

Whilst acknowledging the stressors and problems imposed on women in general living in a society emerging from conflict, it is clear that many of the women who end up in prison do so because of life circumstances – including poverty, homelessness, mental health, trauma and bereavement. Any one or a combination of these factors could trigger a crisis point for women leading to offending and ultimately a prison sentence (Corston, 2007). Women in Ash House have similar complex and inter-related needs (Kerr, 2014, Scraton and Moore, 2005). They are reported to have greater health needs in particular; depression and anxiety conditions compared with the general population. 88% experienced depression while in prison (Roberson and Radford, 2006). The overuse of prescription drugs which affects Northern Ireland in general, but disproportionately affects women in prison and is used as a coping mechanism both inside and outside of prison (PRT, 2011). Previous research showed that 60% of women were taking some form of medication prior to their imprisonment (Roberson and Radford, 2006). It is not surprising that many of the women have histories of trauma and abuse. Experiences of physical abuse and sexual abuse were recorded in most women's pre-sentence reports (74.5% physical abuse, 10.5% sexual abuse) (Roberson and Radford, op. cit).

Linked to the above is the issue of self-harm. Although a previous study reported that almost 48% of women interviewed by NIPS (2005) had experienced suicidal thoughts, 32% had self-harmed, and 32% had attempted to take their own lives. (PRT). These findings are not reflective within the more recent Inspection Report that outlined that levels of self-harm were not high and serious incidents were investigated. (CJINI,2013). Women who struggle with life in the community will often struggle with life in custody and may exhibit violent, disruptive and often difficult behaviour (Scraton and Moore, 2005).

In terms of family, 60% were mothers, and of those one-third were on remand (Roberson and Radford, 2006). 45% of women in prison surveyed said they had children under the age of 18, and over half reported that it was difficult or very difficult for family and friends to visit. (CJINI, 2013)

In terms of poverty and accommodation, previous research outlined that 64% of the women were in receipt of some form of social security benefit prior to coming into custody, over one third (36%) did not have a confirmed address on release and nearly three quarters (72%) reported use of drugs and alcohol prior to entering custody (Roberson and Radford, 2006). Similar studies in the UK report that between 30% (Corston, 2007) and 40% (Davies, 2011) of women lose their homes as a result of their imprisonment, which is higher than males (Loucks, 2004). This fact is explained as women are more often single parents and have tenancy agreements in their own names, while men are more likely to have a partner at home to maintain the tenancy (Loucks, 2004).

The Roberson and Radford (2006) study was of particular interest in reporting that a high proportion of women in prison felt unsafe in their communities prior to being imprisoned and did not feel safe returning. Whilst the authors highlight that women were concerned about the transition out of the prison environment they also reference that, "social concerns played a role". (Robertson and Radford, 2006). It is unclear whether this refers to women returning to communities where paramilitary groups² still have influence in local areas.

² Paramilitary groups exist across the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. These illegal groups have committed politically-motivated acts of violence throughout the period of the troubles and continue to impact on local communities through their attempts to exercise control by operating alternative justice systems.

3.0 Research Design

This study aimed to explore the transition of women from prison into the community through women's own accounts of their experiences in custody, their plans, hopes and any concerns for release as well as hearing over time their journey on returning back into the community. As the study was to be based upon one-to-one, in-depth interviews over time with a small sample of women, I decided to use a qualitative, longitudinal research design. This methodology allows the researcher to explore topics in depth and using a semi-structured approach, which enables the deeper exploration of important aspects that may surface spontaneously in the course of the interview (Bell, 2005).

I was aware that the total number of women sentenced prisoners held in Ash House was not high.³ In July 2014, there was an average daily population of 61 women, of whom 44 were sentenced prisoners and the remaining 17 were held on remand. Of the sentenced women, 8 were subject to life imprisonment, and the remainder included those sentenced from 1 - 5 years (n=14) and those sentenced to less than 1 year (n=20). Given that the aim of the project was to follow up women over a period of 9 months, I decided a sample of 15 would be feasible and representative of the total population. In line with this approach, the data collection took place over 13 months.

As the research was particularly focused on the transition process from prison back into the community and the changes that took place over this period, I agreed with my supervisor that I would aim to meet with the women on four occasions. The first interviews took place prior to their release. Initial meetings involved explaining the project to women, outlining the parameters of the study (including confidentiality and informed consent) and answering any questions on the research. Where women agreed to take part a baseline interview, which took place prior to their departure from custody was arranged. With the women's consent, the follow-up interviews were to take place at 3, 6 and 9-month stages following their release from prison. The frequency of the meetings allowed me to develop a relationship with the women and to record their progress over time as they endeavoured to reintegrate back into society.

³ Recent figures (NIPS 2013-14) show the prison population within Ash House fluctuates throughout the year with number ranging from 52 to 77 both sentenced and on remand.

I am aware that my work experience will have an influence on this project, particularly the fact that I work with women offenders, which may have unconsciously biased the research questions, the subsequent interpretation of the data and the write-up of the research. This was particularly relevant given that I am employed by PBNI and I am the Manager of the Inspire Woman Project. I therefore have 'insider status' (Creswell, 2003) both within probation and the prison environment and have knowledge of the process relating to the management of custodial licences. Literature suggests that being an 'insider' means being rooted in a shared setting (Smyth and Holian, 2008), emotionally connected to the research participants (Sikes, 2008), with a *'feel for the game and the hidden rules'* (Bourdieu 1988). Whilst such insider status may confer privileged access and information, the researcher's position in an organisation may also act as a constraint, limiting who is willing to participate, and what is revealed by the subjects (Smyth and Holian, 2008).

This of course also raises ethical issues, particularly in respect of participants being clear of my role and the fact that they were under no obligation to take part. These ethical considerations were carefully considered before I commenced fieldwork, and I ensured that I did not interview any person with whom I had a supervisory relationship. Throughout all of the stages of the research process I made it clear to participants that I was there as an objective recorder of their experiences and not as a probation manager. I also explained the nature of conditional confidentiality, to ensure that women were clear about the parameters of the research and my professional role. I ensured that interviews took place in the community and actively removed my work identification badge at the start of the interview as a physical sign that I was meeting them in relation to the study only and not a probation staff member.

Once permission for the study was given by both NIPS and PBNI, approval was sought from the Office for Research Ethics Committees Northern Ireland (ORECNI). This was an exacting process as all project materials were required to be submitted. Copies of consent forms, participant information sheets, interview schedules, lone worker arrangements, support to interviewees arrangements along with details of the study, organisational consent forms and curriculum vitae were requested. Ethical approval from ORECNI was received in July 2014.

3.1 The Sample

As previously noted, the total female prison population is small. At the time the study began there were 61 women, of whom 8 were serving mandatory life sentences for murder, 36 were serving a specific sentence and 17 were on remand. Of this number I estimated that 20 women would be released from custody within timeframe of the study⁴. I employed a purposive sampling technique, which is extensively used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that have knowledge or experience of the occurrence of interest (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, individuals need to be available, willing and able to participate (Bernard, 2002). It is accepted that samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. (Ritchie et al., 2003) There is also a point of diminishing returns to a qualitative samples the longer a study goes on more data does not automatically mean more information.

Having access to the Nominal Roll, (NIPS Daily record of inmates) I was able to identify women who met the criterion for inclusion. The sample was selected from women offenders currently in custody in Ash House, and who had a custody release date in that they were returning back to the community and were not subject to a further period of remand or detention in relation to emigration status. Women who did not plan to remain in Northern Ireland following their release were excluded from the sample, given that for logistical reasons it would not have been feasible for me to travel to other locations. It was agreed also that women who had severe mental health issues would not be included in the study due to the in-depth nature of the interview schedule, which might potentially exacerbate their mental health. Unfortunately, the study could not include those women who had spent time on remand and were subsequently released at Court, having being sentenced to a term of imprisonment which they had served on remand, as there was no opportunity to meet with these women in order to provide information about the research and allow for adequate time to inform them of the study and to obtain their consent.

Given the small sample size, I was unable to select the sample to ensure a variation in age, residence and offence type which would precisely reflect the heterogeneity of the female prison population. Furthermore, I was constrained by the low number in the overall prison population, my own

⁴ Based on the information received in July 2015, and accepting that women would be committed into and released from Ash House.

availability, given that I was the sole interviewer and could only be available outside my work demands, and the time constraints imposed by the study. I had to accept the women as they presented themselves and those who were willing to participate in the study. Consequently, they varied in age, demographic and offence type.

In order to recruit participants I met with the women on the prison landings and informed them about the study. If they were interested I arranged a meeting to tell them more about the study. I supplied details on the study and gave them time to consider the information in order to attain informed consent. This provided the women an opportunity to ask questions about the study and allow them time to reflect prior to agreeing to participate in it. Whilst some of the women would have known that I worked as a manager for the Probation Board, not all did. I explained that I was completing this study as part of a Fellowship Programme with the Griffins Society and that I was also a Manager of the INSPIRE Women's project, PBNI. I carefully explained the distinction in my role undertaking this research and the parameters of confidentiality so that they could make an informed decision about whether or not they wished to participate.

The initial proposal aimed for a sample of 15 women, which would allow for attrition. It is recognised in a longitudinal study, that maintaining subject participation over time can be difficult, particularly in criminological studies where those participants lost at follow up, may be those whose experiences are precisely what a study of this nature is aiming to capture (Cotter et al, 2002). There were only a small number of planned releases from Ash House each month so that necessitated attending the prison on a weekly basis to introduce myself, seek consent and interview the women.

I met with 18 women of whom 14 agreed to participate while 4 were deemed unsuitable in that they did not meet the criteria as outlined earlier⁵. The first interviews took place in July 2014, and the final interviews concluded in August 2015. The table below sets out the interviews completed over the period, it does not include the number of interviews arranged where women *did not* attend. Follow-up letters and phone calls were made to re-establish contact; interviews with women were organised subject to their availability.

⁵ Two of the women were not going to reside in Northern Ireland on release, and a further two women did not want to participate.

Table 1. Timetable of Interviews.

	Jul 14	Aug 14	Sep 14	Oct 14	Nov 14	Dec 14	Jan 15	Feb 15	Mar 15	Apr 15	May 15	Jun 15	Aug 15
Initial	5	4	2*	5*	2								
Consent	3	6	1	1**	3**								
Interview 1	3	5	2	0	4								
Interview 2				1	4	2	2	3					
Interview 3								4	1	2	1	1	
Interview 4											4	1	4

* One woman interviewed in September and one in October did not fit criteria.

** One woman in October and one in November did not give further consent.

Informed written consent was gained prior to each interview, and initial interviews took place in custody. Follow-up interviews took place at 3, 6 and 9 months following release from custody, the interviews taking place in the community at venues agreed by the women. Of the 14 women who were initially interviewed in custody prior to their release, 12 were interviewed 3 months post-custody; 9, 6 months post-custody and 9 9 months post-custody. The reasons for attrition included non-contact by participants, one went to live in another country, and two women left their home area.

A total of 44 interviews were conducted and audio-recorded. All of the interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed. The analysis began with open coding, which involved searching the data for emerging concepts and repeating ideas (Strauss, 1987), drawing on existing theory as a starting point for formulating the themes (Bryman, 2008). Through the process of coding, other themes emerged which were noted both within the transcripts of individual women and across the transcripts.

3.2 Profile of Participants

All women were white; only one woman was not originally born in Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Their ages ranged from 20 to 61 years, although eight were over 40 years of

age; reflecting the average age of women held in custody. The majority were mothers (12) and eight were in current relationships or had been in relationships prior to their committal. The entire sample reported that their mental health had been adversely affected by their period in custody; six women advised that they had previously self-harmed. Accommodation problems were an important issue for many of the women, eight of the women were unsure what accommodation would be available to them on their release or were returning to unstable or temporary accommodation provided by family and/or friends.

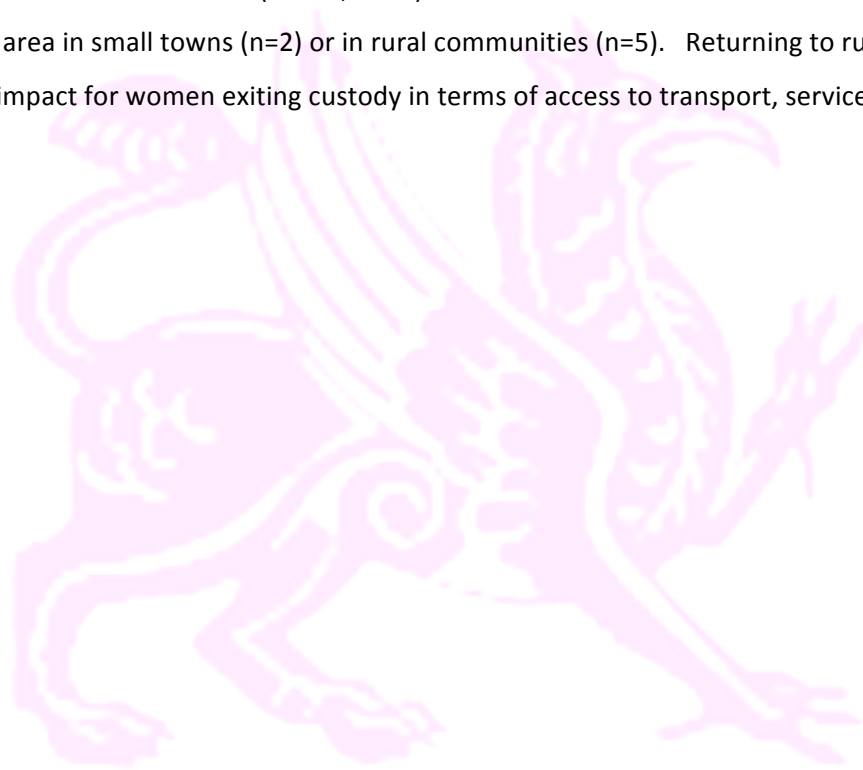
Half of the women had a job prior to their committal to custody; however, six women lost these jobs as a result of their incarceration. Only two were confident that they would be able to secure employment although six spoke of their hopes to secure employment following release. Despite this, only three women secured employment over the nine-month period, although it is of interest that these three women were working prior to coming into custody.

Previous experience of trauma was relevant for all the women interviewed. Nine of the women described their experience of domestic violence, both historical and recent. Other trauma including bereavement, loss and displacement were revealed. All participants were prescribed medication in relation to their mental health, both prior and during their imprisonment. Substance misuse included misuse of pre-scribed medication; alcohol (n=9) and drugs (n=4) were reported as having influenced their offending.

