

**Research Paper**  
2009/04

# The Sustainability Of Gender Specific Provision In The Youth Justice System

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Sue Matthews would like to thank:**

Aileen Wilson, Sarah Day and Shelley Nicholls for believing in the importance of gender specific provision, and for supporting the girls' groups. Your encouragement and faith in me is much appreciated.

The EVE facilitators - particularly Kirsty Davison, Julie Marzano, Vickie Barrow, Rosie Benzie, Sophie Napthine and Bernadette Ahuwalia for their motivation and their commitment to improve the lives of the young women who we work with. You are an inspiration.

Ken Beaumont - for allowing the research to be undertaken at Nottingham City YOT.

### **Cath Smith would like to thank:**

Suanne Lim, Sally Cooper, Laurence Jones, and Alison Platkiw for all their continued support and encouragement.

The Pearl Project facilitators, in particular Rachel Tunaley and Katherine Juniper, for their inspirational enthusiasm and commitment.

### **Both authors would like to thank:**

The Griffins Council for their inspirational support and encouragement.

Tracy Chopping from the Youth Justice Board for listening to us - whether she wanted to or not.

The staff at Nottingham City YOT and Nottinghamshire YOS for both their good will and time in participating in the interviews.  
All the Pink Project© participants.

The girls and young women who continue to make the job worthwhile.

Dave Matthews for proof reading.

And finally special thanks to Dr Simon Shaw- the invisible third author of this report.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

YOT	Youth Offending Team
YOS	Youth Offending Service
MAPPA	Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement
VMP	Vulnerability Management Plan
ROSH	Risk of Serious Harm
YJB	Youth Justice Board
CJS	Criminal Justice System
YISP	Youth Inclusion Support Programme
EVE	Engagement Valuing Esteem
KEEP	Key Element (of) Effective Practice
RMP	Risk Management Plan
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
YRO SA	Youth Rehabilitation Order Scaled Approach
ETE	Education, training, employment
GEO	Government Equalities Office
UK	United Kingdom

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***“Somehow, in all the concern about the situation of women and women’s issues during the second wave of feminism, the girls were forgotten”,***

***(Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004: 1)***

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Sue Matthews has 25 years experience of working with young people in the youth justice system. She currently works for Nottingham City youth offending team as a practice manager, and has a particular interest in working with teenage girls who have committed a range of offences.

Cath Smith has worked in youth justice since 2001 and has worked with young women in custody and on Intensive programmes. She has an interest in the social and political history of feminisation and currently works for Nottinghamshire youth offending service as a senior case manager.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH AIMS

#### INTRODUCTION

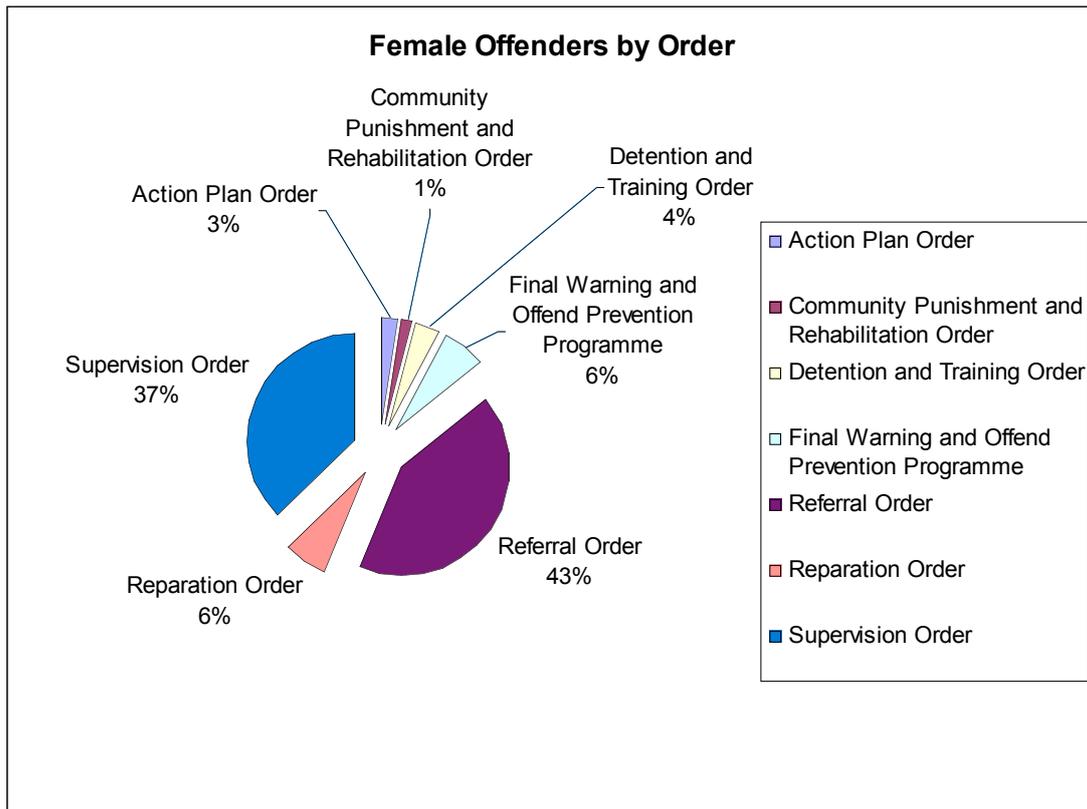
Nottingham City youth offending team (YOT) and Nottinghamshire youth offending service (YOS) are two of 157 YOTs in England and Wales who work with young people aged between 10 and 18 years old.

YOTs were established following the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and are a multi-agency partnership consisting of Children's Services, Health, Education, Probation and the Police. All agencies work together to ensure the primary aim of the youth justice system is met:

*“to prevent, and reduce offending by children and young people” (section 37, Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

As of September 2009 Nottingham City YOT has been working with 311 young people on statutory court orders, 54 of those being young women. Also, Nottinghamshire YOS, as of August 2009, has had 259 young people under its supervision on statutory court orders with 49 of those being young women.

Research by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) states that the number of young female offenders rose by 18% between 2004 and 2007 (YJB 2009:40). Nationally, 42% of young female offenders were on Referral Orders; with the next most common sentence being a Supervision Order (19%). Custodial sentences were issued to 9% of all convicted young women. The local picture in February 2009 at Nottingham City YOT is presented below. It provided a snapshot that indicated that more young women received Supervision Orders, and a lower number of young women received custody, compared to the national statistics at that time.



Nottingham City YOT February 2009

### **WHY GIRLS?**

The authors' interest in girls' offending was stimulated because of their roles as case managers within the Intensive Supervision team at Nottingham City YOT. This team was set up to work with those young people whom Nottingham City YOT perceived to be either the most vulnerable, or perceived to have issues with compliance on their statutory orders and who presented the most significant risk of harm to members of the public due to their offending behaviour. The team has reduced caseloads in comparison to the other teams within the YOT and are thus able to apply a more flexible approach to working. Referrals to this team come via the weekly 'risk panel' which meets to discuss the most demanding cases. These are triggered by a number of factors, including a high scoring Asset.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Asset is the YJB standardised assessment tool, which all workers are required to complete on every young person known to the youth justice system. Such tools are theoretically designed to indicate increased likelihood of offending, concerns about risk which are triggered by the Risk of Serious Harm section (ROSH), or workers' own professional concerns. Asset is intended to assist workers to identify risk and protective factors and vulnerability issues in order to deliver the most effective interventions that target criminogenic need.

We began to notice that girls were being referred to the Intensive Supervision team via the 'risk panel', because workers felt that their needs were so complex that they required additional intervention. It is the authors' contention that girls were being labelled as more 'risky' or 'vulnerable' because many workers felt that they lacked understanding and knowledge about gender specific provision, and had not been provided with the tools to undertake effective interventions with girls. This approach appeared to ensure that young women were more regularly classed as 'high risk' without taking into consideration their differing needs with regard to pathways into offending.

We were also concerned, as practitioners, about the high numbers of young women failing to attend their appointments, and those who were being breached for non-compliance with their statutory orders, when compared to their male counterparts.

Trotter (1999) highlights the fact that practitioners working with involuntary clients have the dual role of both legal enforcement and problem solving. On a local level it appeared that breach rates were disproportionately high for females, and workers acknowledged that they did not have the resources to plan and deliver effective interventions in an environment where the young women felt safe. Trotter (1999) identifies that involuntary clients do not choose to receive services from criminal justice organisations, and could conceivably be opposed to receiving support. Self-reporting by the young women in our sample suggests that some were so actively opposed to coming to sessions at the office that they were refusing to attend appointments at all.

The Corston Report (Home Office 2007a) was also critical of the treatment of women by the criminal justice system and led us to question whether we, as practitioners and as a service, were failing young women. We believed that the young women, with whom we worked, had the potential to progress through the system to become precisely those adult female offenders that the

Corston Report described. It became clear to us that the Corston Report focused its attention on adult women; the girls had been overlooked and largely forgotten in its recommendations. The report did highlight that young women should be directed out of pathways that lead to crime, but failed to identify by what means this could be done. It would seem that funding received due to the Corston Report has so far only targeted adult services (Home Office 2007a).

In order to work more effectively with girls known to the Nottingham City YOT we decided to commission group work training for staff, enabling them to deliver a programme aimed specifically at girls and young women. However, this training provided us with generic tools to deliver group work, but it did not consider gender specific programmes. We were struck by the dearth of training providers who delivered gender specific training, and from this recognition we developed the idea for both 'The Pink Project'<sup>2</sup> and the 'Blue Project'<sup>3</sup>, training programmes for practitioners designed to incorporate the most recent legislation and research on offending by young women. Each of these projects has been designed to train practitioners within youth offending teams to set up gender specific groups and design individual interventions with young women<sup>4</sup>.

The Pink Project has provided staff with an evidence-base upon which to plan gender specific interventions, both on a one-to-one and group work basis. Nottingham YOT has successfully completed four gender specific groups, known as EVE, with girls who had been placed on statutory orders. Nottinghamshire YOS has run two groups for girls on statutory orders across the county and, in addition, 'The Pearl Project', a six week group work programme designed to prevent offending behaviour, has run three groups in schools.

Both the Pearl Project and EVE are loosely based on the Oregon guidelines<sup>5</sup>, but have also incorporated the most up to date research provided by Nacro

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<sup>2</sup> For female staff

<sup>3</sup> For male staff

<sup>4</sup> The Pink Project has been delivered to practitioners in both Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Two for a further examination of the guidelines

(2009) and the YJB (2009) to ensure that the intervention reflects the specific needs of girls from England and Wales.

