

Research Paper

2020/03



‘Hell hath no fury...?’ The experiences of women convicted of serious violence

Rachel Reed

www.thegriffinsociety.org

Acknowledgements

To the women who participated in this research, a heartfelt thank you. Your time, honesty and willingness to share your experiences with a complete stranger was humbling and your resilience inspiring. During the times when I have struggled to finish writing this report, I have thought of you and remembered how important it is that your stories are told.

To the Griffins Society and in particular, my supervisor Serena Wright, a sincere thank you for your dogged patience and persistence over the four years that it has taken to complete this research. Similarly, thank you to the Sarah Ward and the North West Probation Service for supporting me despite moving roles and needing to focus on other things!

And finally, an indebted thank you to those closest to me, and in particular Jo, who has truly borne the brunt of endless 'I need to get my Griffins research done' procrastination-type conversations and has remained patient and supportive nonetheless. I am very fortunate.

Contents

	Page
Abstract	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
1.1 Complexities in women's pathways to offending	7
1.2 Gaps in practice	8
Chapter 2: Literature review	10
2.1 What do we know about women's violent crime statistics?	10
2.1.1 National (England and Wales)	10
2.1.2 Local (North West probation region – Cumbria/Lancashire/Merseyside/Cheshire)	10
2.2 What do – and don't – we know about women's anger and violence?	11
2.3 Existing narratives and theoretical approaches	14
2.4 Current probation practice with violent women	15
2.5 Conclusion	17
Chapter 3: Methodology	18
3.1 Rationale for the study	18
3.2 Research design	19
3.3 Recruitment	20
3.4 Interviews and analysis	22
3.5 Ethical considerations and reflections on the research experience	22
Chapter 4: Findings	24
4.1 Invisible trauma: the foundations of women's violence	24
4.1.1 Experiences of violence in childhood and adolescence	24
4.1.2 Experiences of familial and intimate partner abuse across the life course	27
4.1.3 Invalidated/unvalidated trauma	29
4.2 Women's experience of anger and links to violence	31
4.2.1 Protective anger (others) our outward violence	31

	Page
4.2.2 Protective anger (self) and outward violence: the trauma-precipitated 'snap'	33
4.2.3 Women's reflections on the experience of anger which resulted in violence	35
4.3 Women convicted of violence: interactions and missed opportunities	36
4.3.1 Missed opportunities	36
4.3.2 Positive and rehabilitative experiences	38
Chapter 5: Discussion	40
5.1 The prevalence of trauma	40
5.2 Women's experience of anger	41
5.3 The need for practitioner support	41
5.4 Limitations	42
Chapter 6: Recommendations	44
Bibliography	46
Appendices	53
Appendix 1: Participant information sheet	53
Appendix 2: Participant consent form	54

Abstract

The experiences of women convicted of serious violence is an under-researched aspect of human behaviour, particularly when set against their male counterparts. In probation practice, this translates into a corresponding lack of investment in offending behaviour programmes and interventions specifically focussed on working with women's violence and its origins. The Female Offender Strategy (MoJ, 2018) promotes a trauma-informed and gender-responsive approach to working with women within the criminal justice system and highlights the importance of taking a specialist approach when working with women. Given the lack of research on which to base such an approach however, specifically in relation to women convicted of serious violence, the current study focussed on attempting to capture this perspective using qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven women convicted of serious violence. Interviews were analysed using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Key findings included: the significance of trauma histories and the link to serious violent offending; the role of anger and violence performed as a protective function; the role of a trauma-precipitated 'snap' moment within the women's offending histories; and the importance of feeling heard and seen within a busy and under-resourced system. Recommendations relate to the need for specialist training and support when working with women convicted of serious violence, the development of specific interventions and a systems-facing approach to improve wider understanding and practice with this cohort.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research was initially inspired by my observations and experiences whilst in role as Women’s Strategy Lead in the North West Probation region between 2018 and 2021. At the time, this was a new role introduced as part of the Female Offender Strategy (MOJ, 2018), with a remit to drive and improve local outcomes for women in contact with the criminal justice system.