For six, of the study group, this was their first offence. For the remaining eight who did have a previous record, previous convictions ranged from one offence to 33. For the majority, this was their first experience of custody. Offences ranged from Violence against the person (n=3), Theft (n=6), Perverting the Course of Justice (n=2), Public Order Offence (n=1) and Driving without Insurance (n=1) and Allowing Self to be Carried (n=1). This range of offending reflects the overall profile of women in custody (NIPS 2015). The length of periods in custody varied and ranged from three months for a Theft offence, to 24 months for Violence against a person. The majority of women (n=12) were sentenced to a period of 12 months custody or less⁶, which is higher than the overall profile of women in custody in Northern Ireland. Six of the women were subject to post-release supervision. Only one of the women in the sample was assessed by the PBNI as being of high risk of harm to others. This would be consistent with PBNI statistics. (O'Neill, 2011).

⁶ I have only included the period of custody as directed by the court and not included the period of post-custody licence.

Demographically Northern Ireland has a unique rural flavour with 35% of its population residing in rural areas. The limited availability of private and public services in rural areas can cause difficulties for women returning back to their communities, particularly where they are dependent upon public transport to access services. In recent years there has been an overall decline in the availability of some public services in rural areas of Northern Ireland. Shops, schools, banks, post offices police stations and probation offices have closed due the decline of the population in their catchment areas, market forces and rationalisation programmes. This has resulted in a lack of facilities particularly for women in rural areas (Walsh, 2010). Seven women lived out lived outside the Greater Belfast area in small towns (n=2) or in rural communities (n=5). Returning to rural areas had significant impact for women exiting custody in terms of access to transport, services and isolation.



4 Findings

In order to accurately reflect the women's journeys from prison to the community, it was necessary to listen to the women's voices and to their interpretation of their realities (Finch and Mason, 1993). To check for validity of the analysis, I ensured that the concepts and examples represented patterns in women's accounts while paying attention to different cases and patterns. The information gathered was extensive and it would be impossible to fully encapsulate it in this report. Therefore, the following is an outline of the main themes which emerged and which will include some case studies to illustrate the impact of 'time after time'. Pseudonyms have been used and care has been taken not to include any personal identifying information in order to protect participants' anonymity.

KEY THEMES

4.1 Supporting Desistance

Desistance theory provides us with an understanding of the processes through which people cease offending; a key element of desistance theory concerns the nature of identity within this process (Maruna, 1997, McNeill 2006). It is argued that a movement away from crime entails viewing oneself as a person who does not offend. Whilst definitions and understandings of desistance remain contested, most researchers now think of desistance more as a process than as an event that involves 'both ceasing and refraining' from offending (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). An initial criticism of the desistance paradigm was that much of the research did not examine the role of gender in desistance (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). It therefore failed to fully understand the interaction between women's offending, their needs and the criminal justice system. This was particularly so with respect to women serving very short sentences and remand prisoners, and those with 'combined and multiple mental health and substance abuse disorders' (Baldry, 2010). Most importantly, perhaps, Baldry (2010: 253) accuses desistance theory of failing to account for 'the marginal space from which most (women offenders) come and to which most return'.

Desistance is often considered as a process which starts after an offender's release and indeed the question has been posed if there can be a role for the prison in desistance. Liebling (2013) proposes the concept of 'survivable prisons', stating that studies have shown that the risk of reoffending for

some is exacerbated by the experience of imprisonment, whilst for others it is reduced. She also highlights that prisons which promote “feeling of personal development”, are better at promoting desistance (Liebling, 2013: 160) and suggests that prisons should aim to provide “an environment that helps prisoners with offending behaviour, preparation for release and the development of their potential’ (Liebling, 2013: 160).

The Prison Review (PRT, 2011) explored the role that prisons can play in supporting such intentions. It called for a Whole-Prison approach to support desistance, characterised by a fair and reasonable treatment, strong and meaningful relationships between staff and prisoners, a focus on prisoner motivation and achievement, practical help to promote a crime-free life outside and support for the development of a non-criminal identity’ (PRT. 2011:23). This report also acknowledges that society as a whole needed to commit to supporting reintegration, namely, there was a role for families, communities, the State and the institutions of civil society (the media, the Church, business, etc.) to be engaged effectively in processes of supporting change.

It became apparent over the period of this study that women who had engaged in purposeful programmes, which assisted self-development within the prison, when matched with appropriate community services including mental health, addiction, accommodation and support services were better prepared to return into the community and indeed desist from further offending. The question is did the women, many of whom who had no history of offending and no previous prison experience need to be sentenced to custody in the first instance and could their offending not be addressed by way of a community sentence?

The first case study will consider some of the issues raised above.

Case study 1 - Anna

Anna was assessed as posing a risk of harm to others. She was serving a two-year sentence. While in prison she attended programmes and gained external support with mental health, addictions, trauma and managing finances. Subject to post-custody supervision, her licence conditions were restrictive, including requirements that she reside in hostel accommodation and be subject to electronic monitoring. Despite her fear and concerns about returning to the community, Anna acknowledged that she was more prepared due to engaging in programmes in custody:

“Well, I think a lot of things have been of benefit to me like the help I got from the mental health, the education I had, mixing with other people. My confidence has grown from when

I've come in. It has definitely ... been a good source of help". (Anna, age 45, 3 months post custody)

Anna was able to reflect on some of the desistance work completed with one of the voluntary sector organisations within the prison:

"I did the Sycamore Tree⁷, it was the Conflict and Resolution and we had to think a lot about our victims and we had to write them a letter. I realise now that at the start when I came in, I didn't think it was so serious but now I realise that consequences that my actions had and my (victim) could have did... it made me think before I would use my hands or I would think better". (Anna, age 45, pre-release)

Anna did face a number of difficulties on her release, such as establishing links with family and residing in a hostel outside her community. She did express concerns about returning to her local community fearful that she would meet up with others who would have a negative influence on her and that she might attract the attention of local paramilitary groups. Despite the main official ceasefires over twenty years ago, paramilitary activity still occurs in local communities. The term 'community punishment' has a particular significance in Northern Ireland in that the term usually refers to action taken by local paramilitary groups who are 'policing' local areas, often involving meeting out 'rough justice' (Carr, 2015). Punishments have included evictions from home and area, beatings and shootings (Nolan and McCoy, 1996). People involved in so-called 'anti-social' behaviour or offending can become targets. Anna described her concerns in returning to her local community for fear that she would be contacted by a paramilitary group:

"It [the estate] is run partly by the paramilitaries and the flat that I would be going into, some of them are for prisoners. They have seemed to have taken them over – they have murals⁸ and that up and I would worry in case they would come and have a word with me, they would not be happy at what happened ". (Anna, age 45, pre-release)

⁷ Sycamore Tree is a Restorative Justice and Victim Awareness programme, facilitated by Prison Fellowship, Northern Ireland within Hydebanks College.

⁸ Murals figure as a prominent feature of the visual environment of Northern Ireland depicting the region's past and present political and religious divisions. The murals represent the paramilitary control within communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Subject to a licence, Anna did not need to return to her local community, but was placed in a hostel that was specifically chosen to assist with her particular needs. She availed of a range of support from a number of agencies in the community.

"I suppose when I was in custody, I would have worried about coming out and in hindsight now if I knew I would have got so much support, I won't have worried so much at the time. You know I used to lie in my bed at night in my cell and think, Oh my goodness how am I going to cope with one thing and another, but looking back now, I have surprised myself the way I have coped, you know, with certain help that I got. I wouldn't have worried if I knew I would have got that help". (Anna, age 45, 9 months post custody)

Anna availed of specific services that commenced whilst she was in custody and continued to be provided within the community, resourced and managed through her Probation Officer. Such interventions provided her with the practical support needed for her to deal with previous experience of trauma, domestic violence, mental health and self-harm issues.

"I have Probation and I have NIACRO and I have my support worker in here, (project worker) comes out to see me and I'm getting Community Counselling (mental health)... to be honest, I think that every day, there is something and I've got put in touch with New Horizons..., another group that deals with Mental Health and I'm going to start a course there on a Monday". (Anna, age 45, 3 months post custody)

The provision of practical support was particularly important in securing accommodation, arranging transport and filling out the necessary forms required by the Social Security to assist her return to the community.

"I put in for the DLA (Disability Living Allowance) and NIACRO filled that in for me... I wouldn't have filled in the form as well on my own, I wouldn't have known what to write or I wouldn't have been able to fill it in as well if it hadn't been for NIACRO". (Anna, age 45, 3 months post-custody)

Anna acknowledged and appreciated the impact of such support.

"If I had have come out and had nothing, I would have been in a bad situation". (Anna, age 45, 3 months post-custody)

Her story describes a woman who would classically meet many of the predicted “pathways” into custody (Corston, 2007). Anna described a difficult childhood, both her parents suffered with poor mental health, she grew up with little self-confidence and spoke of her dependency on others. Her marriage was characterised by misuse of alcohol and violence. She outlined a long history of depression and contact with the mental health services. Support through addictions counselling, mental health services, Women's Aid and a number of personal support programmes have assisted her in returning to the community. These services were put in place due to the serious nature of her offending and concerns that she presented a risk of harm to others. She also completed specific counselling programmes in relation to domestic violence and trauma that helped her in making better judgments when forming relationships with others. Over the nine-month period of release, as part of her resettlement and licence plan agreed with her Probation Officer, Anna had at different times engaged with eleven different organisations (including Probation). Significantly, she obtained the services and level of support because of her assessed level of risk of causing harm to others. Resources follow risk that raises two concerns; when resources follow risk, the focus shifts from helping people who are in distress to managing risks of others. This is likely to cause further disadvantage to women, most of whom are low risk of causing harm to others and secondly given the climate of greater austerity there is concern that there will be fewer services available in the community.

There is also the concern that whilst most of the organisations who worked with Anna following her release from custody, offered services to women as citizens in their own right, i.e. she did not need to offend to access such services. Anna felt that she would have been unable to access such services on her own, and depended upon others to act as a bridge, assisting her to avail of local community resources. She viewed her period in custody and on licence as providing her with the necessary supports to change her life. She spoke of the practical support provided to her to boost her confidence:

“Occupational Therapy helped me, they would have took me out, one day on the bus to see how I got on, met me in town and stuff and I met XX, my Alcohol worker and [s/he] tried to help me as well.” (Anna, age 45, 3 months post -custody)

Such practical supports allowed her to join a number of support groups in the community:

"I wouldn't have even had the confidence to join a group like that, I would have stuck with a No-No, I wouldn't have joined it before but now I have the confidence to go in and join new groups". (Anna, age 45, 3 months post-custody)

By the end of the 9 months, Anna was able to articulate the improvement she saw in her life:

"I definitely feel better about myself, I feel healthier... I'm moving in the right direction The support I got in prison, I thought it was going to stop when I got out those doors but it didn't and that's a thing I'm grateful for. You know, I think there's a lot of women and they're not on Probation and I really think, they would find it harder without some support because if I have a problem, I can ring (Probation officer) and talk to her or come to the hostel here...because I can honestly say I have had support". (Anna, age 45, 9 months post-custody)

On the other hand, where preparation for release was inadequate and/or the where women were released following court, women returned to the community alone and were not assisted to address the situations which caused them to offend in the first place. This is illustrated in the following case study.

Case study 2 - Barbara

Barbara was not so positive in outlining her experiences. She spent a number of short periods in custody previously mainly for public disorder and theft. She was serving a sentence of three months for a theft offence, having spent some time previously on remand she was effectively in custody for six weeks as a sentenced prisoner. Given her short period of custody, she was unable to avail of the range and number of programmes that were put in place for Anna. Barbara outlined that she spent much of her period of custody on the landing and had little interaction with support services.

The *Northern Ireland Gender Specific Standards for Working with Women Prisoners* (NIPS, 2010) states that a needs profile should be completed for all women within four weeks of their committal, including an assessment of their accommodation needs. The Standards also state that an education, skills and training profile should be agreed for every woman and relevant training and work opportunities provided. Whilst successive monitoring and inspection reports have reported improvements in resettlement service provision, the overall regime remained deficient. The most recent Criminal Justice inspection Northern Ireland report 2013, highlighted that only 63% of sentenced prisoners had a sentence plan. Plans were criticised as being too aspirational such as,

'maintain enhanced status', 'remain drug free', 'follow sentence plan' rather than being individualised steps to reduce risk or enhance personal development" (CJINI 2011 pg. 38).

Barbara outlined that she spent much of her time on the landing or in her own cell and her view of custody is negative:

"I have (been) on the landings, you're locked up, and you're isolated...I have seen an awful lot of bullying and tears because of it and to be on the receiving end of it, put your head up (away) ... and I have seen some of the Officers turning a blind eye and the person, the victim, is quite often, you know, put into the room and the door closed and the boy laughing outside of it". (Barbara, age 49, pre-release)

Whilst Barbara's view was that prison, "provide no assistance, no assistance, well it hasn't in my case", she was aware of some of the initiatives within Ash House to support activities:

"they have new people coming in from uni's and things to do work and it was things like that I didn't get to touch because it takes about two weeks for your sentence manager to get the action into gear and then, well it wasn't really worth the while". (Barbara, age 49, pre-release)

Prior to release, Barbara was not very confident about her readiness to deal with life once she had returned to the community. She expressed anxiousness and concern as to her release:

"How can I? When I 'm straight back out to the problem that put me here in the first place". (Barbara, age 49, pre-release)

There was no sense of planning for release. In terms of her accommodation she outlined that she would be returning to her own accommodation, something which she was not keen to do as she was concerned that she would end up re-offending:

"It's just dangerous to be there [in her home address], though I'm going to leave to go there obviously until...I don't know...I've just so much...and myself to sort ... new address...you know." (Barbara, age 49, pre-release)

She was particularly concerned as her benefits were stopped and she had no available finances:

"I think I'm going to have to go to DHSS and apply for a grant or whatever after you leave here and I...actually, I'm not told very much about...really what to do on Wednesday (release date) ...to be quite honest". (Barbara, age 49, pre-release)

Barbara recalled that during a previous period in custody she had met with a NIACRO Support Worker⁹ who had left her contact number with the reception staff. However, on the day she was leaving custody, Barbara said she was unable to arrange contact with her:

"The number ...was written on a wee Stick It, a wee yellow thing, but there was four going out that day and it was hectic in there and they gave it to me and it had been left on the table... I was only out for two days anyway so I never got a chance to phone (her)". (Barbara, age 49, pre-release)

There was no assistance made available to Barbara when leaving custody. She returned to her house, which is located on the outskirts of a rural town and isolated from resources. Her nearest town was some twelve miles away. The estate has symbols of paramilitarism, such as flags, kerb stone painting and wall murals. On her return home, she discovered her house had been burgled and destroyed and her personal items broken. She was unable to access her benefits and she was without food and fuel.