Following on from Pink Project training, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) female staff at Nottingham city YOT felt it important to develop their own girls' group, known as 'SISTAHS OF KAMARA'©, for girls from BME communities. The BME practitioners believed that there were considerable differences in regards to ethnicity as well as gender, and they based this on their own experiences as black and minority ethnic women. 'SISTAHS OF KAMARA' aims to specifically address the needs of BME young women who have been placed on statutory court orders. Girls and young women were given the choice as to which group they would like to attend.

However, for the purposes of this research, we are focusing on the EVE girls' group run by Nottingham City YOT, and The Pearl Project, run by Nottinghamshire YOS.

Gender is a very broad category upon which to build an offending behaviour programme. In addition to this there were a number of other issues that were likely to mediate the efficacy of any such programme, and these had to be considered. These included the ethnicities, religions, cultures, sexualities, disabilities and socio-economic backgrounds of the girls within our groups. All such factors need to be taken into consideration when conducting work with girls and young women.

The YJB report acknowledges that some authors believe that women have other and differing criminogenic needs which relate to recidivism, but more research is needed in order to identify these. (YJB 2009:35).

Blanchette (2001) states that there is some empirical evidence to suggest that the criminogenic needs of males and females are broadly similar but that their importance and association with offending may differ between the genders. Staff recognised that there were as many differences within the genders as between them, and it is therefore important that assessments identify interventions to incorporate all the above factors.

## **RESEARCH AIMS**

The concept of effectiveness has very clearly defined terms within youth justice and has become a fundamental goal that underpins the operation of the youth justice system. The primary aim of interventions within the youth justice system are set out in section 37 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 ‘to prevent offending’, and effectiveness has to be measured in relation to achieving this outcome (Stevenson 2004).

The dictionary of youth justice reinforces this: ‘Effectiveness is the extent to which a youth justice intervention has its desired effect – usually the extent to which it can be shown to reduce the rate of re-offending’ ([www.yjils.org.uk](http://www.yjils.org.uk)).

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) has acknowledged that there is very little research in England and Wales that has either examined how programmes can reduce and prevent young people offending, nor measured the effectiveness of such programmes. The YJB highlights the “difficulty that it is not yet clear which needs of young women are criminogenic and which other important needs are not necessarily related to their offending”. (YJB 2009:35). In order to create the most effective programmes and interventions for young people, the YJB advocates that the effectiveness of existing programmes and interventions should be tested to ensure that they have been developed to target the criminogenic needs of young offenders. It also advises that programmes should be based on the best available theory and empirical research. (YJB: 2008:10).

Our original intention for this research paper was ‘to examine the efficacy of gender specific provision in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire youth offending teams.’ We wanted to consider what community based provision was currently being provided for young women at Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire YOTs and to what degree this was gender specific. We then wanted to test the efficacy of such programmes in improving outcomes for young women, particularly in reducing their offending behaviour. It soon became apparent that it would not have been possible to categorically state that it was attendance at gender specific programmes that had had a positive

effect on the young women, due to a number of variables including the difficulties in making a direct correlation between cause and effect, and to obtain a convincing control group ([www.yjils.org.uk](http://www.yjils.org.uk)) Although the group work programmes that are run by the county and the city are based on the most up to date evidence and research, and target the known criminogenic factors of the young women, we cannot conclude with any certainty that it is the targeting of these criminogenic factors, rather than their other needs which enabled successful outcomes for the girls involved. We therefore recognised that we were not able to categorically prove it was attendance at a gender specific programme that had made the difference.

In addition, we did not have the resources to complete a longitudinal study which would have been essential in order to track recidivism. The small numbers of girls attending the programmes did not provide an adequate sample in order to test validity, as there may have been other factors that could have impacted on the successful outcomes of the girls interviewed for the purposes of our research.

Taking the above points into consideration, and without a clearly defined definition of what constituted an 'effective programme' from the YJB, our original proposal needed to reflect this.

We therefore revised the focus of our research to address the issue of sustainability- a topic awarded a high degree of importance by recent publications (Nacro 2009; YJB 2009).

The YJB recognise that "sustainability is a key issue in working with girls" (YJB: 2009:6). Owers' report in 2004 identified that only forty five YOT's offered gender specific interventions (Owers 2004 cited in YJB: 2009:77). In 2007, as part of the YJB study, these YOTs were approached again and asked to confirm whether such interventions were still on offer to young women. Eleven YOTs confirmed that they still provided gender specific interventions. (YJB: 2009:77).

The YJB attributed the lack of sustainability of such programmes to two main factors: staffing issues and characteristics of the target group. (YJB: 2009:77). Our research has identified a further six main factors in achieving

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sustainability, and this will form the basis of this study using Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire YOTs as a model.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*"Girls are still seen as mad, bad or really sad"* – male manager, Nottingham city YOT

What follows is a review of the literature on female offenders, their criminogenic needs and the recent trends in youth justice and social policy. This aims to provide the reader with a contextual framework in order to highlight the different approaches in addressing female offending.

#### **Contextual framework**

Historically, young women have constituted only a small minority of offenders within the youth justice system; although their numbers have increased over the past decade (Lloyd, 2005). The theories as to why and how women offend have changed over recent centuries from the atavistic degeneracy belief (Lombroso & Ferraro (1895) cited in Walklate, 2004), to the 1970's and 1980's where one of the reasons for female offending was purported to be the result of abnormal 'hormone imbalance' (Cowie et al cited in Muncie, 2004). However, it is important to note also that this era significantly changed the way in which criminology and the criminal justice system came to view women. Feminist criminologists challenged the widespread assumption that the delinquency of young women was only related to 'deviant' sexuality, promiscuity and/or prostitution (Muncie, 2004).

An alternative approach which has also been challenged was to consider young women as in need of care, protection and control (Muncie, 2004). It has been stated that professionals have been able to legitimise their interventions with girls under the protectionist umbrella (Lloyd, 2005). Lloyd goes on to suggest that this protectionist/welfarist attitude remains a focus for some professionals within the modern criminal justice system as an accepted method of dealing with girls offending behaviour.

There has been an increased spotlight from the media; and also increased political attention; to the perceived rise in criminal activity by young women with heightened awareness and blame being apportioned to both 'gang' culture and a conscious decision by girls to act and behave in a more aggressive, male manner in order to fit in and become accepted.

The rising figures of young women being processed through the youth justice system are a cause for concern, not least because there remains a lack of clarity from the YJB on how to provide appropriate interventions for these service users. At the same time it has been widely argued that rather than pointing to significant changes in girls' offending, these increases are more a result of policy and legal shifts that have impacted on the way girls are dealt with in the criminal justice system, namely more formal police responses to girls offending and the lesser use of diversion from the court process (Steffensmeier et al 2006). Analysis of Home Office statistics published in 2007 indicates that the increased use of custody does not in general reflect more serious offences being committed by women (indeed, 62% of all those remanded do not get a custodial sentence). Rather, the increases reflect a greater propensity for magistrates and judges to send women to prison (Gelsthorpe, Sharpe, and Roberts 2007).

### **Youth Justice Policy and Practice**

The Youth Justice Board has identified effective practice as a key element in developing and improving youth justice services and have, to that end, published ten Key Elements of Effective Practice (KEEP's) documents which have been written in order to provide staff within the youth justice system with the most up to date evidence about effective practice in interventions. The intention is to assist youth justice practitioners and their managers deliver, "more rigorously evidence-based services" (YJB 2008). The YJB recognise that current criteria for effective practice is subject to change as new research becomes available and the KEEP's are therefore a, 'living, learning tool that will be updated every two to three years' (YJB :2003).

Whilst there is no specific KEEP that examines the research and evidence about girls' offending behaviour, the Offending Behaviour Programmes KEEP does suggest that the gender of the young offender should be considered

when selecting programmes to tackle their offending behaviour (YJB; OBP 2008).

It is disappointing that the KEEP series does not provide a separate analysis or presentation of research findings into the particular needs of girls. Rather, the generic term 'young person' or 'young offender' is used throughout. The YJB's recently published research about the patterns, perceptions and interventions of girls who offend needs to be incorporated into future KEEP's publications.

This is in direct contrast to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) which has published revised guidance to regional probation areas and offender managers, which fulfils one of the commitments of the Corston Report. (NOMS: 2008). There are recommendations for good practice throughout, and the guidance stresses the importance of awareness of gender issues, as these are crucial to the achievement of good practice with female offenders. It notes that gender awareness is an integral part of the diversity training undertaken by all trainee probation officers, and advises that training managers should include skills and awareness training with female offenders as part of their annual training plan.

The predominant evidence-base that currently underpins effective practice, across the whole of the criminal justice system in England and Wales, is the 'What Works' movement. 'What Works' was a response to Robert Martinson's published research into the rehabilitation of adult offenders. Martinson and his colleagues surveyed a total of 231 studies, and concluded that, "(the) results of this assessment convinced (us) that not much seems to work and one program did not seem more effective than another." (Martinson, Lipton, Wilks 1974)

The study became known as 'Nothing Works' and caused some controversy in America, mainly due to Martinson's belief that the findings of his research would empty prisons. It had the opposite effect in America with other prominent criminologists such as James Q Wilson advocating increased and

harsher custodial sentences. In the UK the Conservative government at the time advocated a minimum interventionist approach (Hopkins-Burke 2001).

The 'What Works' movement was underpinned by Lipsey's meta analysis of 433 programmes with offenders based predominantly in North America (J. McGuire 1995). The 'What Works' agenda identified a common core of programme characteristics that contribute to what is known as 'positive behavioural change' for all offenders. McGuire developed seven predominant principles known as the 'principles of effective practice' (1995) and these provide the foundations to working with offenders in the UK, both within National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the youth justice system. Practitioners are expected to deliver interventions to young people to reduce their offending behaviour, using evidence about 'what works' to inform their practice.

However, Lipsey only analysed two per cent of programmes that were specifically targeted at women, and there was no separate analysis of effectiveness with boys and girls who commit offences. Hedderman (2004) notes that those interventions that focus on male criminogenic factors are less likely to be effective in working with girls. This focus on male criminogenic factors tends not to address those factors that are pertinent to female offending; including "gender differences in opportunity, upbringing and expectations across our society" (cited in NACRO 2009:16).

According to The Ministry of Justice (2008) there is a dearth of reviewed evidence as to 'what works' with female offenders, despite a wealth of studies on male offenders. The suggestion is that women's criminogenic needs may not necessarily be the same as that of their male equivalents, and separate research is needed.