I was immediately struck by two things: firstly, that at the time, the majority (60%)¹ of women on the North West Probation Service caseload had a current offence classed as ‘violent’. This figure was notably higher than national estimates of women’s violence; for example, in 2018, when the Female Offender Strategy was released, only 1.93% of all women sentenced for criminal offences in England and Wales were convicted of violent offences (based on data from June 2017-2018)² and secondly, that there existed a corresponding lack of available staff training or structured interventions targeted at working with this group. As a by-product of this, driven by the fact that male violent offending programmes have tended to take an anger management approach, and were designed by and for men (Howells, 1989), I was drawn into thinking about female anger and how this is responded to within probation practice.

At the same time, there was a significant amount of media coverage in relation to Sally Challen’s appeal case³. Her successful appeal marked an important shift in the way in which women’s experiences of coercive control and related trauma is understood and responded to. Of particular relevance was the attention the case drew to the gender differences in a ‘loss of control’ defence,

¹ Drawn from Probation Service data, this figure was correct as of 2019. While systemic changes to the Probation Service mean that this figure is now somewhat lower (as discussed in Chapter Two of this report), it still remains significantly higher than those national estimates.

² This figure is based on the number of women sentenced for violence against the person, robbery, possession of weapons and public order offences during that period (n=5,647) as a percentage of women sentenced for all offence types during that period (n=292,591). Source: Ministry of Justice (2022a).

³ Sally Challen was convicted of murdering her husband Richard in 2010. Her original defence of diminished responsibility, as a victim of ‘coercive control’ within the marriage, was not accepted and she was sentenced to life imprisonment with a tariff of 22 years. This was then reduced to 18 years at appeal. Her case drew significant attention due to the psychological impact of her experiences of coercive control and concerns that this had not been fully acknowledged or understood by the Court. She was represented by Justice for Women and further psychiatric and expert reports were commissioned, which provided a framework to better understand the context of her offence. Eventually, her appeal was successful and, following a subsequent retrial, her conviction was reduced to manslaughter and her sentence reduced (<http://www.justiceforwomen.org.uk/sally-challen-appeal> Justice for Women, 2017).

with this seeming to favour narratives of male 'hot rage' as opposed to female 'slow-burn' anger (Ellison, 2019). Given that the majority of programmes and courses available within probation, including those for people convicted of serious violent offences, have typically been designed for men based on male offending patterns and data (de Vogel et al., 2016), developing and improving ways of working in an effective and informed manner with women convicted of serious violence presents as an important aspect of probation case management. Similarly, the vast majority of research into anger in offending populations has focused on male experience which in turn has led to a lack of knowledge specific to the treatment needs of women (Suter et al., 2002). This is a problematic gap given the relevance to women serving custodial sentences specifically because anger sometimes leads to women being sent to prison (McDonagh, 1999), but also because anger can be a response during and following imprisonment (Pennix, 1999). It must be noted at this point however that while anger *can* be a precursor to some violent offending, it is 'neither necessary or sufficient' as a sole explanation of violence (Howells, 1998).

1.1 Complexities in women's pathways to offending

It has been acknowledged for some time now that whilst women engage in violent crime far less frequently than men (Bartlett, 2010), the number of women committing violent crimes has increased steadily over recent decades (Heilbrun et al., 2008; Odgers et al., 2005). That said, these statistics are well documented as more accurately reflecting what acts are criminalised in policy, policing, and who is being caught and prosecuted for them, rather than actually telling us much about 'crime'. For example data from the Ministry of Justice (2022b) documented a 'notable percentage increase' of 91% in the number of women being prosecuted for violence against the person (up from 4,600 in 2017 to 8,800 in 2021) but explained that this increase was 'mainly driven' by the introduction of 'assault of an emergency worker' offences in 2018.

There are also significant complexities to women's offence patterns. For instance, whilst some types of violence, such as domestic and in-patient violence, appear to be as common in women as in men (Nicholls et al., 2009; Cho, 2012; Straus, 2008), there are important differences in the nature and severity of their violent behaviour (de Vogel et al., 2016). For example, men are more likely to pose a risk to strangers and intimate partners and to offend violently for financial gain (Barlett, 2010).