Barbara described how she was affected by her experience in custody and the challenges she met when she returned to the community:

"Being in Hydebank you're in a routine, (crying) and do you see coming out, was a flipping nightmare... trying to get money sorted out... my house had been broken into ...my bed had been stripped so, while I was sleeping on the settee". (Barbara age 49, 3 months post-custody)

Barbara's main concern was that she had to re-apply for Social Security Benefit support, and given the delay in processing her claim, she had no money and ended up going to ask her cousin for assistance:

⁹ NIACRO offers specialised help to women, through the Probation Board's Inspire Project. Women under probation supervision, or soon to leave prison, can access a wide range of mainstream services including those that are based in women's centres in the community.

"I starved, I went to the DHSS, that was...the first thing was a doctor's appointment and he was as much use as a trapdoor in a canoe, but, and then I had to wait so long for him and my DHSS appointment was straight after for a crisis loan for money, and I must have sat for an hour, but anyway, that was Ok. Got in and couldn't really talk to them because I was worked up to high doh ... Went there and got £31... I actually, actually (crying) I actually had to go to a cousin in [place name] to stay with her for a week and a half, you know, as the forms went through for my money to come through. I was sitting over there in pain with hunger, I mean in pain... I had no money...no electric, no heat, no food, not a thing". (Barbara, age 49, 3 months post-custody)

Barbara's view was that she found the return to the community following a period of custody to be more difficult than custody itself:

"I could sit in front of those girls (women in custody) and say, 'You think you have problems in here? Wait until you go home, that's when your problems are going to hit you". (Barbara, age 49, 3 months post-custody)

Barbara described some of the stark choices facing her:

"I actually contemplated do I phone the hospital and say (of her concerns of self harm)...or do I go out and commit a crime to back into Hydebank to eat?" (Barbara, age 49, 9 months post-custody)

Diagnosed as having a personality disorder, Barbara was without medication, financial, family and emotional support. She was not subject to post-custodial supervision. Barbara re-offended within six months of her release and was sentenced to a further two months in custody for the theft of a bottle of wine valued at £4.99. She has subsequently reoffended and is facing a further court appearance for the theft of a bottle of cider.

Over the nine-month period, having spent a further four-weeks in custody for the theft of a bottle of wine and facing further charges, Barbara's outlook is that of despair and frustration. Her view of prison was that it:

"Doesn't work...throwing me into Hydebank, you know at the end of the day... but I'm coming back out and what has, what has it done for me?...Prison yes it's awful and you can't go home at night, but you're going to walk back out and what support? What rebuilding have you had? None...it's just not there..."

There has to be a more constructive way of whatever, rather than send you in there to a room where you sleep, you're fed and you go to a silly wee whatever (class/programme)...It doesn't rehabilitate, one way nor no way ... it's just, it's not the answer". (Barbara, 49, 9 months post-custody)

Barbara's life deteriorated over the period of the year, she is facing further charges and the problems that she spoke about at the pre-release stage were still not resolved at the time of the final interview and in fact, some were worse. It was obvious that her mental health was not good; she continued to rely on alcohol and had limited support in her local community. She described her life as a 'disaster' and "that nothing had changed" for her.

Barbara typifies women who experience the pains and futility of imprisonment acutely. She returns back to the same circumstances of poverty and neglect, which caused her to end up in custody in the first place (Carlen, 2013). Indeed, after each period of custody, her situation worsened and her vulnerability increased. Her finances and health care were stopped and it can take considerable time to reinstate such supports. This was a common theme for women who found it difficult to access monies from the Social Security Agency. Women reported considerable time delay between applying for and receiving monies, in one case this process took up to ten weeks.

It seems to me that women like Barbara are sentenced to custody not due to the serious nature of their offending but because community alternatives are not considered feasible. This is particularly the case where there is a history of non-co-operation with previous community orders. The demands of community alternatives can be onerous on women, particularly for those who have complex lives and where there are travel and child care responsibilities. Gelsthorpe (2006) has argued that community alternatives do not always acknowledge the specific needs of women offenders and there is a lack of women-specific community provision.

There is a question of justice – is it right that women be sentenced for short periods for such minor offences? In 2011, the United Nations published its '*Rules for The Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders*'. These Rules known as the 'Bangkok Rules, have been widely welcomed, not least in that they recommend that women should be given non-custodial sentences whenever possible and they should not be imprisoned because there are no appropriate non-custodial facilities. If women are to be successfully reintegrated back into society after serving sentences, there must be a package of care that can support them in the community. In

addition, the planning process for this must begin as soon as women begin serving their sentences, rather than during the final days of a prison term.

4.2 Women on Remand

In Northern Ireland women are more likely than men to be remanded to prison for offences that are not likely to lead to a custodial sentence (PRT, 2011). During 2014-15, over 59% of the female receptions to Ash House were on remand (DOJ, 2015). Research in the UK has shown that the reasons behind this relate to the issues outlined here and which can lead to great instability for the women concerned: homelessness, mental health problems, substance dependency and poverty, all of which can lead to an inability to adhere to bail conditions without support in the community and an inability to pay the bail bond (PRT, 2011). Women who leave custody following a period on remand have specific needs due to the fact that they are often released following a court hearing without any certainty that their application for bail will be upheld. Women who are remanded are often sentenced to short sentences and are released straight from the court, with little or no planning or support. In such cases, women need to make their own arrangements to travel home and indeed, to return to prison to collect their belongings. There is little or no planning for release for bail. Linda's case illustrates this predicament:

Linda is a single mother and all of her children are currently in care. She herself has a history of growing up in care, trauma, sexual violence, mental health and addictions. When we first met in Ash House, Linda was homeless and she had little support in the community. She outlined that when she initially came into to custody, she had no change of clothes, personal effects or money. She had little support from her family and she was dependent upon others for basic assistance:

"I wasn't expecting [prison] 'cos my solicitor has assured me I wouldn't get time... I hadn't anything at all, no clothes or anything ...I had to get the Chaplin just to report to the Post office to get some money for me". (Linda, age 31, pre-release)

Linda could only identify support agencies such as the Drug Action Unit and the Mental Health Crisis Team as positive supports in the community, recognising that her friends were all drug-users:

"I do have friends but I wouldn't like to relapse...like it's a bad circle for me and if I go with them, I'd end up here again so I would". (Linda, age 31, pre-release)

Linda had planned to go to a hostel and she was concerned as to how she would manage. She spoke of her plans to attend the Addictions Centre and her G.P. and despite the lack of identified support in the community; Linda had optimistic hopes for her future:

"I feel quite confident this time, because you know, I just don't want to be coming back in again; it's no life out there". (Linda, age 31, pre-release)

Linda did return, she reoffended and was remanded to Ash House four days following her release. She spent the nine-month period of the study in Ash House, apart from a short period when she was granted High Court bail. Her story highlights the lack of planning and support offered to women who are released from custody after a period of remand. Like Barbara, Linda lacked the basic necessities of life on release and had no support.

"I wasn't (prepared) this time I was out I wasn't getting my benefits so I went without money, because I wasn't under a sentence regime I didn't qualify for it". (Linda, age 31, 3 months post-custody)

The court had imposed a number of bail conditions including residing in hostel accommodation, a curfew that was electronically monitored and reporting to the police station. There were also restrictions on her movements in that she was not allowed into certain areas:

"I didn't go to visit her (Mother) because I wasn't allowed, I was on really strict conditions so I was and that restricted me from going places so no I couldn't even go down and see her if I had wanted to. I wasn't allowed into town or anything or I wasn't allowed near (place name) it was really strict conditions there". (Linda, age 31, 3 months post custody)

Her journey is typical of the many women who return to the community with little support. She described her fears concerning her release:

"I was scared; I was scared because I knew I was going out to nothing... I was just told to go to that hostel – I hadn't been to the hostel before. I had to go and present myself to the door on my own and you know what was I going to say to them? What was my explanation for coming out of jail? Do I tell them about it, or do I not? I don't want them sitting judging me either you know ". (Linda, age 31, 3 months post-custody)

She described her first night in the hostel, where she attended an induction meeting where there was an emphasis on rules and ensuring social security forms are completed so that the hostel is

funded. The journey from prison to the hostel was over two and a half hours by bus, she had no money for food for the journey and on arrival she was met by staff from the hostel who immediately informed of the rules. She outlined that she did not fully understand these:

“because I am only after a big long journey, you know, I only got half way through the rules and I told them - look I have to go to my bed. I was so tired from the travel and they said it was OK but that I would have to complete the rules the next day and fill out the rest of the forms and I was told that I had to present myself to social security to get my benefits set up”

“I had been it all through so it was kinda ...I know what to do, but there was confusion because the hostel is so big and there was problems with the tagging [electronic monitoring],”. (Linda, age 31, 9 months post-custody)

Linda spoke of her difficulties in completing the necessary forms required by the Social Security. She also was unable to pay the service charges levied by the hostel. She did register with the Drug Addiction service and was receiving drug substitution on a daily basis however, due to lack of funding and other support this required her to walk some distance:

“I had thought it would have been a lot better than it was ...it was difficult for me what with having no money and stuff because I was expected to walk out to my addictions centre which was 2 -3 miles from where I was ...I had to walk out there and walk back in just to get my tablets – and everywhere I was going I had to walk because I didn't have the money to get the bus or the taxi or anything and there was nobody to take me”. (Linda, age 31, 9 months post release)

Linda described the challenges of being on her own, isolated from family and peers, experiencing poverty and feelings of depression. However, it was directly after a difficult and emotional meeting with her young son that she made the decision to return to prison.

“It's very lonely and hard, I was just barely scraping by to be honest, on a bad day, I would have been in my own room sitting by myself wondering what to do next. I did sort of wish I was back in here [prison]”....

“I knew it wasn't working for me ... I wasn't getting no money, I wasn't eating properly because I didn't get any food. I didn't get any money for food anything I did get; I had to steal myself... I ended up cutting the tag off, I was quite drunk and emotional about seeing the child, about not having money, about being in a hostel and about just general things and

I decided I had enough of this tag. I had enough of being confined in my room – it's just like sitting in my cell so I just might as well go back and sit in my cell, I wanted to go back to prison, I knew it wasn't working for me and that prison, I would be safer". (Linda, age 31, 9 months post release)

Despite Linda's conscious decision to return to custody by breaching her bail conditions, the experience of her period on bail compounded her sense of failure:

"To be honest, I was glad to be back in but it doesn't feel good knowing that you were only out for six days and you are back in, it's like you have failed again and you are made, you are on your own to feel that way". (Linda, age 31, 9 months post release)

Research has highlighted that women who have difficult and chaotic lives can experience prison as a respite (Mayock and Sheridan, 2010), and a recent study of women prisoners found that for some women, prison 'came as a welcome relief to the situations that they found themselves in immediately prior to arrest.' (McHugh, 2013:12). One of the functions of prison is to deprive individuals of their liberty as a punishment for their offending. The function of remanding individuals in custody is based on public protection and court attendance. In Linda's case, prison is viewed as a place of shelter and reflects the desperation of her situation in the community. Linda and other women in similar situations require safe, women-only supported accommodation that will provide a holistic service to address complex needs and vulnerabilities in the community. Such services need to be planned and time managed, supporting women to move on to independent living.

4.3 Experiences of custody

Whilst all women found it traumatic to go into prison, it was particularly harrowing for those who were first-time offenders and who were not expecting to receive a custodial sentence. They described being unprepared and fearful of their situation, not knowing what to expect or how to manage. In contrast, those who were expecting a custodial sentence spoke of the plans they had made – much of which centred on the care of their families:

"Just simple things like getting them (the children) to go to do the groceries on a weekly basis... working out bills, for example, rates, TV, electric, credit unions, leaving out cards and

making them go in on a Friday afternoon to pay the bills and... and teaching them how to make dinners". (Cora, age 49, pre-release)

A recent Inspection Report (CJINI, 2013), outlined the process for women's committal to prison. The report stated that as women travelled with young men on their journey to the prison (because the women's prison is in the grounds of the YOI), they were subject to verbal abuse. Once in custody, women were strip-searched on arrival.¹⁰ Whilst they were treated well by staff in reception, some reported that they received only basic services and many reported that they felt unsafe on their first night (CJINI, 2013). Women in this study reported similar experiences:

"I wasn't prepared because the solicitor and the barrister all thought I would have a community sentence...that I wouldn't end up in prison. It was hard to begin with 'cos I never experienced anything like it in my life... your whole world just turns around, completely different and you can't do the normal things that you were used to every day. I was under the impression that soon as I turned up at Court it would be – Oh you'll be away in an hour, nothing will happen, you know and then I went up the cells in a horse-box on the way here." (Jane, age 29, pre-release)

"I was sent down at quarter past 10 in the morning, no tea, no coffee and no lunch, no nothing, came into the prison, no medication for my epilepsy, come in here, processed me down the stairs in reception, still no tea, coffee, nothing, gave me a bag with bed-linen in it, bag with me clothes in it, I was on crutches, sent me upstairs, threw me in a cell. I asked could I get tea or something and that there, their attitude was 'where's your flask?' I said 'This flask? Can I get it filled' and they said no. We're locked down, Drink from the water in the tap. And that's what I got until the I got out the next morning". (Karen, age 41, pre-release)

Another woman, Helen, who had no previous criminal record and no experience of custody, describes her first night:

"You can hear the noise and it frustrates you more too 'cos you don't know a fire's going to be out, you know, outburst of fire. You don't know if somebody's been carted off to hospital,

¹⁰ Since January 2014, this practice has changed. NIPS has now adopted a, "gender specific pilot" on searching procedures in Hydebank Wood female prison. Full body search on a female prisoner only happen now in response to "specific intelligence" and requires the authorisation of a senior manager.

you don't know if any of the officers have been attacked or what, you just don't know and you're sitting in fear, you know, you're sitting in fear...my biggest fear would be if there's somebody out there, if something did happen". (Helen, age 60, 3 months post-release)

Prison is particularly difficult for women who are the primary carers for their children and many spoke of the pain of separation. In England and Wales, it is estimated that between 17 to 18,000 children per year, are affected by the incarceration of their mother (Fawcett Society 2009; Corston 2007). The consequences of imprisoning women with children, particularly where she is the sole carer can be devastating (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). The women described the experience of separation as the most difficult aspect of imprisonment (Kruttschnitt, 2005). This was particularly so with the potential loss of custody of a child while in prison (Loucks, 2004):

"The experience in here has affected me, definitely, I'm very emotional, and I just cry pretty much all the time. I just have to pick a certain subject and I'm gone, you know, but I find it hard to talk about my children in here and I find it hard to talk about the impact it's had on my children". (Jane, age 29, pre-release)

"Extremely hard, the hardest thing I've ever had to do, it's the hardest thing I've ever had to do... not being there, not being there for them when they come in from school, not making their dinner, it's very hard when you're not there". (Cora, age 49, pre-release)

While many women noted the pains of custody, some women viewed prison as a place of safety, given that prior to custody they had survived childhood abuse, profound domestic violence, and on-going struggles with substance addiction and suicide attempts (Carlton and Seagrave, 2013). As previously noted, the extent to which women perceived prison as a 'place of safety' was a reflection of the pains of their life on the outside, where they struggled with addictions and were subjected to inter-personal violence:

"I went through a lot of domestic violence with (partner name) for years ... I have been trying to get away from him for years, and I couldn't and then coming up these last 3 years, I sort of went off the rails myself, I started drinking and shoplifting... This is the first sentence was the best thing that ever happened to me. I maybe wouldn't have been alive if I hadn't come in here". (Anna, age 45 pre-release)

It is of concern that women such as Anna seek refuge and support in custody rather than avail of the services in the community. It is obvious that such community services are failing to engage with

women or those women are unable to access the services in times of need. Research consistently notes the high numbers of women with mental health and experience of trauma within custodial settings (Corston, 2007; Bloom and Covington, 2004).