Therefore what is of concern to many working within the system is that the 'what works' approach is based on research which takes little account of gender, race, disability, or socio-economic factors. There is a body of literature which also suggests that the methodology on which many of the 'what works' programmes are based is somewhat questionable. Tilley ((2003)

cited in Muncie et al 2004) suggests that the quest for a universal 'what works' solution is both misguided and unachievable, and instead we should be asking 'what works for whom, in what circumstances, and how?' (Muncie 2004:278)

The Corston Report was commissioned by the Home Office, and its aim was to provide a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice system, following a number of suicides in Styal prison. (Home Office 2007a)

Baroness Corston stressed the importance of a gender specific approach, one that treated women holistically, and individually. She stated that there needed to be more community provision to support women who offend, or who are at risk of offending, and to divert young women away from committing crime (Home Office 2007a:2). The report identified three categories of vulnerabilities, which included domestic circumstances<sup>6</sup>, personal circumstances<sup>7</sup> and socio economic factors<sup>8</sup>. When women are experiencing a combination of negative factors from each of these three types of vulnerabilities they are more likely to reach a crisis point which could lead to prison (Home Office 2007a:2).

Baroness Corston drew attention to the need to consider the implications of the Equality Act 2006 and the Gender Equality Duty arguing that the 'differences between male and female offenders....indicate that a different and distinct approach is needed for women' (Home Office 2007a:3).

Harper and colleagues (2005) note that women's offending certainly displays a different pattern to the offending of men: - women offend less frequently than men, begin offending at a later age and desist much earlier.

Hubbard and Matthews comment that knowledge about the development of girls' antisocial behaviour is constrained by a lack of longitudinal research and by methodological issues associated with existing studies. Many of the principles thought to be effective with girls are limited to qualitative research

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<sup>6</sup> such as domestic violence, child care issues and being a single parent

<sup>7</sup> such as mental illness, low self-esteem, eating disorders and substance misuse

<sup>8</sup> including poverty, isolation and unemployment

based on small samples of girls. An examination of the existing research reveals both similarities and differences in the factors that contribute to boys' and girls' delinquency and the authors are keen to stress that any conclusions reached regarding the similarity of major risk factors for boys and girls as evidence for generic programmes are overly simplistic and subsequently impede the development of programmes that adequately address the different needs of girls (Hubbard and Matthews 2007).

Indeed this is backed up by the YJB research (2009) which stated that, there was little evidence about 'what works' with girls in the youth justice system. The report went on to state that, "qualitative data indicates that girls and boys prefer interventions which are stylistically different". (YJB 2009:5)

These differences should be central to developing gender-responsive interventions: boys generally prefer structure, clear rules and a problem solving approach whereas girls generally work better where they can build relationships, have time to talk, and one to one opportunities to work with staff (Patton & Morgan, 2002:14). Therefore, although a reduction in offending or delinquency is important, it is not considered to be the principal aim of gender specific intervention with girls (Bloom and Covington, 2001). This is in contrast to the 'what works' literature which emphasizes the reduction of offending as the ultimate goal of juvenile justice interventions; other objectives (e.g., improved education, reduced drug and alcohol abuse, increased self-control) are only important as they relate to preventing offending. (Latessa et al 2002)

The work of McNeill (2006) (cited in Mason and Prior, 2006:18), argues that programmes that are over-structured and prescriptive, without a focus on individual factors, run the risk of practice that is ineffective in achieving positive change. He cites work by Raynor (ibid), which identifies the importance of the interpersonal skills of professional staff including the ability to use discretion in the use of specific interventions and to take account of the diverse needs of young people.

McNeill (ibid) argues that clients responded positively to probation officers who treated them "reasonably and fairly, who showed concern for their well being and for them as people (rather than as offenders). Young people

particularly responded better when treated as an ordinary person with a wide range of abilities, and not just as a problem.” (Mason & Prior, 2008:22).

Youth justice practitioners are required to design interventions based on the criminogenic needs identified by Asset. However, Pitts and his colleagues (2005) found that re-offending rates by girls were significantly lower than the score in Asset had indicated. Girls were much less likely to be reconvicted than boys and differences in rate and frequency of offending need further exploration (Pitts 2005). It is possible that girls in England and Wales may receive a discriminatory service based on their gender specific needs if the very assessment tools used to plan interventions are based on predominantly male-based research. With the implementation of the Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) and the Scaled Approach<sup>9</sup> (SA) in November 2009 it would seem there is potential for girls to be further discriminated against.

Although there is a growing evidence-base of research into effective gender specific programmes, the results of this research have not, at the time of writing, been consistently transferred into practice.

Indeed, much of the emerging evidence comes from America, where some States are ahead of England and Wales in designing and delivering gender specific programmes. In 1993, Oregon became the only state in America to pass a law, which requires that girls have equal access to appropriate services, treatment and facilities. It also stated that, particularly in the arena of juvenile crime, any barriers to services should be removed and that those services should be gender-responsive.

The Oregon guidelines for effective gender responsive programming are based on the most promising evidence from group work programmes for girls. In addition, the guidelines included literature on and research into gender specific programmes in America. The guidelines are broken down into six distinct parts, which include why gender specific services are important to

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<sup>9</sup> The Scaled Approach includes changes to the way practitioners assess young offenders so that time and resources reflect levels of risk. It includes a tiered approach to interventions based on the three domains of risk – likelihood of re-offending, risk of serious harm and vulnerability. The assessed levels of intervention will help determine the programmes and interventions included in court proposals.

girls; the administration of gender specific programmes; the management of gender specific programmes; programme content; gender specific assessments, and resources (Patton and Morgan 2002).

Patton and Morgan (2002) acknowledge that this guide should be used as a catalyst for workers to assist, examine and provide effective services for girls and young women.

“Gender specific services comprehensively address the needs of a gender group, fostering positive gender identity development. Gender responsive programming for girls intentionally allows gender to affect and guide services, creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of girls’ lives, and is responsive to the issues and needs of the girls and young women being served” (Patton and Morgan 2002:9).

The principles underpinning many of the programmes are consistent with emerging evidence in England and Wales and can be easily transferred, with a degree of caution. The profile of girls in England and Wales is not directly comparable to that of girls in America: there are differences in ethnicity and in offence types and these should be taken into consideration when following all the recommendations for programme interventions. However, there is very little research that has looked at the efficacy of programmes in England and Wales and therefore we are reliant on findings from America until more research is done in this country (YJB 2009:35).

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

Both authors work within the youth justice system as practitioners and therefore acknowledge their bias and prior knowledge in relation to examining the current provision for young women. They recognise that there may have been a conflict of interest in their dual role as social researchers and youth justice practitioners. In addition, as creators of the Pink Project training programme the authors recognise that they have a vested interest in the research outcomes.

### **What are we hoping to achieve?**

The YJB has identified that sustainability is a key factor of good practice in delivering gender specific interventions; sustainability needs to be treated as a key concern in order to enable gender mainstreaming within YJB activity (YJB: 2009). Currently the majority of programmes for girls that have been developed nationally and analysed by the YJB were designed in an ad hoc way and were often reliant on the goodwill of staff. As such, many of them proved to be unsustainable, and were not prioritised by the organisation. (YJB: 2009).

We wanted to examine the feasibility of providing sustainable, gender specific provision for young women within the youth justice system. We recognised that the concept of sustainability is a subjective one and therefore we have broken it down into the following measurable criteria for examination.

There were a number of pertinent questions we wanted to consider as part of our research in examining sustainability in gender specific provision:

- How can gender specific provision become part of mainstream practice?
  
- How can managerial 'buy in' be promoted?

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- What is the attitude of managers within youth offending services about gender specific provision?
- What is the feedback from workers who have received gender specific training, and are delivering gender specific programmes?
- What is the feedback from workers, who have not received gender specific training?
- What are the views of the girls and young women about their offending or risky behaviour, and their opinions about different service provision?
- Do gender specific interventions promote more positive outcomes?

### **Review of problems**

During the course of our research we considered a range of potential barriers that may have influenced our findings. As youth justice practitioners we were aware that we may be provided with sensitive information and therefore we had to give careful consideration to ethical issues. We ensured that we spoke at length to the parents/carers of the girls, about the kind of information we would be looking for, and what we would be doing with the information. In addition, we also spoke to the girls who had agreed to take part in the research, assuring them that any information that they were to give to us would be treated anonymously. We would not be using their own names, nor recording any information that would make them easily identifiable. We recognised that the analysis and interpretation of the data provided by the girls was a snapshot in time, and that their responses would need to be revisited in the future, in order for some of the data to be considered valid. Further, the concept of change is subjective, and may not be compatible with the 'what works' agenda which underpins current youth justice thinking.

In addition, we were aware of researcher bias in gaining the views from our respondents, who may have reciprocated our own views, and provided a more positive feedback than was accurate.

In order for the staff to be as honest as possible in their responses to our questions, we provided anonymous questionnaires. Additionally, we guaranteed respondents that they would not be identified by name when we conducted our semi-structured interviews. Due to the small sample size of managers we were not able to guarantee the same levels of anonymity.

We were aware that there could be a level of bias towards us from the staff, particularly those who had attended Pink Project training. We were aware that some of the managers provided 'managerialist' responses in relation to some of the questions regarding targets and key performance indicators. We also recognised that, regardless of our position as interviewers, we had a relationship as colleagues/ trainers with every staff member interviewed. The authors recognised their own bias in relation to their role in delivering the Pink Project training programme, and as case managers and co-facilitators of the girls' groups.

Practical problems included factoring in non-attendance at interviews, and ensuring that we had enough time to re-arrange schedules. We adopted a flexible and adaptable approach to all the interviews to ensure that neither staff nor girls were too inconvenienced by our demands on their time.

### **YOUNG WOMEN – RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

We undertook an analysis of completed Assets. This was done by accessing careworks<sup>10</sup>, and by gathering information from each of the Asset sections systematically. The data was anonymised, and each section was then used to compare data against the national Asset analysis conducted by the YJB in 2009. This was useful in providing a comparison about the risk and offence types committed by girls, and to compare local and national findings.

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<sup>10</sup> One of the computerised systems used by the YOT's in the research

For the purposes of validating the research we used a range of different methods of collecting data with the same focus; this enabled an element of data triangulation to help increase the reliability of the data.

### **REALISTIC EVALUATION**

Any kind of evaluative research is required to assess the value and effectiveness of the research project and should focus on both the process as well as the identification of outcomes. It was clear that there were a number of limitations in terms of collating data for this research. Specifically we were limited in our access to control groups and the identification of outcomes would need further in-depth research in order to increase validity. Therefore it was considered more appropriate to adopt a realistic evaluative approach, a concept developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). This concept stressed the importance of understanding the mechanisms involved in any process of change, and the context in which these operated. Realistic evaluation uses experimental controls if there is an opportunity to do so, but does not regard them as essential for the identification of effective practice or the development of theory. Thus, such evaluations rarely produce unambiguous and clear-cut results but they can produce results that suggest what is likely to work, for whom and in what context.