Similarly, other complexities, and ways in which men's and women's violence may differ, are related to processes of socialisation. For example, Ogle et al. (1995) suggest that socialisation

processes teach women to inhibit expressions of anger, which consequently force them to internalise negative emotional states including guilt, hurt and depression, rather than to externalise them as anger (p173). These social inhibitions can then prevent women from developing appropriate 'culturally approved' ways of expressing feelings of anger. In turn, women convicted of serious violent offences can be seen to operate outside of these accepted norms and as such, there is the potential for the function of their violence to be misunderstood. The effectiveness of intervention work with women based on data relating to male violence, which is typically more direct, overt and culturally normalised (Archer, 1994), is therefore undermined as these approaches are not responsive to gender differences.

It is also important to consider the specific aetiology of women's violent offending, given that there are clear linkages between women's experiences of victimisation and their pathways to and through the criminal justice system, and that those patterns are different to those seen in criminalised men (Bloom et al., 2003; MOJ, 2018). Of particular relevance to this is 'Pathways Theory', which demands that we 'examine the lives of women prior to their criminal justice involvement, to determine which factors have compelled them to engage in crime' (Gehring, 2016, p2). Salient factors in women's histories include 'abuse, relationship issues, mental health problems, and substance abuse' (Daly, 1994; Bloom et al., 2003; Covington & Bloom, 2006) and importantly, childhood (and sometimes adulthood) trauma, which act as catalysts to criminalisation for women (most notably, Belknap, 2015). This complexity in itself seems worthy of attention given the importance not only in relation to accurately assessing and managing risk but also in regard to the focus of intervention work.

1.2 Gaps in practice

Currently, the evidence-base for how best to work with women convicted of violence and in particular serious violence is limited. Within the Probation Service, it has been my personal experience since joining as a trainee in 2006, that there is no specific guidance or training focussed aimed at working with these cohorts. As such, probation officers continue to be reliant on male-based theories of violence to inform assessment and to utilise male-orientated cognitive behavioural methods of intervention, which are not appropriate or relevant to women's lived experience (e.g. Covington and Bloom, 2003; Kaschak, 1992). Given the primary role of probation to manage risk and protect the public, the lack of a coherent gender-specific understanding and related approach to working with women convicted of serious violence is therefore problematic.

As such, the aim of this research is two-fold. Firstly, to understand more about women convicted of serious violence within my local probation region through exploring their lived experiences, including histories of trauma, and their own reflections and beliefs about the aetiology of these offences and secondly, to develop knowledge on ways of working that are (and are not) useful and appropriate in working with women convicted of serious violence, with the aim of facilitating the development of more woman-centred programmes and interventions within the Probation Service.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review seeks to summarise and review current research and commentary in relation to three key areas: differences in male and female violence; existing narrative understandings of female violence; and current probation practice with violent women.

2.1 What do we know about women's violent crime statistics?

2.1.1. National (England and Wales)

Accepting that crime statistics can present a compromised reflection of criminality (given the confounding factors of who is caught as opposed to those who commit crime and who it is easier to catch and prosecute rather than who is necessarily causing the largest scale harms), the focus here is on how many women enter the system with a view to providing a sense of scale in relation to female violence.

In 2021, violence totalled 4% of the total prosecutions against women, the fourth highest offence category after summary non-motoring, summary motoring and theft offences (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Between 2010 and 2020, the number of women prosecuted for violent offences remained relatively consistent (8,643 in 2010 and 8,173 in 2020, with an average of 6,861 women convicted per year across the 10 year period). In 2020, of those convicted, this translated into 1,545 community orders, 1,041 suspended sentence orders and 845 custodial sentences; a total of 3,431 sentences nationally (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

2.1.2 Local (North West probation region - Cumbria/Lancashire/Cheshire/ Merseyside)

Regional segmentation data for the North West probation region indicates that, as of August 2023, women currently make up 13% of the total caseload (n = 2,564). This is broadly in line with the national average of 15%.⁴ Of the 2,564 women, 48%⁵ (n = 1,231) are being supervised for a violent

⁴ Data extracted from the Probation Management Information System (MIS) on 09/08/2023.

⁵ This percentage, based on data held by the National Probation Service, was correct as of August 2023. This represents a 12% decrease on the figure of 60% presented at the outset of Chapter One; a figure which represented the percentage of women under supervision for a violent offence in the North West probation region in mid-2019. At that time, the National Probation Service supervised only those individuals who had been assessed as posing a 'high'

offence, making this the most prevalent offence type for women supervised within the region. Within this, convictions ranged from assault at the lowest level to murder at the most serious.