Women did adjust and reconcile themselves to prison life by developing a variety of coping mechanisms. Some women reported that they immersed themselves in prison culture and availed of programmes, classes and activities, building up friendships along the way:

“When I came in, I was distraught, totally distraught; I thought I was never going to do it. Then I found my feet, I thought this is not really as bad as you think. ..I did a parenting course through Barnardos. It was very good; there was only four of us who did it... I’ve worked in the kitchen and I’ve worked in the gardens. I work with the dogs, Dog Orderly; yeah have learnt quite a lot.” (Fiona, age 40, 3 months post-custody)

The recent Inspection of Ash House reported that there was “significant regime slippage and most prisoners spent too much time long locked in cells. This was mainly due to frequent unpredictable lock-downs. Women prisoners in particular needed more access to outside exercise given the claustrophobic environment of Ash House”. (CJINI, 2013: xi)

Many of the women spoke of the lockdowns and the impact that cell confinements had on their wellbeing:

“If it’s the weekend and you’re locked at half 5, it’s like 17 hours that you’re locked over the weekend and you’re just on your own all the time, it’s so hard to be on your own and having all these feelings and emotions in your head, you know, and thoughts. A lot of the time I struggle with mole-hills becoming like mountains, because you get a tiny thread of something and you can’t get out to use the phone to convince yourself that it’s otherwise, you have to wait till the morning and when the mornings come round, you’re convinced you’re heading for divorce and your children’s never going to speak to you again and nobody in the whole community never going to speak to you again, and you’re going to end up on the scrapheap...it can be very frustrating”. (Helen, age 60, Pre –release)

Women’s experiences of prison differ, it became clear over the period of time, that what they retained from their period in custody had an impact on how they resettled back into the community. Women who were able to identify positive experiences were able to transfer such experience to the challenges they met on their return to the community. This included an acknowledgment that they

had survived prison and could transfer that experience to other areas in their lives or indeed, that that the experience of incarceration had strengthened their determination not to reoffend:

“You know, it gives you strength you didn’t know you had. I didn’t think I’d cope ever, ever. I mean when I went in I put myself on suicide watch, I said “I’ll never cope here and you know, never. And then it took me probably a good month to settle, but then you just settle, it’s a way of life, you know, I’m in for four months, I have to get on with it, and I did. I never ever thought I would ever, ever cope in prison ever... I ‘m a lot stronger now”. (Fiona age 40, 9 months post-custody)

Fiona’s feeling of strength is based on the fact that she had survived her period of incarceration and despite emerging difficulties on her return to the community, she was able to draw on perhaps the only positive element of her experience in custody – that she coped with the regime.

Women who maintained negative perceptions of their period in custody were not as positive about their ability to sustain their lives in the community. This was particularly prevalent for those serving short sentences and for women who reported a lack of meaningful engagement in activities whilst in custody. They were unable to identify any positive factor from their experience of prison, which would build up their confidence and resilience in managing the challenges they would face on their return to the community.

Isobel is a young woman who had no previous experience of prison and had no previous criminal record:

“I don’t understand the point of a prison ‘cos people say its... it literally just punishment, there is no rehabilitation, there’s no nothin...there’s no benefit here, you know, it is just a punishment, I would understand why people get worse ‘cos there’s nothing here to make them better... you just think of why am I here? ..You don’t get that rehabilitation of what’s wrong and right, you know, there is none of that in here... It’s just a case of locking them behind the door, lock them away, when they’ve done their time throw them back out and if they do the same thing, they’re back in again”. (Isobel, age 20, pre-release)

Whilst Isobel has not reoffended, she continued to deal with the impact of being in custody over the 9 months following her release - securing accommodation, benefits, training and employment, and dealing with family and community reaction to her offending and imprisonment.

4.4 The initial weeks following release

Many of the women described a sense of loss and disorientation in the initial days and weeks following release. Even those women who had served short sentences spoke of the difficulties they encounter on leaving prison. Some found it difficult to cope with the freedom and especially having to make decisions on their own. Even familiar and simple tasks, which may have been routine before they went into custody were considered taxing. Being amongst crowds of people, travelling and having to use public transport were cited as causes for concern, but the most prominent concern was the fear of meeting people they knew.

Previous research (Pogrebin and Dodge, 2001) notes the impact of institutionalisation on prisoners with long sentences but an important finding of this study was that even women who had spent short periods in custody reported a relatively rapid process of institutionalisation:

"It's daunting getting out. It's very daunting, very, but in a way I'd rather stay, because I'm used to this routine and this way now, you know." (Grainne, age 35, pre-release)

"In the nine months you definitely do become a little bit institutionalised, you do get used to that routine and obviously when you are in you don't have to worry about bills and you don't have to worry about the heating and you don't have to worry about stupid things like TV licences and stuff but when you come out, it's like a complete reality check again because you have all this worry". (Jane, age 29, 3 months post-custody)

"It was a complete culture shock, I'd sort of got used to being in, the routine of Hydebank and that ... and then coming out into the big wide world again, it was a complete and utter shock... even though I was only in for 3 months, you still have that institutionalisation...I think the first couple of days, I did sort of tuck myself away in my own house. I didn't want to do things, it was more, and I was waiting for somebody to say it was OK to do it". (Donna, age 42, 3 months post-custody)

The effects of this process of institutionalisation was most profoundly felt when women exited custody to return to the uncertainty of life in the community. For some women such as Donna, this uncertainty was compounded, as she did not know where she was going to live or have any source of support:

"I haven't really (support) as far as I know I haven't probation and I'm not on license or anything like that, so...once I go, I go...I was renting a place but it had to go... that's one thing I was meant to see the girl from the Housing. I asked to see her nearly four weeks ago and I'm still waiting to see her... when I get out, I have a weekend booked in a hotel but I'll have to use that weekend to look for somewhere temporarily... At the moment, I'm living in a tent by the looks of things when I get out". (Donna, age 42 pre-release)

Other women described trying to manage this uncertainty by retreating into their home environments in an attempt to insulate themselves from the outside world, which they perceived as hostile and confusing:

"You get scared like. Do you know what it is? It's like, I don't know, it's like that feeling, see when you're a wee kid and you lose your parents and you get lost and all, you don't know where you are, don't know whether you're coming or going like, you just feel lost". (Ellie, age 22, 3 months post-custody)

For many of the women, an effect of their institutionalisation was the loss of self-confidence and initiative needed to manage their everyday affairs. If the impact of custody leads to one feeling disarmed and incapacitated, then it follows that there needs to be greater support offered to women prior to and on leaving custody.

4.5 Re-establishing relationships with children

For many women who are imprisoned, this is probably the first time they have been separated from their children for a significant length of time (Codd, 2008; Prison Reform Trust 2007). This separation is described as 'mental torture' (Corston, 2007:29). Being apart and being concerned about the welfare of their children are among the most damaging aspects of prison for women and the problem is exacerbated by a lack of contact (Bloom and Steinhart 1993). Literature points to the importance of maintaining positive links between prisoners and their families; if this is successful they may be less likely to re-offend after release (Hudson, 2006). NIPS recognises the importance of family ties in supporting social rehabilitation¹¹ and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland Resettlement Strategy (2004), and the Health and Social Service Boards, Children Services plans also

¹¹ NIPS Annual Report 2003/04:17. 'The aim is to ensure that time spent in custody is used to the best effect with a view to reducing re-offending on release, and to assist prisoners to lead law-abiding lives when they return to the community. Family ties are important sources of support and maintaining these links contributes to social rehabilitation.'

note the place of parenting work within the resettlement process, however, there is no statutory agency in Northern Ireland with specific responsibility for children of imprisoned parents (Barnardos Briefing paper No 8).

The majority of women in this sample (n=11), were mothers, five of whom had full-time responsibility for childcare prior to their committal to custody, five women had children who were now adults and one woman had children in care. Time and time again in the discussion with women, mention was made of the pain and anguish of being parted from their children in particular not being able to look after them and share the everyday joys of motherhood.

Case Study 3 - Cora

Cora had no previous experience of the criminal justice system however, she knew that she was facing a period of custody due to the nature of her offending. In interviews she defined herself in relation to her role as a mother, wife and carer, and this extended to her preparing the family on an emotional and practical level prior to her imprisonment. She defined her period in custody as a punishment for her offence but describes the punishment in terms of the separation from her family:

"...extremely hard, the hardest thing I've ever had to do, it's the hardest thing I've ever had to do... not being there, not being there for them when they come in from school, not making their dinner, ... it's very hard when you're not there. ..Being away from the kids has been awful, if I didn't have kids, time in prison would be much easier but being away from them is the hardest part of being in here". (Cora, Age 49, pre-release)

Cora spoke of the contact with her family who were able to visit her, despite the cost of the two - hour journey from her home. The Corston Report noted the 'bitter-sweet' experience of family visits, providing the women with the chance for much needed contact but also the profound sadness when the visit is over and re-emphasising the agonies of separation (Home Office, 2007). Visits can compound the women's feelings of lack of control over their children's lives and their powerlessness to intervene in relation to any presenting problems (Casey-Avevedo et al, 2004). Many of the women spoke of such experiences, particularly the pain they felt once the visit was over and they returned to their cells alone:

"I look forward to seeing them and then when I see them, I'm happy and then when they leave and it's like your heart went with them, it can be quite hard". (Jane, age 29, pre-release)

There is a growing body of research in relation to the unintended consequences of imprisonment including the impact of imprisonment on family life, children and communities. The effects of imprisonment often reach far beyond their impact on the individual prisoner. However, little is known about these secondary effects in an Irish context (Breen, 2010) and few studies have focused on the impact for families of women offenders. Women returning to their homes, families and children spoke of the challenges in re-assuming parental roles:

"It took a while, it didn't happen just over night, like the girls found it odd, they had their own wee routine they had gotten themselves into...They had one doing so much one day and another doing things another day, you know, and when I came back, it took a few weeks now but I didn't want to step on their toes either you know...I noted with my two younger daughters, they'd grown-up, they'd matured, you know, I was expecting to come home to where I'd left them, but no they'd matured... times I wanted to sit and cry and think, you know, I've missed out, but I suppose I'm lucky compared to some women". (Cora, age 49, 3 months post-custody)

The six-month period following release from custody posed the greatest challenges for women. The initial optimism had passed and women were dealing with day-to-day issues with the additional pressures of being an ex-prisoner. Cora had returned to a jubilant welcome and enjoyed the rituals of being a mother once again. However, living in an isolated community made getting basic necessities was a problem. Whilst she wanted to reassume her parental role, though her husband and children expected it to be the same as prior to her incarceration, difficulties emerged. Cora had been banned from driving, therefore employment opportunities, already scarce in a rural area, were limited. This placed further financial pressures on her and it impacted on the family, but it was the isolation and her dependence on others that caused the greatest challenge to her:

(Long pause then tearfully) "Just depending on people all the time but especially upon your own children (voice breaks up tearfully) times during the week when we needed bread and milk, I'd say to my older daughters, like - on the way, would you'se be fit to get bread and milk. They know now I just don't have the money". (Cora, age 49, 3 months post-custody)

Over the period, Cora was having particular difficulties with one of her daughters and she felt that the children did not respect her as they had previously:

"I've noticed, I suppose, they feel they can say anything to me - now that could be insults or anything when the time comes...you can notice their attitude, they can just say something and they don't know how much it is hurting...it's just that wee bit of respect, at times you think it's gone". (Cora, age 49, 6 months post-custody)

As time went by, Cora was able to work through many of the issues with her daughters but reflects that there was a link between her period in custody and the breakdown of the relationship between her and one of her daughters:

"It was probably hard for any of them to forgive what I had done, I had left them". (Cora, age 49, 6 months post-custody)

Cora had no history of previous offending. Following her period in custody and subsequent period on licence, she was confident that she would not re-offend in the future. Her experience of custody left an enduring impact on her, ten months following her release she still checked herself against prison rules and the clock:

"There are times I'll be looking at the clock at ten past seven and thinking 'Oh No!' Time for lock-up in 20 minutes, or I 'm outside as much as I can, it kills me to come in for lunch on a good day 'cos lunch time is automatically half twelve and all you can think of is Hydebank". (Cora, age 49, 9 months post-custody)

In criminal justice terms, Cora would be considered a success in that she did not re-offend and was confident that she would not do so. However, this was not mirrored in her life experience after release. Her life after custody was difficult in that she was isolated from the community. She felt immense shame in relation to her offending and excluded herself from social events including attending mass. Her family had been affected by her period in custody and her husband had left the family home. These secondary impacts of custody or invisible punishments, can transform family and community dynamics (Breen, 2010, Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002).