### **YOUNG WOMEN – GROUP WORK ANALYSIS**

An evaluation of the group work programmes provided by both YOTs was undertaken, and data collated, in order to provide evidence to support sustainability of gender specific interventions with young women.

We have obtained the views of girls and analysed their risk factors, and compared them with the national statistics issued by the YJB. Thirty girls were interviewed in total from the two youth offending services. Approximately two-thirds of the sample was the participants of the EVE and Pearl Project group work programme. 87 per cent (13) of the 15 young women interviewed at Nottingham City were white British compared to 100 per cent of the County; 60 per cent of the City girls had committed violent offences, and 60 per cent of these girls were on Referral Orders.

13 per cent of the City girls had committed theft and handling stolen goods offences with the remainder fitting into 'other offences' category -13 per cent had committed burglary, and 13 per cent robbery offences. The girls in the City sample were aged between 14 and 17. Of those girls interviewed in the County who were on statutory orders, 100 per cent had committed their offence under the influence of alcohol, 87 per cent had committed violent offences and 20 per cent had committed a robbery offence.

In order to minimise bias, a number of different methods of data collection were employed, which are discussed below.

The Richter scale was completed by each girl individually with a facilitator of the group asking the questions and noting the score. This is a solution focused scaled self -assessment tool and asked girls to score between 1-10 on how happy they were about the following issues in their lives:- employment/training/education (ETE), relationships, health, drugs, alcohol, stress levels, happiness, money, influences and accommodation. These variables reflected the most up to date research into the criminogenic needs of young women (YJB: 2009).

The girls were asked to complete the scale at the end of the girls' group to identify their views about any changes in the above variables. This method assisted workers to identify those areas in which the girls believed improvements had been made, and which areas required additional intervention. We recognised that, when considering changes in circumstances and behaviour, the views of the girls may have been subjective. Secondly, and more importantly, any sustained changes would need to be measured beyond the duration of the girls' group programme. However, it still provides a useful, contextual framework within which practitioners can tailor interventions to meet the most pertinent and presenting criminogenic factors.

The girls were then interviewed, face-to-face, using a semi-structured interview, the aim of which was to ask particular questions pertinent to the research, but also to allow the opportunity for additional comments and

discussion. The questions were prepared in advance, but as some of the questions were personal and related to abusive situations, we left room for the girls to share their stories. This flexible approach allowed us to ask further questions and explore some issues as they arose in more depth. It is considered good practice that researchers have an interview guide prepared, which is an informal "grouping of topics and questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 195).

In addition, the girls monitored the group each week, by filling in a simple form, which identified what they liked/disliked about the session, and completed a more thorough evaluation at the end of the programme. The evaluation included questions about each of the sessions, what worked for them in terms of engagement and allowed self-assessment to encourage reflection on their own criminogenic behaviour.

### **PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE**

It was important to collect the views of staff working within the YOT as the practitioners currently working with young women and therefore better placed to evaluate the group work process. With this in mind, a number of different methods were used. We ran three focus group sessions, where the group of fourteen female staff who had been involved in facilitating the girls' groups met to evaluate both the programme in terms of attendance, compliance and recidivism and to identify the factors that contributed to ensuring sustainability.

Twenty female staff members, (eight of whom were African Caribbean, one dual heritage and two Asian) were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire. Twelve of these women had previously participated in the Pink Project training and other gender specific events facilitated by us. The intention of anonymising these forms was to reduce bias, and enable the respondents to feel comfortable, rather than feel that they were being tested on their knowledge about the training.

Eight white female staff who had facilitated the EVE group work programme (see chapter one) also completed an anonymous evaluation, with a section included for critical feedback.

Ten male practitioners were chosen at random from the staff group<sup>11</sup>, six of the men were of African Caribbean descent, three were white British and one was of Asian descent. They were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire, but we allowed the interviewees to go off on tangents to further develop and explore their answers. This method of interviewing and gathering qualitative data is also considered to be a feminist methodological approach. It creates a high level of rapport between the interviewee and the researcher, and there is more reciprocity on behalf of the researcher. In addition, it is a non-hierarchical relationship that establishes and understands the perspective of the interviewee. (www.esds.ac.uk)

### **MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

We considered it important to ascertain the views of the managers who had overall responsibility for addressing the diversity needs of the service user group, and to assess their understanding of and commitment to the sustainability of gender specific programmes. We also wanted to establish whether they felt that gender specific training was important for the female staff who were delivering interventions and to establish their views on female offending.

Four white British male managers were interviewed, alongside two white female managers. In addition, the white female Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) manager was interviewed, as was one white female deputy Head of Service. All the management team interviews were anonymised, although due to the small sample size the managers recognised that although they would not be named, anonymity could not be guaranteed, as other people with knowledge of the service might be able to use their responses to identify them.

### **THE PINK PROJECT**

The Pink Project has been developed to provide female staff with the opportunity to learn about emerging research and the particular factors which relate to girls' offending behaviour in order to develop and deliver gender

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<sup>11</sup> a list of male practitioners was provided, and every third name was approached for interview

specific interventions. One of the aims of The Pink Project is to utilise the existing evidence-base, in relation to what works with young women in terms of engagement and compliance, in order to support workers to develop gender specific interventions. In many respects, it represents just the kind of community based projects that the Corston Report identified a need for. All the groups that Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County YOTs have delivered for girls were developed following on from Pink Project training, and it is the participants and workers running these groups who have been the main focus of this study.

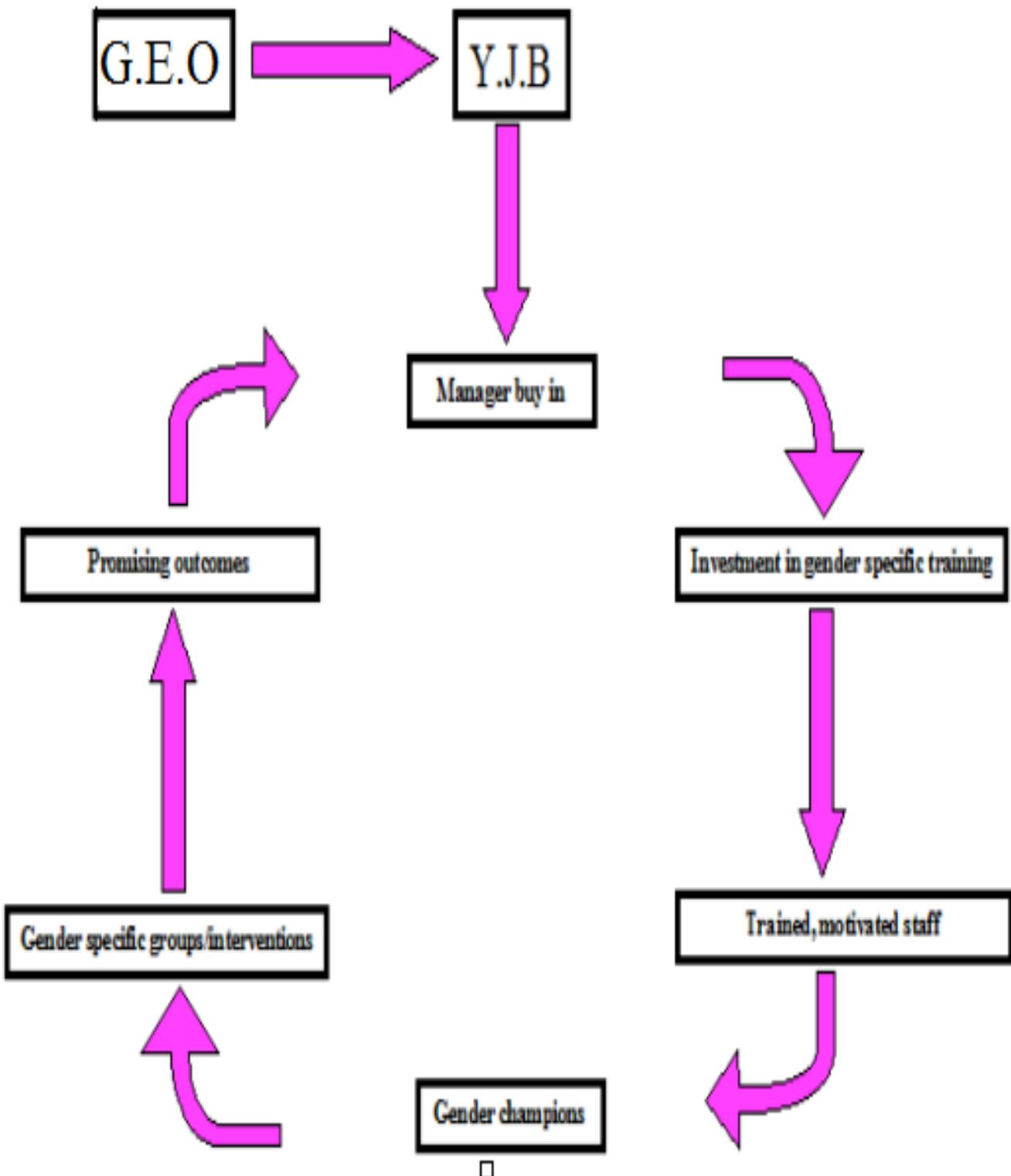
Research from this country, including the Corston Report (Home Office :2007a) and the Fawcett Society report ([www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)) were examined during Pink Project training, although we were aware that this was research into adult female offenders, and this was stressed throughout the course.

The thirty-five practitioner participants from both YOTs evaluated the effectiveness of the Pink Project on completion of the training programme. The purpose of the evaluations was to assess workers' confidence and motivation in being able to deliver gender specific programmes, and to promote and increase sustainability within the service. These were anonymous questionnaires, which gathered both quantitative and qualitative data.

## CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

During the course of our research, it became apparent that the sustainability of gender specific programmes was dependent on a number of inter-connecting factors, which we have identified as the cycle of sustainability:

### THE CYCLE OF SUSTAINABILITY



### **Government Equalities Office (GEO)**

In order to ensure that all young women receive an equitable, gender specific approach, it is essential that the Government Equalities Office becomes more proactive in ensuring that the Equality Act 2006 is implemented consistently throughout the criminal justice system (CJS), which is why they are placed at the beginning of the cycle of sustainability. The Gender Equality Duty<sup>12</sup> places a legal obligation on public bodies to demonstrate that they are actively promoting equality of opportunity between women and men. In relation to the CJS, the onus is on public services to develop gender specific provision that not only empowers, but also promotes equality of opportunity for those women who are the most vulnerable and at risk of discrimination.