2.2 What do – and don't - we know about women's anger and violence?

The gender gap in crime is well-established; always and everywhere, males commit more crime than females (Lauritsen, Heimer & Lynch, 2009). In terms of violent offending, female violence is more likely to be indirect, reactive within social relationships and less instrumental and sexual (Nicholls et al., 2009; Odgers et al., 2005). In turn, victims of girls are more likely to be siblings and peers (Batchelor, 2005). Furthermore, it has been found that some violence risk factors, namely child abuse, adult victimisation, disruptions in relationships and economic disadvantages, have a more significant impact on women than men (de Vogel, 2016; Benda, 2005; Funk, 1999; Odgers et al., 2005).

Historically, gender differences in the nature, magnitude and victim characteristics of violence have been considered in relation to four key areas within psychological approaches to crime; biological, sociological, social learning and psychological (Pollock et al. 2006). While other branches of theory are of critical importance in fully understanding the process and experience of criminalisation, the focus on psychological theories within the section that follows, to the exclusion of others, is a conscious decision. This was based on an awareness that the 'principles of effective practice' governing 'offender interventions' states that these 'should be based on a psychological theory of criminal behaviour' (Hollins and Palmer, 2008, p5); a maxim that has been reflected in the nature and practice of 'offender interventions' I have witnessed in the Probation Service during the course of my career.

Briefly considering biological approaches, these have been criticised for their reductionist nature and failure to consider environmental factors (Denno, 1990). Indeed, these theories have tended to normalise male violence and pathologize female violence on the basis of physical differences

risk of harm, with all 'low' and 'medium' risk individuals outsourced to private Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). This arrangement was a direct outcome of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reform programme of probation supervision services; a programme which was deemed just four years later to have 'failed by every measure' (Sasse et al., 2019, cit. in Johal and Davies, 2022, p2), leading to the eventual unification of the National Probation Service and CRCs in June 2021. These system-level changes, which brought individuals of all risk levels back under the remit of the National Probation Service, served to dilute the 2019 figure, which now appears artificially high. However, the fact remains that hence the slightly inflated percentage of violent women on the caseload.

between the sexes, specifically testosterone, brain chemicals linked to impulsiveness and the greater muscular strength of men (Archer & Daniels, 1995).

More helpfully, cultural and socialisation theories of violent offending (e.g. Archer, 2004) focus on the different lived experience of men and women. At its most simple, this can be framed as boys tending to be rewarded for acting aggressively, whilst girls are more likely to be punished. In turn, this results in girls learning to suppress and hide any aggressive impulses as they grow up and instead employing passive or 'indirect' aggression expressed through behaviours such as verbal aggression, rejection (including exclusion from group), manipulation and spreading false stories (Owens et. Al, 2000). As such there is some indication that there is parity of aggression between the sexes but that this manifests differently (Archer, 2004). Indeed, researchers have long argued as to whether or not women are less aggressive or just as aggressive as men (Pollock et al., 2006). It is also important to consider the implications of associating women with non-violence, as such entrenched assumptions can socialise women such that they are less likely to use violence in confrontations with intimates or strangers and exacerbate women's feelings of vulnerability and fear (Keitner, 2002).

Similar to socialisation theories, social learning theories also draw attention to the different societal expectations of male and female behaviour and the resulting impact this may have on 'natural' emotional expression. Considerable research demonstrates that gendered differences in 'emotional expressiveness' are socialised according to 'display rules'; 'prescriptive social norms that dictate how, when and where emotions can be expressed by males and females in any particular culture' (Brody, 2000, p37). These display rules are implicitly assumed and learned with the expression of anger and aggression viewed as acceptable for men, but not for women. More specifically, research has shown that aggressive boys tend to be judged as more likable and socially competent than non-aggressive boys (Hart et al., 1993). In contrast, aggressive girls are judged to be less likable than nonaggressive girls, and tend to have a wide variety of problems in peer relationships (Crick, 1997). Correspondingly, in adulthood, women have been found to anticipate more negative social consequences for expressing aggression than men do (Shields & Koster, 1989), and to be especially concerned that the expression of anger and aggression will disrupt their social relationships (Davis et al., 1992).