It is reported that in the UK, just 5% of children stay in their own homes when their mother goes to prison, and whilst many are cared for by other family members, 12% of children are placed in care (Corston, 2007). Women whose children are subject to Care Orders and in particular, those who are engaged in legal challenges to regain or maintain legal custody of their children faced even greater difficulties. Women who offend have already been labelled as 'bad women', 'bad partners' and 'bad mothers' (Corston, 2007). The primary challenge for mothers whose children are in care is that they must prove that they are fit and able to care for their children despite their imprisonment. For many this is impossible, particularly when considering the other hurdles women face on leaving custody including securing stable accommodation, finance and seeking support for mental health and addictions.

Linda has a number of children in care and her youngest son was only one month old when she was sentenced. Such was her concern and worry:

"[I've] seen him on a few occasions missing him because he was only a four week baby, and I had a motherly bond with him and just through time you know, I think that bond is gone because I have been here so long, you know he's not going to know who I am". (Linda, Age 31, 9 months post-custody)

Shortly following her initial release, Linda returned to prison on remand and she reported that Social Services did not agree to support and arrange contact visits with her son. Linda found it difficult to understand the decision. The pain of separation was particularly difficult due to the fact that Linda felt that she had no power or control of the situation. She found it difficult to get information from Social Services about her young son:

"I have to go through the Social worker, I try to ring them once a week to see how he is doing, but these last 8 months or so, it's like oh, she is not in the office or she is on holiday or she been off sick or she has just left the office. My wee boy was taken into foster care at the start and for the first couple of months I was getting cards to say how he was from the foster parents ...but that all stops, I don't get any more cards, I don't get any more photos, I don't know what the child looks like now". (Linda, Age 31, 9 months post-custody)

She was released on bail and subject to a range of conditions including electronic monitoring. When on bail, it was agreed that Linda could have a supervised visit with her son. She spoke of how difficult that meeting was, having neither preparation nor support prior to the meeting:

"...to be honest with you, whenever I got to hold the child he was a wee bit upset, as of course I am a stranger to him and she (Social Worker) ended up having to nurse him to sleep so I didn't get to bother with him... I only got about 20 minutes which was kind of sad".
(Linda, Age 31, 9 months post-custody)

Social Services did not provide any support to Linda after her visit her son. She felt inadequate and rejected, particularly as she was looking forward to the contact with her son having not seen for a long period. Linda felt unable to cope with her life in the community and made an active decision to remove her tag so that she would be returned to custody. She described that it not only the pain that she felt in seeing her child again, but also the pain of leaving him.

4.6 Re-establishing relationships with partners

There is little available information as to the impact of imprisonment on intimate relationships especially in relation to women prisoners (Codd, 2008). This is particularly so in relation to husbands / partners who support the woman prisoner. Codd (2008:10) suggests that "men who support female prisoners are...invisible, although this may reflect the simple fact that men are less likely to care for female prisoners' children and less likely to remain involved with female prisoners". I was unable to find research specific to the impact of imprisonment for same-sex partnerships. This would be an interesting area to explore, as would other aspects of identity.

Of the 14 women in this study, 8 were in relationships, 5 were married and 3 were in a relationship. It is acknowledged that imprisonment places great stress on couples, including the impact of the separation and for some the change of roles for those partners left at home (Codd, 2002). On the other hand, for some the period of separation may provide women with the opportunity to break with a relationship, particularly those where there was a history of difficulties (Woff and Draine, 2004).

Cora spoke of the support she received from her husband whilst in custody - the fact that he was caring for the family, managing finances and ensuring that family visits were maintained. She highlighted how the roles were now different and the additional impact of financial loss to the

household, Cora's concern was directed to how her husband was managing, reflecting the fact that she was trying to maintain her role as carer even from within the prison:

"It was very hard on him because it's one wage coming in now. I was full-time working and there's a mortgage to pay, there's everything...as you know, there's a recession and everything has risen price wise... just extremely hard on him... He has taken on the mother and father's role". (Cora, age 49, 3 months post-custody)

One of the areas which is not fully covered in the literature is the issues arising with regard to intimacy; especially that of re-establishing the sexual aspect of the relationship post release. Cora expressed her concerns regarding this issue:

"I'm a bit nervous, 18 months is a long time, yes it's the first we've been separated, we're 23 years married, it's the first time, you know...So it's nerve-wracking...physically and emotionally". (Cora Age 49, pre-release)

Over the months, Cora outlined the impact of her offence and her period in custody on her marriage. Upon returning home, she expressed concerns returning to her role as wife and mother. As the months passed, both the financial and the emotional strains of their situation resulted in her husband moving away. There is little research as to the precise impact of imprisonment on relationship stability (Codd, 2009). Even strong relationships can come under severe strain because of the difficulties women experience when trying to reintegrate back into the community. Relationships in which there are difficulties prior to prison are unlikely to be resolved upon release. Anna separated from her husband and commenced divorce proceedings whilst in custody:

"It gave me a sense - here's a chance I could start again and I got divorced and all when I was in Hydebank. I put in for a divorce and now I'm divorced so I think if it hadn't have been for Hydebank, I think I would have still been in that horrible relationship". (Anna, age 45, 9 months post-custody)

Those women who planned to return to their husbands/partners were confident that the relationship would assist them in returning into the community. Two of the women had established new relationships prior to their imprisonment and spoke of their plans to get married. However, it became clear that over time, the challenges of returning home had an impact on the relationships of these two women. Neither of them married and both of them spoke of difficulties that emerged

within their relationships after they returned back to the community. On the other hand, three of the women reported that their relationships had benefited from the separation:

"It's like a new marriage, the honeymoon... he changed a lot, he did the housework when I was working, and last month for my birthday, I got a wedding ring, (after 18 years of marriage)". (Helen, age 60, 9 months post-custody)

More commonly the separation exacerbated problems and two women reported that their husbands had moved out of the family home, albeit temporarily:

4.7 Re-establishing relationships with family - Young Adults

Not all families were able to provide support and this was perhaps more evident for the younger women in the study. Two of the women in the study were under-25; the youngest was aged 20. Although their parents provided support during their period in custody and both young women had hoped to return to their families on release, they were unable to do so. Isobel acknowledged that her relationship with her family was strained due to her offending and her period in custody. Living in a small town, people were aware of her offence and she described how her family needed to move to a new location due to social pressures:

"You can see the damage has been done and I can't do anything to change that, just apologise and not get myself into any more trouble, but I think it has had an impact on the family, not just the immediate, even the extended family, it's quite a big hit." (Isobel, age 20, 3 months post-custody)

Over the study period, Isobel's relationship with her mother deteriorated and she did not return to the family home. Although she did not re-offend during the period, she was quite isolated and had few supports in the community. Another young woman, Ellie, had spoken of her hopes to return to her family when in prison, however on release, she continued to misuse alcohol and drugs. When she had no money or accommodation she returned to her family, however this was just a short-term measure:

"I stayed for two nights, and then they were talking about letting me go home, but then my dad was like you know... I told him the truth about me...taking stuff and all (drugs)...and my dad says "no, that's it, can't be doing with that"... because of my wee brother as well. I

actually see for once, I actually understood that they could not...see for once, I'd like mucked up here, I've made a mistake". (Ellie, age 22, 3 months post-custody)

Ellie acknowledged the support that her family had shown her and had insight into the impact her behaviour on them. She moved to a number of short-let accommodations and did not continue to meet with me after six months. It was clear that being accepted and included within the family was important to the two young women as they had not built up other social supports and were quite isolated in the community. It is important to recognise that young women have age-related needs that differ from those who were older and these needs to be taken into consideration when planning for release.

4.8 Mental Health

Evidence exists internationally as to prevalence of mental illness amongst women in custody and women who offend. Women in custody are five times more likely to have a mental health problem than women in the general population (Corston 2007). However, in Northern Ireland there has been growing concern in relation to the increase in mental ill health and particularly the risk in depression, anxiety and other psychological difficulties across the community. The experience of living through the conflict is recognised as one of the main contributors (McCaffery, 2014). Northern Ireland also has one of the world's highest prescription rates for anti-depressants (McCaffery, 2014). There is a high prevalence of serious mental health difficulties in the Northern Ireland female custodial population (Bates-Gaston, 2013). One study showed that 78% of the women screened displayed three or more forms of personality disorder, with paranoid characteristics being higher than samples in the rest of the UK (Bates-Gaston, 2013). Further data from the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJINI, 2010) revealed that 50% of female prisoners have personality disorders and 14% of female sentenced prisoners have a psychotic disorder. This clearly has implications for prison and all of the agencies across the criminal justice system.

Twelve women in this study reported that they had mental health problems and/or their mental health was affected by their period in custody. This included diagnoses of bipolar disorder, depression and personality disorder. The CJINI found this has implications for criminal justice agencies, particularly for prisons that find they are coping with high levels of mental health need.

Case Study 4 – Fiona

Fiona, a mother of two, was sentenced to a period of four months custody and one year's post-custodial licence. This was her first offence and first period of imprisonment. She described her offending against a background of domestic violence, both as a child and within her marriage and she spoke of the trauma living with an alcoholic father. She outlined that her mental health had not been good for years and recognised the link between her offending and mental health:

"...well, when you get very, very low and you just go out spending, you know, it's really low and my husband had me in a very bad place at the same time and told me I'd be better off dead, you know, and emotional, I was an emotional wreck." (Fiona, age 40 pre-release)

She spoke of self-harming incidents prior to coming into custody, which were related to domestic violence:

"My husband would have said...well, I would have the tablets and I said I was going to take them, he'd go - "if you're going to take them this time, take them right this time and make sure you do it right". He'd tell me to go and jump off a cliff and then, you know, tell me I was a bad mother, nobody wanted me here and...Just real mental torture...I overdosed three times, yeah, and I ended up in hospital twice and I pulled my hair out". (Fiona, age 40, pre-release)

Fiona had sought assistance from community mental health services and although this information would have been available to the Prison Service on committal, she outlined that she had not received any support from the Prison Mental health team. She described being nervous as to the prospects of serving a custodial sentence, but over time she described how she settled into the prison regime and described a pride in being able to handle it:

"When I came in, I was distraught, totally distraught, I thought I was never going to do it. Then when I found my feet, I thought this really isn't as bad as people think, I thought you come in and have to eat porridge and you know, you were, as my mum thought, in handcuffs in the shower and in the back. ... There are the hard parts, being locked up but, you know, I've kept busy the whole way through..."

You know I'm actually proud of what I've done now, for I've done my time and I've got through it a hell of a lot better than I thought I would and I'm a stronger person". (Fiona, age 40, 9 months post-custody)

Fiona's plans on release were to return to her family home, where her parents were caring for her children. She had commenced a new relationship and was confident of her ability to return to her life.

Three months post-custody, Fiona reflected that much of her mental health issues over the more recent past were in relation to her court case and that she felt she no longer felt the need for the amount of support as previously. She had met with her psychiatrist shortly after her release and attended meetings with the mental health team over the period. This assisted her in managing her mental health:

I'm probably lucky in a way where I was already seeing a psychiatrist and it's all like before I went in, they know I had my court case pending, you know, once they knew I had been sent down, My mum had told them and they sent me an appointment out, they know then as soon as I got out on [date], they could link in with me you again, you know, so , but it's people in there, don't have those supports, I suppose it would be very, very daunting coming out". (Fiona, age 40, 3 months post-custody)

However, over time, Fiona's mental health deteriorated. When we met some months later, the challenges of managing a new relationship, a new home and settling back with her children had taken its toll. Fiona was not only dealing with difficulties within her family, she was also coping with her community's perception and response to her offending and imprisonment. The media reporting of her case had particular impact for both her and her family:

"That was the worst part for me..... going into the newspaper, you know, somebody phoned me up and said they'd seen it and I was, like Oh my God!, you know but that was worst for me than anything else, more so probably for my parents and stuff...".(Fiona, age 40, 3 months post-custody)

Fiona was subject to Probation supervision as part of her licence conditions and had attended NIACRO, meeting up with other women whom she had met in custody. This was an important support for Fiona as indeed for many of the women who attended such groups:

"I like going to NIACRO because I think you meet up with people, you know, who you was in with and people who are out now, but I like it because nobody judges you. You can just be yourself fully, you can talk about being in prison, whereas like you have to be careful sometimes of what you're saying". (Fiona, age 40, 3 months post-custody)

At our last meeting, Fiona had become reconciled with her partner and she had moved house again. The period of time had also taken its toll on her relationship with her parents and she was no longer speaking to them.

Despite her problems and setbacks, Fiona described developing an inner strength to deal with the challenges life was throwing at her with the support she received from the mental health teams. She believed her resilience came from the fact she was receiving appropriate help when required and she had survived a period in custody. She also recognised the importance of the support she got from attending NIACRO and meeting with her peers upon release.

4.9 Feelings of Guilt and Shame

As is evident from the case study referred to above, feelings of shame and guilt were features of women's lives as they returned to the community. Some women described how they were unable to cope with the day-to-day challenges of life outside prison. Simple activities such as going to the local town or shop were a cause of stress. This was most acute during the initial weeks on leaving prison, however for some, the shame and stigma did not lessen over time:

"I didn't want to leave (prison) because I was facing the big bad world I thought. My biggest issue was meeting people, having to try and get on a bus myself, having to bump into people myself... it was as if I had prison wrote on my forehead ". (Helen, age 53, 3 months post-custody)

Evelyn struggled with her label as an offender and recalled her anguish during her first months of custody:

"I was unable to physically or mentally function – I just stayed in my cell and cried, I just couldn't come to terms with the fact that I was in prison – me, at this stage in my life". (Evelyn, age 61, pre-release)

This was Evelyn's first occasion before the court and her first experience of custody. She described herself as a respectable woman. She justified her offending as a moral dilemma in order to protect her son who was under threat in relation to non-payment of debts. Her offence resulted in her losing her job, home and social networks. Evelyn spoke of her feelings of shame and guilt in custody – feelings which stayed with her throughout the period and impacted greatly upon her ability to reintegrate back into the community.

"It's hard, it's very hard. I haven't engaged with many people since I came out, mentally I am not strong. I am very low at times. I just don't have any confidence really to go out and forget about all that has happened because I can't forget". (Evelyn, age 61, 3 months)

The sense of stigma that women experienced as a result of having been in prison was clear in many of their accounts. Women who had no previous convictions and clear intentions of avoiding further offending were confronted by the impact of stigma and a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963). This was evident in how they viewed themselves and how they perceived others viewed them, particularly within their local communities. This was a consistent theme in nearly all of the women's accounts. However for Evelyn, such was the extent of her feelings of shame and guilt that over the nine months and was unable to move beyond her status of offender/ex prisoner:

"It's just ruined my life, you know, my life isn't, it'll never be what it was before. I've lost my own self-respect, you know, so nobody can give that back to me really..."