The Corston Report recommends that:

*“Every agency within the criminal justice system must prioritise and accelerate preparations to implement the gender equality duty and radically transform the way they deliver services for women”. (Home Office 2007a: 3)*

However, the reality is:

*“Traditionally girls’ stuff is not brought to the fore of practice- programmes and the political drive is predominantly male orientated. Girls are not seen as the main perpetrators of crime, and therefore their needs are not considered. Vulnerability is seen to be more of an issue for girls”- female manager.*

This quote from a female manager suggests that she believes there is discrimination within the system, whilst men continue to be the main drivers of policy. Without the leadership from the GEO, and sustained pressure on all organizations to adhere to the Gender Equality Duty, it appears that service provision for young women will remain discriminatory, ad hoc and inconsistent.

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<sup>12</sup> The Equality Act 2006

**YJB.**

*“There is a lack of strategic leadership to make sure gender specific provision has its place, and a lack of diversity steer in general.”* female manager.

The YJB is integral to the development and sustainability of gender specific provision, and should ensure that its duties under the Equality Act 2006 are adhered to. It has a key role in promoting the Gender Equality Duty, and needs to incorporate this into its key performance targets, as part of the quality assurance process.

In terms of addressing the specific risks and needs of young women, it would seem that both managers and practitioners often felt impeded by the targets, performance management and budgetary constraints determined by the YJB. The managers’ identified that their approach to practice was corporate and YJB led which provides an insight into the pressures and priorities on managers within the system. One manager did acknowledge that a target led system meant that they lacked knowledge about what staff actually did in their face-to-face sessions with young people:

*“The recidivism cohort measures offending and re-offending, but it does not isolate which interventions are being used. In reality, we don’t really know what staff are doing in sessions with young people. There is no practice based assessment to inform practice development needs”* - male manager.

This approach was considered by those interviewed to have had a negative impact on good practice and they believed resulted in girls either not being assessed properly or referred to appropriate services and interventions.

This is mirrored by a male practitioner who stated that:

*“I don’t believe our organisation uses any assessment tools effectively- they are obviously meant to stem from Asset, but if they are filled in incorrectly they will not inform any interventions effectively. I do not think assets are filled in holistically- they are neither analysed, nor are inaccurate ones challenged in*

*any meaningful way. As far as I am concerned, Asset and ROSH<sup>13</sup> are full of spurious rumours.” - male practitioner.*

A female manager also recognised that the current assessment process did not necessarily capture relevant information pertinent to girls' offending. This reflects some of the issues discussed in the literature review about assessments, and highlights the importance of a gender specific assessment tool.

*“They (girls and young women) require very complex assessments as the current assessments do not seem to accurately or significantly address issues pertinent to girls' offending. They do not help us address the interdependence of risk factors for example self esteem and violence. There also seems to be an over scoring on Asset in terms of predicting risk, especially around violence.” – MAPPA chair, Nottingham City YOT*

In 2009 the YJB published research into the patterns, perceptions and interventions of girls in the criminal justice system. Part of the research involved a quantitative analysis of 285 Asset forms that enabled the YJB to identify trends in offending, and sentencing patterns. The YJB report has been pivotal to this research paper, and has allowed us to make a comparative regional study, focusing on local statistics and criminogenic need. (YJB:2009).

We interviewed girls known to the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire youth offending teams between January and May 2009. At the time of our research there were 54 young women open to the City YOT and 49 open to the County YOT.

The YJB research (YJB 2009) found that a young female offender in England and Wales is most commonly white, most likely to receive their first Reprimand between the ages of 13 and 15, and their first conviction would occur between the ages of 15 and 16 yrs old.

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<sup>13</sup> Risk of Serious Harm assessment

The fifteen young women interviewed at Nottingham City fit into this profile with 87 per cent of the sample being white, and 80 per cent receiving their first conviction between the ages of 15 and 16. 60 per cent of the girls had committed violent offences, and 60 per cent of our sample was on Referral Orders. In the County, 100 per cent of the sample interviewed were white, 75 per cent received their first conviction between the ages of 15 and 16 years, 87 per cent had committed violent offences and none of the sample were on Referral Orders.

Many of the young women in the YJB sample had exhibited multiple risk factors including having come from dysfunctional families, having a lack of attachment to education, mixing with delinquent peers, drinking and smoking, but not using drugs (YJB:2009:33)

Our sample from the City YOT mirrored the national findings with 100 per cent having had significant issues with their families (i.e. irreparable breakdown or damaged family relationships), 87 per cent had a lack of attachment to education, training or employment (ETE), 100 per cent mixed with delinquent peers (i.e., those who were, or had been known to the YOT), 94 per cent drank alcohol, and 20 per cent used cannabis.

Below are samples of statements from the interviews with the young women known to the YOTs'.

*“My mum abandoned me twice and is a total bitch- what sort of mother would leave her kids ‘cos it all got a bit much for her, but she is still a real interfering cow and tries to stir it up with R (brother’s partner) but I haven’t talked to her for two years and don’t want to.” young woman (17 years)*

*“I had to move loads when I was with my mum as she was in loads of debt and we had to keep running away”. young woman (17years)*

*“I had a hard time at school from year 3 to year 8 as I was bullied badly”  
young woman (16years)*

The YJB research identified that approximately a third of young women in their sample had experienced abuse. Our sample of City girls was higher with 54 per cent disclosing abuse, 100 per cent having experienced significant bereavement or loss, (usually the absence of a parent), 94 per cent said that they had witnessed family violence and 60 per cent had significant adults who had failed to communicate with them or demonstrated affection. The YJB identified that almost half lived with just one parent, whereas 80 per cent of our sample did.

*“Mum was battered by her last few boyfriends and was not really able to look after me” - young woman (17 years)*

*“I was ditched by mum as a baby and sexually abused by me older brother” -  
young woman (16 years)*

*“I absolutely hate my dad- he’s really annoying and lets me down all the time.....and promises lots of things that don’t happen, like coming to see me” -  
young woman (14 years)*

The YJB national findings show that victimisation and family dysfunction are reasonably common experiences for girls and boys, but more common for girls. It would appear that our small sample not only confirms this evidence but also indicates that higher levels of abuse may be prevalent. This may be because we interviewed the girls face-to-face rather than relying solely on an analysis of ASSET.

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

The YJB analysis also indicated that girls who commit different types of offences are markedly different from each other and they state that this is congruent with other research.

They identified that violent girls tend to fall into two groups: those that are residents of children's homes or institutions, and those who had no discernable problems aside from their own behaviour and particular personality –based characteristics. Of the 60 per cent of our City sample who committed violent offences, one girl lived in a children's home, 47 per cent were aged between 14 and 15 years old, and they all knew the person they had assaulted.

*“Most of the young women are referred to MAPPA because of concerns around the risk of significant harm due to violent offending. Violence in young women tends to be linked to mental health issues, self esteem and self harm, and I believe it is an external symptom of the internal factors which they have no control over. I have also noted issues such as negative body image being a major factor. It appears that there is lack of resources to address these factors, and also an over criminalisation of girls” - MAPPA chair, Nottingham City YOT*

The YJB stated that only 11 per cent of violent offences were committed against strangers. The YJB identified that they were less likely to be as troubled as the girls in the other groups, by the fact that they were more stable at school and less likely to have family problems. 40 per cent of our sample who committed violent offences were stable at home, but they had all had problematic educational backgrounds, and were either school non-attendees or on part-time packages. However, they claimed to be motivated to change and expressed a desire to access mainstream school or college. 94 per cent of our sample drank alcohol.

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

The YJB research (2009) identified that those girls who committed theft and handling stolen goods offences were more likely to exhibit multiple risk factors including living in unsuitable/deprived accommodation, holding dysfunctional relationships with significant adults, and having had a lack of education or employment experience, had mainly pro-criminal peers and were easily led and easily bored.

Only 13 per cent of our sample from Nottingham City YOT (2 girls) had committed these types of offences, and the small sample size means that these findings are inconclusive but they do fit into the profile described above. These offences fitted with a more typical pattern of known risk factors which included socio-economic factors, pro-criminal peers and family groups, experiences of victimisation, lack of school attachment/ attainment and personality based characteristics such as recklessness and boredom. (YJB 2009).

*“All my old friends were a bad influence and were getting into trouble and fighting and stuff. They were at my school as well and I was copying them cos I wanted to be accepted by them” young woman (14 years)*

The YJB research (2009) categorised the remaining offences as ‘other offences’. 27 per cent of our city sample fit into this group, with one young woman convicted of arson, and the remaining three being convicted of burglary offences.

YJB findings suggest that these young women were more likely to suffer from emotional and psychological difficulties, than the other two offence groups- and were more likely to have had contact with or referrals to mental health services. 100 per cent of our sample in this offence group had involvement from Children and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS), with 75 per cent of them being cannabis smokers.

In these characteristics they were more similar to the adult female offending population in that they demonstrated low levels of self esteem, low levels of self confidence and described feelings of depression and suicide, all of which have been identified as potential risk factors for girls becoming involved in pro-criminal activity. (YJB:2009) The following comments from our sample indicate issues of self-esteem, and psychological and emotional difficulties, which fits the profile for these types of offences. Again, this data is included with the caveat that our sample size is too small to be conclusive.

*"I think I am too fat". young woman (16 years)*

*"I smoke too much weed, and drink a lot when I am feeling it (depressed and suicidal)" young woman (16 years)*

*"I hate myself, think I am worthless and useless" young woman (15 years)*

*"I have tried to kill myself three times" young woman (16 years)*

*"I cut myself and ended up in hospital last time-blood everywhere man!"  
young woman (17 years)*

The YJB report has clearly identified some of the patterns and perceptions around girls' offending behaviour. It has also included the identification of three separate offence categories, and the distinct criminogenic factors relating to these categories. Our small research sample broadly mirrored the YJB research findings, with some regional variations.

The report concluded that whilst there are indications that risk and protective factors are broadly similar for boys and girls, those for adult female offenders are different (YJB 2009:5). They also highlight the fact that little is known about 'what works' with female offenders. (YJB 2009)

It is disappointing that this research was not disseminated more widely amongst practitioners in the YJS in order to improve their knowledge base about the patterns, perceptions and interventions relating to girls.

One of the recurring messages that emerged from the interviews with practitioners was that there were a number of precursors to gender considerations that need to be taken into account in order to become better integrated into mainstream youth justice work. Many practitioners identified the need for organisations to support staff in completing on-going training which would not only ensure that staff participated in relevant training pertinent to their own personal development plans, but would also promote the sustainability of interventions. This route would have the added dimension of helping the youth justice system work towards a more organised and structured programme of gender specific interventions.