The biggest challenge is trying to be able to go out and about and not feel like as if you have got a sign on top on your head, and I haven't overcome that, not being able to live where I want to live and not being able to organise. That's the biggest challenge and disappointment as well. It's a challenge that I haven't been able to deal with and I'm at other people's mercy at the minute...it's just my independence taken away and I just don't, don't enjoy life". (Evelyn, age 61, 9 months post-custody)

This is not unusual for women exiting custody. A study which focused on stigma found that upon release into the community, women often experience a damaging process as a consequence of both society's labelling, as well as the internal mechanisms of self-shaming resulting from embarrassment about having been in prison (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). The enduring impacts of shame prolong punishment and lead to isolation and social exclusion, which can place women at risk of further offending (Carlen, 2002; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

4.10 Employment

Obtaining stable, meaningful and well- paid employment is an important factor in assisting the successful resettlement. Seven women were in employment prior to custody but only six of the women spoke of plans to seek employment on release from custody. Indeed, of the fourteen women, only three of the women had secured employment in the nine months following release. This is consistent with recent research published by PRT (PRT, 2015), which showed that women were unlikely to secure employment following a period of imprisonment. Similarly, it was clear from this study that imprisonment adversely affected their employment opportunities. One of the women, Nora, who returned to her job was laid off one month after her return, the financial impact of this setback was extremely difficult for the family over the period:

“I was very hopeful when I came home but then everything just broke down, because my previous workplace, they said that they were keeping me and everything, but when I arrived home and I went to the first meeting, they were sorry, but we have to reduce your hours because we have got some else... but they knew what happen with me, they knew I was not sick”. (Nora, age 36, 3 months post-custody).

Another woman, Helen, had always worked prior to her imprisonment but had not found employment six months after her release:

“I’ve been trying to get a job and stuff. I’ve put in application forms in but I haven’t heard anything back yet, so I haven’t, so I ‘m just hoping to get that. It’s just, I have to get some work because bills are just piling in “. (Helen, age 60, 6 months post-custody)

For Helen the importance of her working was linked to her sense of self-worth. Employment provides the financial means to support families, it provides a sense of identity and purpose, a daily structure and routine and an opportunity to increase one’s social network. Helen was unable to secure employment over the nine months and she believed that her period in prison had made it more difficult for her to get a job.

Jane also spoke of her plans to secure employment whilst in custody. She lost her job prior to coming into prison but was hopeful of finding a job in due course but unfortunately, the job was not available to her on her return. Jane attended programmes with NIACRO and with her probation

officer, and however she found it difficult to secure employment – not least due to employer's view of her having a criminal record:

“Definitely a lot harder, I see jobs that I feel I can apply for and then obviously there is always that question, Have you a conviction?, and as soon as you declare you have a conviction, no matter how qualified you are for that job that you are obviously down at the bottom of the list.. I have applied for a few jobs, I haven't been successful for any of them and I do believe that is because I have disclosed that I have a conviction”. (Jane, age 29, 3 months post-custody)

Of the six women who spoke of their plans to work, only three of the women secured employment. However, all were faced with discrimination, which was related to their offending and imprisonment. Securing a job was particularly difficult and there was evidence of employers not wishing to employ applicants with a history of conviction. Women spoke of their concerns in informing their employers of their convictions and were fearful of the consequences should their employers find out. This led to one of the women feeling that she could not be honest with her colleagues.

Eight of the women did not identify employment as an immediate concern, particularly those who were suffering with mental health difficulties. The two women who were pregnant were not keen to seek employment, mainly because that they perceived that the only work available would be short-term and low paid, and that ultimately it would reduce their benefits. Those women who lived in isolated, rural areas also perceived themselves to be at a disadvantage in securing work and the younger women found that it was not financially feasible to work as they were in receipt of housing and income benefit. Carlen (1988) recognised that many women perceive themselves, as being damaged by their imprisonment and that their criminal record had declared them as unemployable for life. She argued that imprisonment can effect a further narrowing of already meagre life chances”. (Carlen, 1988:137).

4.11 Experience of Post Custody Supervised Licence

Prior to April 2009, prisoners in Northern Ireland were eligible for release after serving half of their sentence. Since the introduction of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order, 2008 only those sentenced to less than 12 months' imprisonment are released at the halfway point of their sentence without supervision. Sentences which are over 12 months are now replaced by the Determinate Custodial

Sentence (DCS) where the Court fix a period of time to be spent in custody as well as a period on licence which is supervised by a Probation Officer. Consent is not required for the imposition of a DCS. The legislation also introduced a range of public protection sentences (indeterminate and extended custodial sentences) for offenders who commit a specified sexual or violent offence and who are assessed as 'dangerous', release from custody is now dependent upon the reduction of risk. Where there is lack of compliance, PBNI will request a recall to prison executed through the Offender Recall Unit, with a review of all recalls by the Parole Commissioners.

The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order, 2008 marked a significant change for probation in Northern Ireland, in that it had greater role in the provision of reports and assessments to the courts, at the decision-making regarding release and also in the management of most serious offenders in the community in both community and custodial sentences (Fulton and Carr, 2013). Recent reviews carried out by the Department of Justice (DOJNI, 2014) in relation to these new sentences have focused on men and highlighted the number and reason for the recall to custody. The first recall case was returned to custody in February 2010 and by September 2013 there were 168 recalled offenders in custody. Since 1st April 2009 and 30th November 2015, 91 women have received a total of 97 Determinate Custodial Sentences and to date (December 2015), 11 women have been recalled to custody.

Just under half of the women interviewed in this study were released subject to post custody supervision. Those on licence were required to meet their Probation Officer on a regular basis and to complete programmes as specified within the conditions of their licence. All the women subject to licence reported that they did not re-offend during the period of the study and none were recalled to prison for breach of licence.

Themes raised by the women subject to post-custodial supervision included the need for clear and timely information as to what their licence conditions entailed, particularly for those who had no previous offending and no previous contact with the Probation Service. One of the women outlined her concern that she had not yet received a copy of her licence when we met one week prior to her release and she spoke of the impact of this:

"I might not get it as it has been joking said to me by my Sentence Manager, I might get it the day I walk through the gate... they know my release date, I should at least have it a week before I get out... even a couple of days at least, not the day I leave which is more like going to be the case... It does concern me at the end of the day 'cos I don't know what's in it. You

know if they give that to me the day I leave, you know, I have to plan everything then... I can't plan in advance... You know, it's a horrible feeling 'cos you don't know what they're going to do, you don't know if you've got a curfew, you don't know anything." (Isobel, age 20, pre-release)

Another woman spoke about the need for information as to the requirements of the licence. This is usually shared with the licensee at the pre-release meeting with the Prison Probation Officer and Community Probation Officer which takes place within the last month of her prison sentence however, there is a strong case for initiating the procedures much earlier in their sentence. As one woman recalled:

"I didn't know what it was, that you'd have a weekly visit or a monthly visit, a fortnight or whatever it would be. You know, nobody sat down with me and explained right, here's what happens when you get out on your Probation licence. I didn't know". (Cora, age 49, 9 months post-custody)

Contact with probation was considered beneficial by the women and most (n=5) were able to positively identify the support of being on licence and particularly the additional guidance provided by their Probation Officer and they believed that it did help them not to reoffend:

"I definitely worried about coming out (of prison) The support I got in prison, I thought it was going to stop when I got out...but it didn't and that a thing I'm grateful for.. I think Probation is a good this, I think definitely if it wasn't there, a lot of people would feel isolated and they wouldn't have the support". (Anna, age 45 9 months post-custody)

"It was at the start (useful)..it was, it help me just to sort of talk about things I probably wouldn't have talked to anybody else". (Evelyn, age 61, 6 months post-custody)

Women also appreciated it when Probation Officers showed flexibility and understanding of their circumstances particularly when they were unable to make appointments or struggled with travel arrangements. PBNi established The Inspire Women's Project in October 2008. Initially piloted in Belfast, a key feature of the Inspire Women's Project was its strong connection with other voluntary and community-based women's groups. Described within the Prison Review Report (2011) as 'innovative, flexible and dynamic' with a recommendation that: "The Inspire model should be adopted as the norm for dealing with women who offend. It should be centrally funded, but planned

and delivered by a partnership of statutory, voluntary and community organisations", (PRT, 2011:70).

Since 2011, PBNI completed the roll-out the Inspire Model throughout Northern Ireland. During this period, the Inspire Model created arrangements where staff from PBNI, NIPS, NIACRO, and the Women Support Network (WSN) and other local women and community providers worked together in providing specific programmes and support arrangements for women exiting prison. Women were able to access any of the programmes provided by NIACRO and a range of other local women's group and community groups as part of their contact with probation but the same programmes were also offered to women who were not subject to statutory orders or post custodial licences.

Recent financial cutbacks that have resulted in changes in the model as outlined above. PBNI had to reduce the number of units as a result of budgetary curtailment, notably the closure of the PBNI INSPIRE women's premises in March 2015, although alternative accommodation has since been secured. NIACRO and WSN have also lost their ability to provide the range and level of relevant services as a result of the budget cuts they have experienced, (Campbell, 2015).

The women in this study outlined how they had benefitted from their contact with PBNI over the period of the study. This ranged from the intensive planning and management of services for high-risk women, referring and organising specific counselling sessions, liaison with Mental Health Services and contact with the Victim Information Scheme. Women also acknowledged the usefulness of programmes, which were on offer and in being referred to other services:

"in this community, there isn't a lot of groups of different things to go to, if it wasn't for NIACRO I think I would feel very unanchored, at least having that Thursday that I am going there and I see people and you are not judged, you are in the same environment as everyone else, nobody in NIACRO really judges you.. we are all coming from different backgrounds and it's nice to go there. If NIACRO were there my anxiety state would be a lot higher". (Jane, age 29, 6 months post-custody).

Probation Officers met the women on a one-to-one basis and offered a range of self-development and confidence building programmes. Participation was on a voluntary basis and not all women wished to avail of such services. Many programmes were community-led and supported by short-term funding grants. In order to ensure value for money and to meet service level agreements with funders, there were pressures on probation staff to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of participants to ensure that the programme is viable. This can be difficult balance to achieve. On the

one hand, Probation Officers can see the benefits for women engaging in programmes and will encourage women to attend whilst on the other hand, there is acknowledgement that attendance is voluntary and needs to fit in with her other responsibilities. This challenge is illustrated by Jane's comments:

"At the start it was a bit of a challenge for me I have to say because I kept being offered things I didn't want to go to and it wasn't because I was just being awkward... I didn't want to do it...and I was like it just doesn't suit me at the moment with having people pick up the kids and it just sort of felt as though I was being told you just really have to go and I didn't want to go. (Jane, age 29, 6 months post-custody)

Due to financial challenges, some of the programmes offered were dependent on short-term, short-notice funding and relied heavily on the availability of community staff to facilitate the programme. It was therefore difficult to plan with sufficient accuracy in advance. Some programmes were unable to be delivered due to the small number of women subject to community court orders and custodial licenses living in the area and not all of these women would consent to participate; this was particularly challenging when planning programmes in rural areas.

"There are a couple of course but they kept falling through, they had me doing one and there was one in the (place name) about doing make-up and stuff but then it fell through and there wasn't enough people so I just go to NIACRO ". (Fiona, age 40, 9 months post-custody)

There is a substantial body of research examining the concept of legitimacy and the use of power within criminal justice (Tyler, 1990). Studies have found that people's willingness to comply and cooperate with power holders are significantly linked to their perceptions of the legitimacy of those in power (Tyler, 2006b). Legitimacy and the use of power within probation is centred on compliance. Robinson and McNeill (2008) suggest two categories of compliance, 'formal compliance' and 'substantive compliance'. Formal compliance describes the technical (minimal) conformity to licence conditions whereas substantive compliance refers to an active form of engagement. The nature of the relationship between probation officers and those whom they are supervising is key to enhancing legitimacy.

Women in the study acknowledged that they were subject to licence conditions and understood that there were restrictions placed on them. Whilst they accepted the legitimacy of probation in enforcing the conditions of their licences, they did question some of decisions made in relation to the management of their licence.

One of the women explained that she wanted to go across the border to the Republic of Ireland for a weekend. She informed her Probation Officer, who advised her that her request had been turned down due to concerns that she would not return to Northern Ireland. Given that this was her first offence, she had already spent a period in custody, had demonstrated compliance during her period in custody and home leave and her family commitments, she viewed this as particularly unfair:

"I just thought that it was ridiculous after all this time getting to the stage to do a runner. I wasn't going to do a runner, I think they should have considered that, when I never done before I went into custody and I'm not going to do a runner after it, why would I?" (Cora, age 49, 3 months post-custody)

Whilst there was an understanding of the Probation Officer's role, the women did call for an individual approach to each case:

"I can understand that they were (concerned about the risk) but I think they need to check the individual cases, just not automatically presume somebody's going to do a runner". (Cora, age 49, 3 months post-custody).

"I think the Licence people have to look at the person .I think the Licence people think that everyone needs the same sort of thing but they don't...I feel it (licence conditions) needs to be more specific to each individual than what it is" . (Isobel, age 22, 9 months post-custody)

One of the main functions for probation staff is that of ensuring sentence compliance. Women's accounts suggest they felt that PBNi placed too great an emphasis on the need to comply with the contact arrangements and overly stressed the penalties they would face for non-attendance. Women held misconceptions as to the process for recall and there is a need that there is full and correct information imparted to them throughout the period of licence.

"All I know is that they said if you miss 3 appointments, they can come and lift you and put you back in prison, you don't even go through the Courts and I'm like, can they just come and do that to me? That's what I've been sitting worrying about". (Fiona, age 40, 6 months post-custody)

There is evidence to suggest that compliance increases where women perceive their contact with supervisors to be fair and reasonable- in the words of Tyler (2006: 376), decision made in relation to their licences are 'appropriate, proper and just'.