The sustainability of youth justice work focusing on young female offenders is, according to the YJB, a fundamental aspect of good practice. This needs to be treated as a priority if gender specific programmes are to become part of mainstream practice within YJB activity. In addition, consideration needs to be given as to how these programmes can be delivered on a more consistent basis, rather than the ad-hoc provision that currently characterises the youth justice system. (YJB 2009:77)

It appeared that many of the staff interviewed for our research, were unaware of both the findings from the YJB report and the potential impact of the Gender Equality Duty. Without investment and commitment from the YJB the development of gender specific provision at a national level will remain 'dependent on the goodwill and energy of staff'. (YJB: 2009; 6)

Therefore, the role of the YJB in the cycle of sustainability is two fold. Firstly, it requires direction from the GEO in ensuring that the Gender Equality Duty is implemented throughout the system. Secondly, the YJB needs to be more proactive in ensuring managers and staff are aware of emerging evidence, in

order that this can be transferred to practice and improve outcomes for girls and young women.

The value of disseminating research and ensuring manager buy-in is evident from our own research- the YJB report (2009) has provided a framework in which we were able to compare regional and national variables, and adds credibility to our findings.

In addition, the identification of different criminogenic needs for different offence categories has meant that interventions are tailored to match the most significant risk issues. However, without strong leadership, and a commitment to diversity issues, the system will continue to offer an ad hoc and discriminatory service.

### **Manager buy in**

*“The main obstacle is the attitude of managers! There is a lack of understanding about the research into female offending.” - female manager*

We interviewed a sample group of six managers<sup>14</sup>, and it became apparent that their methods of measuring both the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions were predominantly target led with little consideration given to diversity issues. Respondents claimed that a combination of factors including organisational culture, lack of training budget, and a smaller percentage of girls’ offending compared to boys contributed towards the ad hoc service received by young female offenders.

*“There is no formalised way of assessing effectiveness of interventions – I would personally look at Asset scores in supervision and compare the beginning and end scores to measure effectiveness” male manager*

*“The success of interventions is measured through asset review, intervention plan reviews, ROSH, RMP and VMP reviews, participation feedback” male manager*

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<sup>14</sup> All ten managers were approached and the sample relied on the availability of managers at the time of interview

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

Some respondents also stated that they didn't believe that the number of girls under the supervision of the YOT was sufficient to provide a tailored or specific service:

*“Unfortunately, one of the obstacles is the attitude of some of the management to gender specific work and group work in general. This is not high in the priority list. Resources are another key issue and we currently have no money for training” - female manager*

*We do not have enough girls coming through to justify spending our very limited training budget on bespoke training programmes”- male manager*

However, it was acknowledged that relevant training

*“... could also provide the staff with a bit more information about how women are dealt with, as part of the criminal justice system, and assist staff challenge stereotypes” - female manager*

It is interesting that all the female managers who are quoted have a different perspective to their male colleagues, in relation to the benefits of gender specific training. The female managers interviewed also recognised the benefits of providing training to staff about the wider issues relating to women from a more structural perspective, in order to challenge stereotypes within the organisation.

The managers were asked if the intervention plans in their teams reflected the specific needs of girls:

*“How do we write a SMART target regarding self esteem?” - female manager*

*“Relationships are fundamental to girls and we do not reflect this in our interventions. Often risk levels are artificially increased and girls are moved from worker to worker” - female manager*

The manager quoted above recognised the importance of relationships to girls- if girls are allocated to a variety of different workers this does not allow a relationship to develop, and the young woman could potentially disengage from the process. This may have an impact on attendance and compliance and engagement with their court order.

Her comments also reflect our findings that girls were being labelled as more risky because of a lack of understanding about their different needs. This lack of understanding about young female offenders' needs is an area which requires further consideration within YOTs, particularly with the implementation of the Scaled Approach. Girls may be assessed as requiring an intensive level of intervention based on inaccurate assessments, which would artificially increase their risk levels, thereby raising the potential problems of both 'net-widening' and 'mesh thinning' (Cohen 1985).

It has become clear from both our own research, and that of others such as Nacro (2009) and the YJB (2009) that girls will continue to be discriminated against in terms of receiving gender specific interventions whilst managers have conflicting approaches to service delivery. The argument that there are 'not enough' girls is not a sufficient justification to either ignore the needs of girls or fail to invest in gender specific training for staff, but this is likely to remain the norm without a mandate from the YJB who have the authority to steer YOTs towards addressing gender as a diversity issue.

### **Investment in Gender Specific Training**

*"It (training) can provide a more scientific and professional approach, and enable us to see what we do as workers to impact on girls' offending. It can help identify the specific issues which put girls and young people at risk and raises awareness about the specific resources available. The benefits would include staff making better assessments and more relevant intervention plans which incorporate social and gender issues' - female case manager.*

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

Many practitioners believed that gender specific training was not considered a priority for their organisations, and this is reflected in the quote from the manager below.

*“Despite us being a predominantly female organisation, we don’t do anything for female staff as such. I am one of the few female managers and am aware of the cynicism of male managers about providing gender specific interventions, and specific training for female staff. There is an assumption that women are ok within the organisation as they are.”* - female team manager

This attitude is reflected in the Corston Report (Home Office 2007a) which identified a paucity of suitable, evidence-led programmes to challenge the offending behaviour of young females and women, despite the evident demand for community based sentences and interventions for this very group. The Home Office recognized that:

*‘This is a serious weakness given the proportion of female offenders among the community sentenced population, and the recommendations of the Corston Report that comprehensive community based services for female offenders be developed’.* (Home Office 2007b)

Our research found that many practitioners held pre-conceived ideas about female behaviour, believing girls to be difficult to manage in terms of compliance and engagement on court orders. The commonly held view appeared to be that girls displayed challenging behaviour that increased their risk of offending due to a practitioner-perceived inability to manage, or control, their own emotions. Therefore, knowledge and understanding about the particular pathways into criminality for girls can assist workers in developing confidence and enthusiasm to effectively engage young women.

*“Evidence suggests that gender specific interventions are more effective in reducing the risk of re-offending and so it makes sense to provide training for workers into how to deliver effective gender specific programmes. In addition, there are also additional benefits to the synergy of the staff group - I have*

*seen increased motivation by female staff because of their involvement in the training and the girls group. It also provides positive role models for the girls from staff who are more aware of their particular issues. I am all in favour of empowerment of staff!"* - female manager

This is particularly significant and supports the findings about the importance of relationships for women which is detailed in much of the literature (Patton and Morgan 2002; McIvor 2004; Gelsthorpe 2002). The staff cited in the quotation above attended Pink Project training where they worked closely together for four days and formed strong personal and professional relationships. Many of the exercises completed during the training were experiential and therefore directly transferable to the girls' group. They enabled the workers to reflect on their own life experiences and to have an awareness of their own gender specific issues as well as provide a positive role model for the young women with whom they were working. The female practitioners have continued to meet regularly to plan and improve the girls' group work programme and, at the time of writing, are working on one to one packages of intervention in preparation for the Scaled Approach.

Without the increased knowledge base about the importance of gender specific interventions, and the motivation to effect change, there would have been no awareness of the importance of different interventions and group work programmes, and girls would continue to be worked with using male models of intervention.

We wanted to interview a range of male workers from YOTs in order to find out their views about working with girls and whether they thought training would be beneficial to them.

*"I am very aware of the gender difference and the need to protect myself. I find sometimes it's difficult to know what to talk about- I know male adolescents but am adrift when it comes to girls. The girls we get through (meaning on Court Orders) are very damaged: boys' behaviour is much more a normal part of adolescence"* - male case manager

*“I am very aware of the male/female role; especially for young women who may present as sexually aware/promiscuous and wanting to talk about sex. With one young woman I talked to her about respecting herself, trying to give a male perspective” - male case manager*

*“I don’t work differently just because they are a girl- I work with each individual dependent on their history. I also act as a positive male role model. I think that girls seem to constantly change boundaries to divert attention from issues that need addressing. I think that I have had better outcomes with girls than boys” - male case manager*

The above statements highlight the importance of gender specific training for all staff.

A number of assumptions were made by the male staff who were interviewed about female offending: that girls are more damaged, more promiscuous and are more manipulative, which all fit into the stereotypical view of the female offender<sup>15</sup>.

Although all the male staff had worked with girls on their case load, they acknowledged that young female offenders constituted a minority of their client base and they probably worked with one or two girls a year. 13 per cent of the girls interviewed said they would not mind being supervised by a male worker, but the remaining girls were very clear that they would not feel comfortable, but would feel more timid and would not be able to discuss feelings or sexual issues with a male worker. At the time of writing, girls are usually allocated to the next available worker, irrespective of gender.

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<sup>15</sup>Although we could not categorically state that this is the view of all male youth justice workers

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

A comparison was made between female and male workers understanding of what they considered to be the most predominant pathways into criminality for girls and young women

	<b>FEMALE STAFF</b>	<b>MALE STAFF</b>
<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>HOME/FAMILY</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>PEER PRESSURE</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>LACK OF FEMALE ROLE MODELS</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>SELF ESTEEM</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>LACK OF EDUCATION</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>DRUGS/ ALCOHOL</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>SEXUAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>

It is necessary to understand the risk factors that young people were exposed to in their everyday social lives, in order to provide effective interventions to address their offending behaviour (Nacro 2009:14). There are differences between both genders' criminality, and the circumstances that give rise to these. Relational issues feature as a predominant factor in girls offending yet, as NACRO makes clear, there is little evidence "that such an understanding has contributed to the development of appropriately gendered youth justice interventions"(Nacro 2009:20). This reinforces the need for consistent gender specific training to be made available for all practitioners in the youth justice system.

### **Trained, motivated staff**

Female practitioners who were participants of Pink Project training have reported the development of informal teams to support one another in delivering interventions both on a one to one basis and in groups. They believe that this has assisted in maintaining sustainability and has raised the profile of gender within their organisations. This mirrors the previous comment made by a manager (p46) about increased motivation amongst the female staff who had attended Pink Project training and raises a key point within this research regarding sustainability of programmes. Early indications from this research would suggest that appropriate and relevant training has the potential to motivate practitioners and in turn has a greater chance of changing practice.

*“We meet regularly to discuss the girls group and to share good practice with girls. There are eight of us and we are all equally involved so that if one person is off sick or too busy motivation is maintained. I love being part of this group”* - female case manager.

*“I now have supporting theories, skills and tools. I recognize the group is needed and achievable”* – Pink Project participant

The female staff who facilitated EVE were asked to evaluate the EVE group work programme. Evaluation forms were completed in order to explore in depth whether the group had met its learning outcomes. In addition, two focus groups were held to discuss the above in more detail, with sustainability a key theme throughout. The purpose of the group was to provide a safe, girls' only environment in which to explore some of the factors that had led them into offending behaviour. The facilitators wanted to improve attendance and thus reduce potential breach of order<sup>16</sup> by creating an environment, which was relaxed, fun and friendly, but with clearly defined ground rules, decided by both the staff and the girls.