Analysing the accounts of the six women subject to post-custodial licence, there are differences as to how they perceived the usefulness of the contact over the period of time. In the initial months women appreciated the support – particularly the practical support and advice which was on offer:

“I think at the minute I probably need it, if I had to get out of custody and not have anything, I would have struggled, I feel that, knowing there are supports out there for you, it a big benefit to you”. (Anna, age 45, 3 months post-custody)

“When I was down last week, she was asking me about (Specific problem) ... and she said “I’m not going to say go do it, but I ‘m not going to tell you not to do it, this is your choice” She made me aware, you know, just to think (of the consequences). She’s very open and honest”. (Cora 49, 3 months post-custody)

However, most of the women did question the value of sustained contact over the longer period of time. Of the six women who were subject to licence three had no previous offences and were adamant that they no intentions of further offending. Given that they were not assessed as posing a serious risk of harm and were compliant in their attendance, the frequency of their contact with their Probation Officer was reduced to monthly. Over time, most of the women reported that the value of their contact diminished as the focus became one of monitoring rather than meaningful engagement:

“Personally I don’t see what good it does me, you know, there’s nothing more I can do, I’m not a risk to the public basically, so they don’t need to keep an eye on me, you know, that type of way”. (Cora, age 49, 9 months post-custody)

Unlike Probation Orders where there is an opportunity to return the Order to court for early discharge, licences are supervised until the end of licence period and in some cases, it would seem that supervision is no longer required and could be viewed as ineffective use of resources. Given the changing political landscape where there have been severe cuts budgets, there is a need to re-examine how resources are deployed. One option may be to consider early discharge of licences for those who are assessed as unlikely to re-offend and who have no outstanding needs.

A further comment, which is of interest, was raised by one of the young women in relation to probation’s contact with her family. Current data protections practice does not allow Probation Officer to divulge information to family members where the offender is over-18 years of age, unless consent has been given. PBNI do not actively seek this consent; it is usually provided, following a

request by the individual or family. It was suggested by one of the young women that it would be useful for her mother to be informed of licence conditions prior to release in order to provide support:

“My mum was very much left in limbo and me trying to explain was not the best ‘cos it was my first time too and was getting stressed out and her stressing out was stressing me out more. I think parents need to be brought in a wee bit as well”. (Isobel, age 22, 9 months post-custody)

Of the six women subject to licence, four were based in the Greater Belfast Area and two lived in other parts of the Province. Women were initially met in the Inspire Women's Project in Belfast. This was a women-only facility however, due to financial pressures, the premises were closed on the 27th March 2015 and staff were relocated while alternative accommodation was secured. The Inspire Project moved to its current location in December 2015. During the period, women were seen in local offices where most of the attendees were male, consistent with practice outside Belfast. It was clear from accounts that women preferred to attend a women-only location:

“ I don't like going into that office at all, they've done it all up and freshly painted and everything but I don't like going in there and there being men there.. I don't know what it is but to me, it's hard enough, but when you are going in with women, it's not so bad but when you are sitting there with all these wee hard lads you know, they are just giving you the eye and they're are sort of glaring at you.. You feel really uncomfortable”. (Jane, age 29, 6 months)

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of an all-women environment in supporting desistance and in ensuring that women feel safe (Corston, 2007, Gelsthorpe et al. 2007). Particular importance is attached to the titles of women only projects in order to stress the aspiration to make positive change in women's lives rather than as correctional services (Radcliffe and Hunter, 2015).

4.12 The Impact of Custody beyond the Gates.

Women described how prison had presented challenges for them, the physical and psychological demands as a result of being locked up, hearing and witnessing other women's distress and dealing with their own thoughts and concerns. Prisons are not safe places (Moore and Scraton, 2009), women described long-term consequences from having been subject to pain, deprivation and living

in an abnormal setting interacting with strangers. Moore (2015) describes that the enforced removal of a person's liberty, a citizen's status, and the erosion of personal identity. Hanley (2003) notes that the psychological effects of imprisonment can vary from individual to individual, but 'few people are completely unscathed by the experience' (Hanley 2003: 4).

Exiting prison is sometimes classified as the 'end result' – a static experience, as an end point in a "linear process through the criminal justice system" (Seagrave and Carlton 2013:8). A key finding of this study, is that experience of punishment does not end on release from prison. All twelve women interviewed during the nine months following their release from custody reported that the memory and experience of being in custody remained with them. The consequence of being in custody went far beyond the prison gate. This is a selection of their words nine months following release:

"Whether you're in a month, two months, a year, you know, it's not something that you can wipe out you know. You've had that experience, you know, you just have to learn by it and ... It stays with you". (Donna, age 42, 9 months post-custody)

"It's with you for life, it's with you for life. You know you can, you'll never lose that" (Evelyn, age 61, 9 months post-custody)

"You never forget, you never. You try and block it out, but when sometimes you're on your own and you see them four walls you think, you know where I've been, what I've done, it's just an impact on your mind, your life. I hope, and I do hope, that one day, I'll wake up and I'll think "it's gone". (Helen, age 60, 9 months post-custody).

The experience of being in prison, no matter what the length, or indeed how women coped with the consequences did stay with the women throughout of the period of study. There is little knowledge as to when such memories fade and women can move on to living their lives beyond prison.

5 Conclusion

Women who offend in Northern Ireland endure similar problems to their counterparts in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, particularly in relation to mental and physical ill health, addictions, poverty and social exclusion. However, they tend to be at a higher rate due to the additional impact of living in a society emerging from years of conflict. No government agency within Northern Ireland escaped the impact of the Troubles. The justice agencies had particular demands placed upon them in relation to policing, security and detention of political prisoners. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has acknowledged that some of their current regimes and policies were shaped as a result of the conflict and require changes to ensure that the Service is more reflective of the post-conflict society of Northern Ireland.

The personal cost of prison was great for women. All the women spoke of the trauma of being in custody, even those few who found some benefits. The overwhelming view was that that the period of custody was a wasted period of time for them, women felt marked by the label of imprisonment and in some cases, the fact of the being in custody even for a short period of time, was a punishment so great that time could not erase the detrimental effects upon their psyche and outlook on life. It is clear from these accounts that the effects of custody are seen not just in the period of imprisonment but as 'a dynamic process that unfolds over time' (Parke et al, 2003:199). These women's journeys reveal the impacts of this 'time after time.'

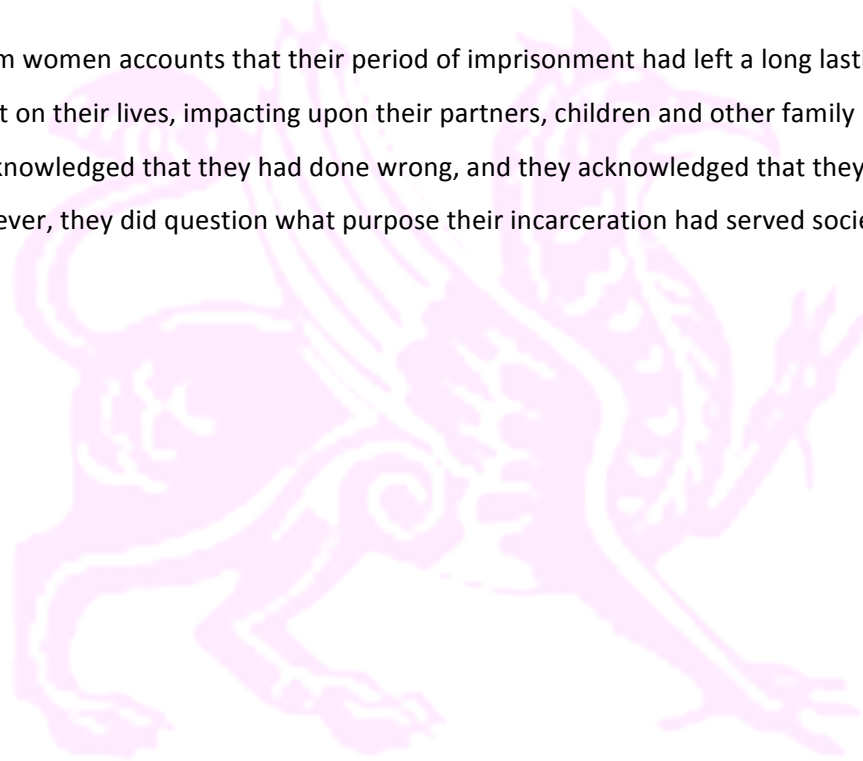
The focus of this study was on the experiences of women exiting custody and their stories have raised the following significant issues and in the final section I include a series of recommendations.

Notwithstanding the debates as to the function and use of custody, it is important to recognise that women may face particular difficulties when they enter custody that are different to men. Women tend to commit offences that are acquisitive in nature while men tend to commit more serious, violent crimes and as a result, a higher proportion of women are in prison for relatively short sentences. This has great implications in terms of sentence-planning, access to programmes and making the appropriate links with agencies in the community who can assist women in their return back into the community. It was evident from research that those who were sentenced to short periods of custody did not receive the level of support within custody to prepare for their return to the community. Women were therefore in more difficult circumstances than prior to their incarceration.

A high proportion of women in this study were first-time offenders and the majority had no previous experience of custody. Most were sentenced to a period of custody of less than eight months, some with a further post-custody licence reflecting the nature of their offence. Their offences were not necessary violent in nature and they were not assessed as posing a significant risk to others. Short term sentences do little to address the complex needs of women offenders and from the account of the journeys described by the women, they can have detrimental effects in terms of their mental health, family relationships and financial stability.

The salient question that needs to be asked is - did they need to make this particular journey, or to put it in another way, did their offending merit a custodial sentence?

It was clear from women accounts that their period of imprisonment had left a long lasting and damaging effect on their lives, impacting upon their partners, children and other family members. The women acknowledged that they had done wrong, and they acknowledged that they had offended. However, they did question what purpose their incarceration had served society?



6 Recommendations

There is a need to review the sentencing of women. In Northern Ireland the sentencing of offenders is gender-neutral in that everyone is deemed to be equal before the law. A long-standing principle of the justice system is that courts should consider the full circumstances not only of the offence but also those of the offender when sentencing. Police diversion initiatives and community sentences enable women to take control of their lives, to care for their children and to address the causes of their offending.

Recommendation 1

The Department of Justice should commission a review of the sentencing of women offenders in Northern Ireland in order to establish on what grounds women are sentenced to periods of custody. Northern Ireland needs to have confidence in community sentencing and not view such sentences as treating women more favourably than men. Planning and providing for release is essential in order to assist women return to the community. There is much criticism in a criminal justice system that returns women back into their communities and situations which has led them to offend in the first instance. Much of the current debate within Northern Ireland is focused upon the inappropriateness of the present women's prison estate and there have been calls for a new programme of work, building a purpose-built unit for women prisoners. Indeed, a new step down facility opened recently in 2015. Whilst it is right that prison accommodation should meet the needs of women offenders, it is essential that resources are matched in the community so that women can avoid the need to return to prison as a place of safety or refuge.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Justice should ensure long term funding for community initiatives that provide women exiting prison with the practical and emotional support to rebuild and return to the community. Stable mental health and feeling secure is particularly important for women leaving prison. Prior to leaving prison, the women described feeling anxious, depressed, and lonely and having a fear of being unable to cope on their own. There is a vital need to fully address women's

mental health needs on entering custody and to ensure that women are referred to the appropriate local community supports systems upon release. Therefore it is essential that all medical support services are in place especially a designated General Practitioner.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should ensure full assessment and treatment of women who report poor mental health and ensure that any required support is arranged with appropriate community services upon release.

Recommendation 4

All women leaving custody should be registered with a General Practitioner within her local community. There is a pressing need for safe, supportive and local accommodation for ex-prisoners. It is widely recognised that accommodation is one of the most vital issues facing women leaving prison. Whilst specialist hostel accommodation can be extremely supportive and necessary in working through particular issues with women, generic hostel accommodation is not suitable for women who present with a range of mental health, addiction and family needs. Accommodation requires coordinated planning and support, sometimes for extended periods of time prior to and after release.

Recommendation 5

There is a need for the Department of Justice in partnership with the Department of Social Development to consider accommodation needs for women leaving custody, with a view to specialist provision for those women who have been excluded from mainstream accommodation.

There is now greater knowledge as to impact of separation of women from their families and particularly the negative repercussions upon their children. This study highlighted the challenges for women returning to families, the problems they faced in re-establishing normal familial relationships and for some, their period of imprisonment and the strains it put on them and their family proved to be the cause of the family breakup. Women spoke of the challenges that their period of imprisonment and separation had on their relationships with their husband and partners.

In particular, mothers who have children in care have special needs. There is a need for the relevant agencies to work together to ensure that the bonding process between mother and child continues to grow during the period of separation. Services are also required both in prison and the community to support mothers before and after contact visits.

Recommendation 6

The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) should pay further attention, and particularly the impact that custody has for partners and families of women in prison. There needs to be more emphasis on supporting the women who intend to return to the home by increasing the amount and range of family contact whilst in custody in order to reduce the length and time of the separation from their families. Consideration should be given to support women return to their home during the period of imprisonment by means of day release and at weekend visits in order to support and maintain family contact.

Recommendation 7

NIPS and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should ensure greater contact arrangements are made to allow women to maintain contact with their children. Such arrangements should consider arranging contact visits outside the prison estate and making use of local child-care provisions. The detrimental financial consequences of imprisonment for women and their families is known. Poverty and offending is interwoven. This study highlighted the acute anxiety of women who were unable to access monies for long periods after leaving prison. Women also emphasised the challenges in completing the various claim forms and their need for assistance not only in completing them but also in the whole process of trying to claim the social security benefits and financial assistance they were entitled to.

This is particularly important for women who are released from prison after securing bail or when they are sentenced but are released at court as they have served their time.

Recommendation 8

The Department of Justice and the Department for Social Development need to put in place arrangements for women prior to them leaving custody and ensuring timely access to benefits.

Recommendation 9

Women leaving custody should be assisted to obtain personal identification documents to ensure that they can access services. Most women who exit custody are not subject to post custody supervision. This study revealed that one of the benefits of post custody supervision was that there was greater planning for release and the arrangements made to meet with a probation officer in the community. Most of the women appreciated the practical and emotional support provided which assisted their return to the community and spoke of the positive relationship they had with their supervising officer.

It is important however that women are provided with full information as to their licence conditions and such information needs to be provided in a timely manner. PBNI should continue to ensure that practice is gender-informed and where possible ensure that women are managed within women only settings.

Recommendation 10

NIPS and PBNI need to ensure that licence conditions are shared with women in advance of their release to allow them time to fully understand and plan for release. Licences should be shared with women at least 14 days prior to their release. There is a need to review the length of time women are subject to post custody licences and consider the feasibility of reducing the period of licence when appropriate. Women who are assessed as posing a low likelihood of re-offending and who have demonstrated stability in their lives do not require

Recommendation 11

PBNI should explore with the Department of Justice ending supervised licences before their end date where on-going supervision is deemed unnecessary.