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<sup>16</sup> All the girls had at least received a formal warning for non attendance at the YOT for an office based appointment and one girl was returned to Court for breach of her order and her case had been adjourned by the Court in order to test her compliance,

The facilitators also wanted to focus on relationships and self-esteem as all the girls involved in the group had been identified in their assessments as having issues with relationships which had impacted on self-esteem. The sessions therefore concentrated on relationships with family, friends, partners and authority, their aspirations, sexual health, self-esteem and role models; 'the community in which I live' and healthy eating.

*"It has had a really positive impact on practice-I enjoyed working in a holistic way with girls which played to their strengths rather than having office based appointments and work sheets"* - EVE facilitator (female case manager).

The staff reported that they thought the girls' group was making a difference in the lives of the girls, but that it was also making a difference to their working lives. The staff enjoyed being able to participate in regular training events to examine the emerging research about gender specific interventions and girls in general, and be involved in developing a programme that was based on evidence, rather than relying on generic work sheets. The staff reported that they enjoyed learning, and being involved in developmental work.

Some of the staff faced resistance from their managers about being able to dedicate the time to the girls' group. In order to make this a priority within the organisation many female staff-members have included working with girls and the girls group in their personal development plan. In addition, the managers have had a presentation on the need for gender specific provision. Other female workers believed that their persistence and tenacity has meant that some managers have literally 'given up' trying to stop them participating. However, it is worth noting that both deputy Heads of Service have been proactive in their support of girls' groups.

Workers acknowledged that the sessions provided in a group work setting are easily transferable to a one to one setting. Because of the focus groups and additional planning days, the workers have put together a package of gender

specific interventions, which they state has improved engagement with young women.

The girls who attended the group all stated how much they looked forward to attending. They noted how relaxed the workers were, and how much fun they were able to have in a female only environment. The girls built up relationships of trust, and would often request one to one time with workers within the group work setting in order to discuss problems, such as arguments with family, or school problems. Particularly interesting was the feedback from the victim worker about better engagement:

*“I have found, as victim worker, that the girls I have spoken to about victim awareness have been much more approachable, and have a better understanding of victim empathy, following participation in EVE...”*

*“The impact on re –offending looks positive initially - the girls are showing a better engagement with their community and understanding of victims and victimisation” - female victim worker*

Of course, she recognised that she had developed a relationship with the young women involved throughout the duration of the group, but she was adamant that they had developed a better understanding of the consequences of their behaviour on the victims, their community, their families and themselves. Further analysis of whether participation in the group raises victim awareness is required. Such a study would entail tracking a control group to identify what specific variables made the difference to the girls’ understanding of the consequences of their behaviour (if indeed they did).

During the course of this research the YJB published some seminal research (YJB 2009) and the EVE project subsequently evolved to reflect its findings. Of particular interest were the clusters of different offence categories and different criminogenic needs and EVE sessions have subsequently been developed to target these factors. Of particular importance was the development of a session focusing on alcohol and its links to violence as

many of the girls had identified that alcohol played a part in their offending behaviour.

The women involved in facilitating EVE told us that they remain motivated and committed to delivering gender specific interventions. They stated that they felt empowered and in control, and sincerely believed that they are making a difference to girls lives.

Our findings conclusively demonstrate that investment in gender specific training produces motivated and committed staff-members which in turn has a significant and positive impact on practice.

### **Gender champions**

It was identified by the EVE facilitators that it was essential to have a gender champion within the YOT who could co-ordinate meetings and disseminate research and evidence.

*“The only reason we have the (gender specific) provision is because of the passion of the practice manager, who does this without any formal structural organisational support”- female team manager*

*“We rely heavily on individual workers looking outside the box and developing their own resources to target young women” – female team manager*

This mirrors the findings of the YJB research (2009), which identified that much of gender specific practice relied on the goodwill of staff. However, it is not enough to simply rely on the motivation and enthusiasm of individual practitioners to research and deliver gender specific interventions.

*“We have very high case loads, and do not have much time to develop specific pieces of practice, A specialist female worker would be able to put together packages of intervention which other practitioners could pick up and deliver” - female case manager.*

*“We need someone to take the lead locally in terms of gender. Lots of people have an interest and want to deliver gender specific programmes, but don't know where to start. We don't have the time, as a team, to search out research etc” - female case manager.*

Moreover, it is apparent that within management teams there are discrepancies and inconsistencies with regards to their approach. An appointed gender champion within each YOT would ensure that all young women receive the best possible service based on the most up to date research and evidence.

### **Gender specific provision**

Whilst both the Pearl Project and EVE had a different target group, early indicators were that multi-modal gender specific provision seemed to have more promising outcomes.

Case managers referred the girls to the EVE group, and facilitators talked to the girls to assess suitability. All the girls were initially reluctant and nervous at the prospect of engaging in a female only programme. We recognised that often young women struggle to form positive relationships with other young women and that this can sometimes affect their behaviour and motivation to participate in gender specific programmes. Taking this into account, we established clear ground rules in partnership with the girls who, in turn, identified key areas of behaviour that would discourage them from attending. Sessions also reflected the perceived criminogenic needs of the girls and included topics such as relationships (family and friends), peer pressure, anger and aspirations in order to address those areas that may increase the likelihood of them re-offending.

In addition, it incorporated craft-based activities and a pamper session with the aim of building on, and raising, self-esteem.

Before the EVE group work programme started, information about the participants was gathered for a number of reasons including to assess their suitability to work in a group and to target the appropriate criminogenic

factors. This information also incorporated data on the individuals' risk and protective factors (such as drug use, family background and history of self harm), her offending history, her breach and compliance rates, demographic factors such as her ethnicity and age, ETE (attendance) and self-esteem issues. Tools used included an analysis of Asset, self-assessment using the Richter scale (a solution focused scaling method), discussion with case managers and referral forms. The girls were also offered a menu of choices and asked which topics they would like to cover in their group. This was designed to enable participation and encourage compliance.

At each session monitoring sheets were utilised with both the workers and girls, taking into account literacy needs. A Richter scale assessment was used at the beginning and end of the group work programme and both the girls and women completed an evaluation sheet at the end of the programme. In the short term we have been able to: measure attendance, compliance, engagement in ETE, interview family members, and look at re-conviction rates. We hope that this information will feed into a wider body of evidence on the benefits of gender specific work. However, it has been difficult to categorically identify that it is the girls' groups rather than other factors that have caused the change in offending behaviour although the anecdotal evidence is promising. The girls who took part in the group work programmes reported that they felt more confident as a result. It is clear that user satisfaction and positive outcomes are key ingredients in ensuring sustainability.

The girls in the group were asked to complete both a written evaluation and a Richter scale assessment following completion of each group. All the girls indicated that it had helped them change their behaviour in some way. They were then asked to clarify their answers in relation to the following key areas, which included compliance, education and training, drugs & alcohol, safer sex, improved relationships with family and better friendships with other girls. These, amongst others, have been identified by the YJB as more likely to contribute to further offending by young women. (YJB: 2009)

The Pearl Project - a preventative programme was developed as a result of Pink Project training by a number of YISP practitioners from Nottinghamshire County YOS. This programme has been delivered successfully in three local comprehensive schools with a total of 28 attendees. Schools were asked to refer girls to the project (using the criteria provided by the YOS) who they believed were at risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour. These girls would ordinarily have been referred for Youth Inclusion Support Programme voluntary intervention. The facilitators of the Pearl Project reported that only three girls out of the twenty-eight attendees went on to receive further intervention.

The delivery of gender specific interventions should not be considered an either/or choice between boys' and girls' provision. The needs of boys should not impact on the provision provided to girls and young women.

More evidence (Farrington and Painter 2004, McIvor, 2004) is emerging relating to the specific risk and protective factors pertinent to girls offending but this is not yet reflected in terms of interventions. Hipwell and Loeber completed a review which found that:

*“...a small body of evidence suggests that interventions specifically designed to address female behaviour problems or risk factors can be effective in ameliorating disruptive and delinquent behaviors in both pre-adolescence and adolescence. Multi-modal interventions that target interacting domains of risk also show promise.” - Hipwell and Loeber (2002:221).*

### **Positive outcomes**

Schools in Nottinghamshire County are now proactively requesting a Pearl Project programme for their schools as they believe that it is having a positive impact on the young women attending the programme. Anecdotal evidence reported to the group facilitators by teacher indicated that girls who have attended the programme are better engaged in class, have improved relationships with their peers and are less confrontational in attitude and behaviour. We recognise that these improvements could also be related to a number of other factors including maturity, and the possibility that teachers

may be looking for change, but early indicators about the impact of the Pearl Project are promising.

We interviewed twenty-two young women who had participated in the two group work programmes. The purpose of this was to ascertain their views not only on the interventions that they had received, but also on ways in which the YOT could improve service delivery for young women. A further eight young women who chose not to participate in the EVE group work programme were also interviewed and these were chosen at random<sup>17</sup> from the remaining females on current court orders at the YOT. Significantly; it was the relationship with the staff that the girls who participated in the groups valued most highly.

It appeared that the girls responded to group work sessions where one-to-one attention was given and which enabled them to form relationships with several workers. The girls seemed to benefit from, and appreciate female workers participating in, the sessions and where they modelled pro-social behaviour. This reflects findings from other research (NACRO 2008: YJB 2009). Gilligan stated: “attachment, interdependence, and connectedness to a relationship are critical issues that form the foundation of female identity” (Gilligan, quoted in Patton & Morgan 2002:39).

Those young women who had not participated in the group also identified a positive relationship with their case manager, although many expressed a dislike of the YOT office for their sessions:

*“Don’t like reception and the way lads look at you but like my workers”*

*“Scared- never knew who would be there”*

Environment was a key factor in ensuring that girls felt both physically and emotionally safe: many had experiences of victimisation and dysfunctional

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<sup>17</sup> From a list of young women open at that time to the YOT every 3<sup>rd</sup> young woman was approached and asked to participate in the research

relationships and a formal YOT office can be a very intimidating environment for many of the young women.

Of the girls who participated in EVE, one has re-offended and one girl was re-sentenced for breach of her court order. One girl had been returned to court twice for breach of her order prior to the girls' group.

She disclosed in the group that she was terrified of leaving her area and had been the victim of bullying. It was clear that she lacked self-esteem and the journey to the YOT offices, and having to sit in reception, proved too much for her. She knew that she faced custody for breach of her order, but the fear of her peer group prevented her from attending her office-based appointments. She was given lifts to and from the girls' group and her attendance was exemplary. She thrived in a women only environment and her talent for art was utilised to draw adverts for the next group. Her attendance and participation in the girls' group was used as evidence in court of her willingness to engage and she was made subject to a further Supervision Order. She has now developed the confidence to attend the office for her appointments where her case manager has adapted her interventions to a gender specific model.

Compliance rates have improved overall with the girls reporting improved relationships with their case managers. At the time of writing 72 per cent of the sample were in education and college compared with 45 per cent when the group started. 81 per cent of the sample reported improved relationships with their families and 81 per cent reported better relationships with other girls.

The same trend in compliance and ETE were found in the eight girls who did not attend the group. One girl had re-offended. However, those who did not attend the group failed to report improved relationships with family and other girls. Nor did they claim to achieve the same levels of enjoyment from their sessions as reported by the girls who attended the group. Neither group reported any change in their use of alcohol and/or drugs.

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Telephone interviews with parents or carers universally revealed how much the girls looked forward to the group and 80 per cent reported an improvement in the attitude of the girls at home. However, it must be acknowledged that researcher bias is likely to have had some influence and therefore further independent evaluations are needed.

Positive, measurable outcomes about 'what works' with girls and young women who offend will contribute towards managers buying into gender specific provision. In addition, it would seem that there is empirical evidence to suggest that the Eve group would be effective in reducing recidivism, and that the Pearl Project would be effective in reducing first time entrants into the youth justice system. However, further extensive research with a larger cohort would need to be carried out in order to prove the definitive effectiveness of gender specific programmes.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

The original aim of this research was to examine the efficacy of the gender specific community based provision offered to young women by Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire youth offending services. It was also to consider whether girls responded more positively to a gender specific approach.

However, during our preliminary preparations it became apparent that this would require research with a larger sample size. We identified that there was significant evidence to suggest effectiveness by collecting and analysing data on recidivism, engagement and compliance. Despite this, we still felt that, taking into account the limitations of the sample group, and without a matched cohort who had not attended the gender specific programmes, we should concentrate on sustainability as the main focus of our research proposal.

The YJB report published in 2009 had a considerable impact on our thinking, particularly the final recommendation about programme sustainability. This stressed that gender specific programmes require considerably more support than they currently receive if they are to become a mainstream aspect of youth justice practice (YJB 2009). It would seem that sustainability is fundamental to achieving positive outcomes for young women in the youth justice system and therefore we chose to focus our attention on how to achieve sustainability of gender specific provision in this system. We originally believed that training alone would be the key to sustainability, however, our findings demonstrated that there were a number of interconnecting factors; each of which was equally relevant to the sustainability of gender specific provision, and in addition, points towards a level of evidence to indicate effectiveness.

It is evident that very little will change without government and YJB leadership. The Corston Report (Home Office: 2007a) identified that there was a need for not only a visible leadership, but also a strategic approach.

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

Baroness Corston recognised that without strong direction provision for women was likely to remain inconsistent and dependent on the level of priority and strength of leadership provided at a local level.

We believe that it is now the responsibility of Departments such as the Government Equalities Office and the Youth Justice Board to ensure that this is addressed as a matter of priority.

Some of the criticisms of the youth justice system and its managerialist approach have been mirrored in this research. Managers' primary focus appears to remain firmly entrenched in achieving targets and performance indicators set by the YJB. The approach to supervision and evaluating interventions seem to vary widely from 'gut reaction' to relying on the knowledge and professionalism of the staff. Without clear direction from the YJB about working with diversity managers will continue to supervise staff based on their own value base and beliefs. Managers and staff are generally unaware that Asset has the potential to over- predict risk for girls and therefore there is concern that girls may receive a discriminatory assessment and thus more intrusive interventions.

Having an understanding of the discrimination in relation to race and gender and enabling the young women we work with to "stand tall" assists them in developing techniques of resilience, it improves self-esteem and pride in themselves and thus, improves outcomes. Given that the primary aim of the youth justice system is 'to prevent and reduce offending by children and young people' (Crime and Disorder Act s 37) it would seem counterproductive to deliver male orientated methods when working with young women.

It would appear that youth justice practitioners are faced with a dilemma. The YJB require all interventions to be evidence based and all conventional evidence available is gendered by its very nature<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, such an approach allows little or no room to develop gender specific programmes because there is, as yet, little evidence of programmes that are gender

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<sup>18</sup> male

specific and work with young women. Yet there is neither the time nor resources to fund such programmes at the local level – those which can be validated and evaluated - thus leading to a lack of sustainability.

Regional<sup>19</sup> Assessment, Planning, Intervention and Review meetings are held on a quarterly basis during which the quality of several completed Assets are analysed by the gathered YOT managers. It would make sense for diversity issues to be considered within this forum. A gender specific assessment tool would enable the managers to gather evidence about the quality of assessments in relation to gender. Gender specific assessment tools could also assist staff in identifying significant factors to concentrate on when gathering the information from the young person. Such an approach would put gender considerations at the heart of practice.

We believe that there can be little excuse for not providing girls with gender specific interventions. Staff need to be trained to appreciate the value of offering gender responsive programmes. In addition, emerging research needs to be disseminated to staff with a particular focus on those factors that relate to girls offending behaviour. Moreover, staff need information about how to develop and deliver gender specific interventions in order that programmes can be based on the most up to date research and rigorously evaluated. This will assist in the creation of a body of evidence of effective interventions to inform future practitioners and research into “What Works with young female offenders”.

The YJB states that it is keen to encourage the development of gender specific interventions to reduce re-offending and to additionally improve young women’s access to mainstream services and so we challenge them to take the next steps and put this into practice.

Sustainability requires a level of expertise and proactive engagement by the YJB: it requires a knowledge base that takes into account the risks and needs of girls and a commitment from those providing services within the youth justice system to have regular training events and deliver interventions.

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<sup>19</sup> East Midlands

## The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

Gender specific training is one of the key factors to achieving sustainability – if you tell staff why they are doing something and provide them with supporting evidence it becomes more meaningful.

Nottingham City and County youth offending services have provided gender specific programmes for young women for the last 18 months. The women facilitating the programmes attended Pink Project training and other relevant events delivered by us, and continue to be motivated and engaged in improving outcomes for young women. All the women identified that it has been training that has provided them with the confidence and the tools to develop and deliver gender specific provision. It has also been essential to have both regular updates on emerging research and the time to evaluate and develop the girls' groups and because of this the programmes are constantly evolving to reflect new research.

There are early indications<sup>20</sup> from managers and staff about improved practice and a better understanding about the particular criminogenic needs of females. It is interesting to note that it is the female managers who place a higher priority on training for staff and can recognise the benefits to the wider organisation in terms of increased motivation and engagement with their work.

In order to maintain this level of provision the managers and practitioners have identified that it has been essential to have a gender champion who is able to disseminate emerging research and evidence about girls and who keeps gender at the forefront of YOT practice. However, if gender mainstreaming is to be embedded in YOT policy it needs to be promoted by the executive board, rather than it relying on the tenacity and commitment of individual workers.

We believe that effective interventions can be delivered in the form of gender specific work, either in a group work setting or through one-to-one sessions.

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<sup>20</sup> although this remains empirical and anecdotal presently and would benefit from further research

Whilst the sample size for this research is small, the results appear promising with one hundred percent engagement and attendance from the girls involved.

Without exception, all the girls interviewed who had participated in either EVE or the Pearl Project reported some improvement in their attitude, behaviour or compliance. They also were able to identify the elements within the programmes that were meaningful to them.

All the girls stated how much they enjoyed getting to know female staff and they enjoyed the relaxed nature of the group. They actively looked forward to attending the group each week and formed strong bonds with the staff facilitating the group. Research (YJB 2009) has shown that offending behaviour programmes should be delivered in different ways for boys and girls in order to achieve the best outcomes. Boys prefer structure, rules and boundaries, whilst girls place much greater emphasis on building relationships with staff. Our research replicates these findings. In addition, many of the girls reported improvements or changes to their behaviour. Most significantly they all reported improvements in relationships, particularly with their families. Staff also reported increased compliance and engagement on court orders and attendance at ETE provision increased. Therefore, we believe that this provides the empirical evidence to suggest that such programmes may reduce recidivism.

Whilst this is an area that requires further research in order to identify whether attendance at a girls' group can have such a significant impact, the evidence so far would suggest that is a major contributory factor. We recognise that there are, of course, other variables unrelated to the group which could have an impact on the reduction of girls' offending behaviour, but early indicators are that they prefer this method of engagement despite their initial reluctance to attend such a programme.

The research (Nacro :2009; YJB :2009) mentioned in this report indicates that, in order to meet the needs of young women, a more gender specific, that is female focused, approach to intervention is needed. Without a consistent

approach across the management team to the importance of gender specific provision and without direction from the YJB the service that girls receive will continue to be ad hoc and reliant on the tenacity and good will of the staff.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

It would seem that those voluntary and statutory services that target adult offenders have made substantial progress since the publication of the Corston Report and considerable funding has been provided to invest into services for adult women. It is our contention that the youth justice system has not been proactive in prioritising the needs of girls and young women and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. If the YJB are serious about embedding gender in to the mainstream of youth justice and thus ensuring sustainability then they have to take a firm lead. The task of those working within the youth justice system is not merely to reduce offending by girls and young women but also to guard against gender discrimination.

- We recommend that the YJB provides a national policy on working effectively with girls. Those working within the youth justice system would then interpret the national policy according to local need and resources**
- We recommend that the YJB sets up a Girls and Young Women’s policy team, employing the ‘Women’s Policy Team’ set up by NOMS as an example**
- We believe it is essential that the findings of the YJB report, (YJB:2009) are disseminated to all front line staff who work with young women**
- We recommend that the YJB make funding available to appoint a gender champion in each YOT and in the secure estate.**

- **We recommend an investment in more rigorous gender specific training and on-going support and supervision for all those charged with meeting the complex needs of girls and young women**
  
- **We recommend that training should be prioritised for all those working with girls or women in the Criminal Justice System.**
  
- **We recommend that all YOTs and the secure estate use a gender specific assessment tool that identifies the strengths, and meets the needs, of the young women in its area. Information can be taken from ASSET and other assessment instruments regarding family relationships, mental health, basic needs, substance misuse, life skills, history of abuse and neglect, physical safety, peer relationships, school, social supports, parenting and health to create such a tool.**
  
- **We recommend that more research be commissioned to examine the efficacy of existing gender specific provision**

**And finally:**

***‘Somehow, in all the concern about the situation of women and women’s issues during the second wave of feminism, the girls were forgotten’,  
(Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004; 1))***

We start and finish our research paper with this quote, because we believe it is both pertinent and transferable to girls and young women in the Criminal Justice system. It would seem that, in all the concern about the situation of women and women’s issues following the Corston report, the girls who commit offences, and become the adult women offenders of the future, have also been forgotten.

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DOI: 10.1177/0011128706296733

Crime Delinquency 2008; 54; 225 originally published online Oct 4, 2007