Bibliography

Baldry, E. (2010) 'Women in transition: prison to...Current Issues' in *Criminal Justice* 22, no. 2: 253-68

Bates-Gaston, *Personality disorder – emerging themes and interventions within Northern Ireland*, paper presented 2013 Division of Forensic Psychology 22nd Annual Conference available <http://abstracts.bps.org.uk/>

Belknap, J. (1996) *Invisible Women: Gender, Crime and Justice*. London: Wadsworth Publishing

Bell, J. *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*, Open University Press.

Bernard, H.R. (2002) *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative methods*. 3rd edition. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California.

Bloom, B., Owen, B. and Covington, S. (2004). 'Women offenders and the gendered effects of public policy' *Review of Policy Research*, 21(1): 31-48.

Bloom, B, and Steinhart, D (1993) *Why Punish the Children? A Reappraisal of the Children of Incarcerated Mothers in America*, California: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo academicus*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brady E. (2011) *In the footsteps of Anne: stories of Republican women ex-prisoners*. Belfast: Shanway.

Breen, J. (2010) 'Secondary Effects of Imprisonment: The New Direction of Prison Research' *Irish Probation Journal* 7, September: 46-63 available www.probation.ie accessed 6 December 2015

Bryman, Alan (2008). *Social Research Methods*. 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press

Byrne, C.F. and Threw, K.F. (2008) 'Pathways through Crime: The Development of Crime and Desistance in the Accounts of Men and Women Offenders', *Howard Journal*, 47(3), pp. 238–258.

Campbell K. (2016) *The Current Landscape of Support for Women who offend in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Pilgrim Trust and VSB Foundation

- Carlton... and Seagrave, M. (2013) Post-release reality for women prisoners' in *Women Exiting Prison; Critical essays on gender, post-release support and survival*, Ed Carlton and Seagrave. Routledge.
- Carlen, P. (1988) *Women, Crime and Poverty*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Carlen, P. (2013) 'Introduction: Gendered transcarceral realities' in *Women Exiting Prison; Critical essays on gender, post-release support and survival*, Ed Carlton and Seagrave. Routledge.
- Carlen, P and Worrall, A. (2011) *Analysing Women's Imprisonment* Routledge London and New York.
- Carr, N. (2015) 'Contingent Legitimacy: Community Sanctions in Northern Ireland' in Robinson G. and McNeill F. *Community Punishment: European perspectives* ed. , Routledge.
- Casey-Acevedo, K., Bakken, T. and Karle, A. (2004) 'Children Visiting Mothers in Prison: The Effects on Mother's Behaviour and Disciplinary Adjustment', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 37 (1): 418-430.
- Chesney-Lind, M (2004) *The Female Offender: Girls, Women and Crime*. London; Sage Publications.
- Collins, K., Healy, J and Dunn, H. When a parent goes to Prison, Barnardo's Briefing paper No 8 available http://www.barnardos.org.uk/pp_no_8_when_a_parent_goes_to_prison.pdf
- Convery, U. (2009) *Addressing Offending by Women: A literature Review*, NIO Research and Statistical Series, Report No. 21, Belfast: NIO.
- Corcoran, M. (2006) *Out of Order – The political imprisonment of women in Northern Ireland 1972-1998*. Willan Publishing: Devon.
- Codd, H. (2008) *In the shadow of Prison* Devon: Willan
- Corston, J. (2007) *The Corston Report: A Report by Baroness Jean Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System*, London: Home Office.
- Cotter, R., Jeffrey, B., Loeber and R. Navratil, J. (2002)'Innovative Retention Methods in Longitudinal Research: A Case Study of the Developmental Trends Study' *B.A. Journal of Child and Family Studies*, Vol.11, No.4, December 2002 pp.485–498.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) (2011) *Report of a Short, Follow-up Inspection of Hydebank Wood Prison. 21-25 March 2011* Belfast: CJINI.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) (2013) *Report on an announced inspection of Ash House, Hydebank Wood Women's Prison 18 - 22 February 2013*, Belfast CJINI – available <http://www.cjini.org/> accessed 7th December 2015.

Department of Justice Northern Ireland (2015) *The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2014 and 2014/15*, Research and Statistical www.dojni.gov.uk accessed 7th December 2015

Dodge, M. & Pogrebin, M. R. (2001) 'Collateral costs of imprisonment for women: complications of reintegration'. *The Prison Journal*, 81(1), 42-54.

Dickson, B. (2013) *Law in Northern Ireland*, Hart Publishing, Oxford

Dwyer C. and McAlinden, A. (2015) *Crime and Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland: Conflict, Transition and the Legacy of the Past in Criminal Justice in Transition: The Northern Ireland Context*. Hart Publishing. UK.

GELSTHORPE, Loraine (2006) Counterblast: Women and Criminal Justice: Saying it Again, Again and Again. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45 (4), 421-424.

Gelsthorpe et al (2007) *Provision for women offenders in the community*; London. The Fawcett Society. Available at www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

Farrall, S. and Calverley, A. (2005) *Understanding Desistance from Crime: New Theoretical Directions in Resettlement and Rehabilitation* Milton Keynes: Open University Press

Fawcett Society (2009) *Engendering Justice – from Policy to Practice, Final report of the Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System*, available <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/> accessed 6 December 2015

Fay, M.T., Morrissey, M., Smyth, M. and Wong, T. (1999) *The Cost of the Troubles study: Report on the Northern Ireland Survey*, Incore: Derry/Londonderry.

Finch, J. and Mason, J. (1993) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities* Tavistock Routledge.

- Fulton, B & Carr, N 2013, 'Probation in Europe: Northern Ireland'. in A van Kalmthout & I Durnescu (eds), Probation in Europe. CEP, Confederation of European Probation.
- Hillyard, P., Rolston, B. and Tomlinson, (2005) *Poverty and Conflict in Ireland: An International Perspective*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration /Combat Poverty Agency.
- Hudson, K. (2006) *Supporting Family Ties: an evaluation of prisoners perceptions of family need*. Children and Families of Offenders Strategic Pathway National Probation Service, HM Prison Service and Cardiff University
- Kerr, J. (2014) *The [re] settlement of women prisoners in Northern Ireland: From rhetoric to reality*. Howard League What is Justice? Working Papers 8. Available socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/resettlement accessed 6 December 2015.
- Kerr, J. and Moore L. (2013) Post-release reality for women prisoners' in Women Exiting Prison; Critical essays on gender, post-release support and survival. Ed Carton and Seagrave. Rutledge
- Kruttschnitt, C. (2005). 'The politics of confinement: Women's imprisonment in California and the UK'. In A. Liebling and S. Maruna [Eds]. *The effects of imprisonment* Cullompton, UK: Willan Publishing.
- Liebling, A. (2012) *Can human beings flourish in prison? PPT Lecture*, London 29 May 2012, University of Cambridge, UK available www.theppt.org.uk accessed 6th December 2015.
- Liebling, A.(2013) "Legitimacy Under Pressure" in High Security Prisons' Ed Tankebe , J. and Liebling,A. Oxford Scholarship Online
- Loucks, N. (2004) *Prison without Bars, Support and Good Practice for Work with Prisoners' Families*, Edinburgh: Tayside Criminal Justice Partnership/Families Outside.
- Loucks, N. (2004) 'Women in Prison' in Mclvor, G. Women Who Offend. London: Jessica Kingsley: 142-158
- Maruna, S. (1997) Desistance and development? The Psychological Process of 'Going Straight' *The British Criminology Conferences: Selected papers, Vol.2*. Edited by
- Brogden, M. (1999) British Society of Criminology

Mauer, M. and Chesney-Lind, M. (eds.) (2002), *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*, New York: New Press

Mayock, P and Sheridan, S (2010), 'Homeless women and incarceration: Preliminary findings from a biographical ethnography of homeless women in Ireland', presented at the ACJRD 13th Annual Conference 2010, *Women in the Criminal Justice System Justice System*, 15 October 2010, pp.40-42, at p. 42 available at

www.acjrd.ie/files/Women_in_the_Criminal_Justice_System

Mc Allister, S., Scraton P. and Haydon D., 2009 *Childhood in Transition: Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Prince's Trust, Save the Children, QUB.

McCaffery, s. (2014) Concern over high antidepressant use in North

Research questions view poverty and legacy of Troubles fully explain high prescription levels. Script report available <http://www.thedetail.tv/> accessed 7th December 2015

McHugh, R (2013), *Tracking the needs and service provision for women ex-prisoners*, ACJRD, Dublin.

McIvor, G., Trotter, C. and Sheehan, R. (2009). Women, resettlement and desistance. *Probation Journal* vol. 56 no. 4 347-361

McNeil, F (2006) 'A desistance paradigm for Offender Management' *Criminology*

and Criminal Justice. 6: 39-62

McNeill, F., & Weaver, B. (2010). Changing lives. Desistance research and offender. Available www.sccjr.ac.uk accessed 6th December 2015.

Moore, L and Scraton P. (2014) 'The Incarceration of Women: Punishing Bodies, Breaking Spirits'; Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology: Palgrave Macmillan

Nolan, C. and McCoy, G. (1996) 'Changing pattern of paramilitary punishments' in *Northern Ireland – Injury* Vol. 27, No. 6, pp. 405-406, Elsevier Science

Northern Ireland Prison Service (2010) *Northern Ireland Gender Specific Standards for Working with Women Prisoners* Belfast, NIPS.

- Owen, B. (2006). 'The context of women's imprisonment' in A. Merlo & J. Pollock (Eds.) *Women, law and social control*, (second edition, pp. 251-267), Boston: Allyn and Bacon
- O' Mahony, D, Geary, R, McEvoy, K and Morison, J (2000) *Crime, Community and Locale: The Northern Ireland Communities Crime Survey* Aldershot, Ashgate
- O'Neill, J 2011 The Inspire Women's Project: managing women offenders, *Irish Probation Journal* 8, October: 93-108 available www.probation.ie accessed 6 December 2015
- Robinson and McNeill (2008) 'Exploring the dynamics of compliance with community penalties' in *Theoretical Criminology* Volume 12(4) Pages 431-449 Sage Publications
- Parke, R. and Clarke-Steward, K. (2003) 'The Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children: Perspectives, Promises, and Policies' in J. Travis and M. Waul (eds) *The Impact of Incarceration and Re-entry on Children, Families and Communities. Prisoners Once Removed*, Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Police Service of Northern Ireland, (2015) Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2013/14. Annual Bulletin published 03 July 2014 available www.psni.police.uk/police accessed 6 December 2015
- Porporino, F. (2010) 'Bringing sense and sensitivity to corrections: from programmes to 'fix' offenders to services to support desistance' in Brayford, J., Cowe, F. and Deering, J. (eds.) *What Else Works? Creative Work with Offenders*. Cullompton, UK: Willan.
- Prison Reform Trust (2007) *Bromley Briefings: Prison Factfile*, London: Prison Reform Trust. Available at www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Factfile accessed 6 December 2015
- Prison Reform Trust. (2011) *Reforming Women's Justice*, London available at <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/> accessed 6 December 2015
- Prison Review Team (PRT) (2011) *Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service: Conditions, Management and Oversight of all Prisons, October 2011*, Belfast: PRT.
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Corporate *Plan* 2011-2014 available <http://www.pbni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Corporate-Plan-final-for-web-15.09.112.pdf>

Radcliffe, P. and Hunter, G. (2015) 'It was a safe place for me to be': Accounts of attending women's community services and moving beyond the offender identity. *British Journal of Criminology* Advance Access available <http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/>

Ritchie, Jane; Lewis, Jane & Elam, Gillian (2003) 'Designing and selecting samples' in Jane Ritchie & Jane Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp.77-108) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Roberson, R. and Radford E., 2006 The Re-integration needs of women prisoners in Northern Ireland, *Irish Probation Journal* 3. No. 1: 110-15 available www.probation.ie accessed 6 December 2015

Ruane, J. and Todd, J. (1999) *After the Good Friday Agreement: Analysing political change in Northern Ireland*. UCD Press: Dublin.

Scraton, P. and Moore, L. (2005) *The Hurt Inside: the Imprisonment of women and girls in the Northern Ireland* (Revised Edition): The Human Rights commission.

Scraton, P & Moore, L (2009) The Imprisonment of Women and Girls in the North of Ireland: A 'Continuum of Violence' In Scraton P & McCulloch (eds), *The Violence of Incarceration*. Taylor and Francis, pp. 124-144

Scraton, P and L. Moore (2013). *The Incarceration of Women: Punishing Bodies, Breaking Spirits*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sikes, P. 2008. 'Researching research cultures: The case of new universities' in *Researching education from the inside: Investigations from within*, eds Sikes, P and Potts, A, 144-58. London: Routledge

Smyth, A. and Holian. R. (2008) 'Credibility issues in research from within organisations', in *Researching education from the inside: Investigations from within*, eds Sikes, P and Potts, A, 33-48. London: Routledge.

Smyth, M., Morrissey, M. and Hamilton, J. (2001) *Caring through the Troubles: Health and Social Services in North and West Belfast*, ICR: Belfast.

Smyth, M. and Hamilton, J. (2002) The Human Costs of the Troubles. In Hargie, O and Dickson, D (eds) *Researching the Troubles*, Mainstream Publishing: London

Social Services Inspectorate (1998). *Living with the trauma of the 'Troubles'*, DHSS: Belfast.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tyler, Tom (2006), 'Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation', *Annual Review of Psychology* 57, 375-400

Trotter, C, McIvor, G and Sheehan, R (2012) 'The effectiveness of support and rehabilitation services for women offenders' in *Australian Social Work* 65(1): 6-20

United Nations Office (2010) *Handbook on Women and Imprisonment 2nd edition, with reference to the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders* (The Bangkok Rules) available <https://www.unodc.org> accessed on 7 December 2015.

Walker N. and Telford M. 2000: Designing Criminal Justice: the Northern Ireland system in Comparative Perspective (53 – 55) Vol 14, *Review of Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland* London HMSO

Walsh, K., 2010 'Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion on the Island of Ireland –Context, Policies and Challenges, Scoping Paper' prepared for the Pobal All-Island Conference "New Ideas, New Directions" on 21st October 2010 in the Boyne Valley Hotel, Drogheda. Available www.dttas.ie accessed 6th December 2015.

Weaver, B. and McNeill, F. (2010) 'Travelling Hopefully: Desistance Research and Probation Practice' in Brayford, J., Cowe, F. and Deering, J. (eds.) *What Else Works? Creative Work with Offenders and Other Social Excluded People*, Cullompton: Willan.

Wolff, N. and Draine, J. (2004) 'Dynamics of Social Capital of Prisoners and Community Re-entry: Ties That Bind?', *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 10 (2004), pp. 457–490

END