By extension, in terms of violence, the suggestion – within the psychological literature at least (which, as noted above, forms the basis of most intervention programmes within prisons and probation) - is that women are trained to avoid aggressive and violent expressions and that, unlike men, they are not reinforced for exhibiting violent behaviours (Bandura, 1978). This theory is also consistent with the inverse fact; that is, that women who are victims of childhood violence are *more* likely than non-victims to commit violent crime later in the life course (Widom, 1989). In a study into differences between 'generally violent' women and 'partner-only violent' women, Babcock, Miller and Siard (2003) identified that only one background variable differed between the two groups of women, namely that generally violent women more frequently witnessed their mothers' aggression towards their fathers. This finding led them to theorise that, as a consequence of socialisation within a family subculture where women's use of violence was acceptable, these women have developed counter-social notions of the acceptability of aggression and violence.

Finally, psychological theories focus on and seek to understand the internal processes of the individual rather than the broader impact of societal factors. One key theory is the concept of overcontrolled and under controlled personalities to explain women's violent crime (Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995; 1998). The suggestion here is that socialisation processes teach women to inhibit expressions of anger which consequently force them to internalise negative emotional states - including guilt, hurt and depression - rather than externalise it as anger (Ogle et al., 1995, p173) In turn, these social inhibitions can then prevent women from developing appropriate 'culturally approved' ways of expressing feelings of anger. As such, instead of reacting aggressively towards an external agent, women are more likely to internalise feelings and blame themselves. By extension women then experience chronically high levels of stress as a consequence of 'blocked opportunities and cultural messages that devalue women' (Pollock et al., 2006, p489), resulting in low rates of aggression by women punctuated with instances of extreme violence.

Historically, the courts have been reluctant to acknowledge or mitigate fully for such processes in cases of extreme violence committed by women. For example, evidence in the Sally Challen case that she had been subjected to many years of coercive control in her marriage was not viewed as a mitigating factor when she was initially convicted of murdering her husband. The psychological impact of his long-term abusive behaviour and the relevance of this to her violent behaviour however were subsequently formalised when her conviction was overturned on appeal, presenting

as a landmark ruling of the damage caused by cumulative abuse and the internalisation of the feelings brought about by this (Justice for Women, 2017).

This case helps to illustrate how female violence can be understood at a societal level and the heavier focus (if not exclusively) in media reporting 'on individualism and free will', in which the concern is directed to a specific problem (or person), whilst overlooking 'larger structural forces [which] ignore crucial factors of race, class, and sexuality in ways that reproduce, rather than question ... national ideals' (Kozol, 1995, p665). Over-representation of women's violence within the media further adds to this picture with 'reported violence by women ... seen by news producers as more deviant, more anxiety-producing, and more transgressive than men's violence. Women's violence is perceived as more in *need* of explanation' (Naylor, 2001, p188).

2.3 Existing narratives and theoretical approaches

Female violence can be considered inherently political, bound up as it is with societal expectations of gender performance and the resulting discomfort of transgressions which are threatening towards and subversive of the social fabric (Keitner, 2002). Emerging from a 'cloak of secrecy' (Steinmetz & Lucca, 1988, p233) in the 1980s, the study of female violence has, perhaps by virtue of the stigma surrounding it, been fuelled more by a desire to understand this as a phenomenon rather than a legitimate aspect of women's lived experience. Indeed, how to think about and conceive of female violence within the context of a society which has sought to invalidate such behaviour as 'unwomanly' presents a significant degree of complexity. This can be seen to have compounded efforts to determine frameworks for understanding and intervention.

Certainly, there is a lack of an agreed consensus about the function of violence in women's lives. For women in contact with the criminal justice system, this translates into a lack of guidance for professionals on how to most meaningfully provide support, increase understanding and reduce the likelihood of repeat offending. As with other aspects of criminality, much of the knowledge and understanding relating to violent offending is based on research conducted on male cohorts. Similarly, existing structured risk assessment instruments used within the probation setting - namely the Offender Group Reconviction Score (OGRS) the Offender Assessment System (OASys) and the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment tool (SARA) and their underpinning psychometric properties - are also based exclusively on male samples, thus begging the question as to whether

theoretical knowledge of the factors contributing to violence and assessments of risk are adequately valid for women (de Vogel et al., 2016).

The Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2018), echoing Corston (2017), promotes a 'distinct approach' to working with women in contact with the criminal justice system and in doing so, acknowledges that there is a significant variation in the context of male and female crime (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). Over recent years, there has been increased recognition of the specific treatment needs of female offenders, commonly referred to as 'gender-responsive' and 'trauma-informed' approaches (e.g. Bartlett et al., 2014; Covington & Bloom, 2006). Bartlett (2010) states that in order to understand anti-social and dangerous behaviour, any satisfactory model of criminality must address the enormous disparity in male and female crime and that when applied to violence, the model must explain the fact that women's dangerousness looks very different from men's. Specifically, men are more likely to pose a risk to strangers and to their partners, whereas women's violence is almost exclusively confined to their partners and their children. It is also rare for women to offend violently for financial gain and very rare for strangers to be victims.

2.4 Current probation practice with women convicted of serious violence

In terms of current probation practice, there is an informal recognition of two broad typologies of violent women; those women convicted of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and those convicted of more general violence. To outline these briefly; generally, 'violent women' are defined as those who use violence in a variety of situations whereas 'partner-only violent women' are violent only in the context of their intimate relationships (Babcock et al., 2003). In terms of interventions available to women convicted of serious violence, there are currently no specific accredited programmes focused on addressing female violent offending. Programmes that are available to women within the community include the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) and Better Solutions Structured Interventions, both of which are gender non-specific group work programmes. TSP is targeted at men and women who 'evidence lack of problem solving, self-control or appropriate interpersonal relationship skills' and is delivered across 19 sessions. Better Solutions, a shorter programme, delivered as eight one-hour sessions, is similarly aimed at improving 'thinking skills to avoid further offending' by raising awareness of the importance of clear and constructive thinking, helping to understand the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours, exploring emotional management, perspective-taking, communication skills and encouraging a 'pro-social' lifestyle.

There is also an approved practitioner 'toolkit', First Steps to Change, which is intended for use with adult females demonstrating multiple needs (HM Prison & Probation Service, 2023). This is available to probation officers to use on a one-to-one basis with women and covers elements of emotional management which could be relevant to addressing some of the criminogenic needs associated with violence. This is a non-accredited intervention and is delivered at the discretion of individual officers typically as part of a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR); a requirement introduced in 2014, as part of a community sentence or suspended sentence order, with the aim of 'restoring service users to a purposeful life in which they do not reoffend' (HM Prison & Probation Service / Ministry of Justice, 2019).

It is notable that only the First Steps to Change toolkit is gender-responsive; however, this is for use with *all* women under Probation supervision, rather than having any specific focus on working with women convicted of serious violence. Similarly, the focus of TSP and Better Solutions on problem solving and challenging offending behaviour does not offer the relational focus which Covington and Bloom (2003) identify as essential in enabling greater understanding of the ways in which women may conduct or approach relationships.

Within custody there are considerably more interventions for longer-sentenced women convicted of serious violence, specifically those classed as 'Offender Personality Disorder' (OPD) services (NOMS, 2015). Located across the female estate, these services include a residential therapeutic community at HMP Send, the Primrose Unit day-treatment service at HMP Low Newton, and the Access enhanced support service at HMP Foston Hall. For women to be eligible for these services they need to 'screen in' with criteria based on either being a MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) eligible case or assessed as posing a high or very high risk of harm and scoring ten or more on a checklist of 16 items which include things like use of weapon, experience of childhood, difficulties coping and self-harm/suicidal thoughts.

In addition to these prison-based interventions, the Offender Personality Disorder pathway offers a psychological consultation and formulation service to probation officers in the community to think through some of the complexities of managing cases with certain key indicators of personality difficulties. Again though, this is only available to 'screened in' cases and therefore lower to medium risk-level cases presenting with less perceived difficulties remain overlooked.

2.5 Conclusion

This review can be seen to demonstrate that whilst there is a significant amount of discussion around female violence, the evidence-base for how best to work with convicted women is limited and that, in probation work, there is no specific guidance or training focussed explicitly on working with serious violence. As such probation officers remain reliant, to a greater or lesser extent, on male-orientated cognitive behavioural methods of intervention. That said, there have been important developments in working with the general female caseload in recent years, specifically the increased investment in gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches and the related upskilling of staff. The lack of available programmes remains problematic however, and places significant pressure on individual probation officers to effect change with often complex and traumatised women without adequate support in place, thus heightening the potential for vicarious trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

This research therefore was undertaken with a view to exploring the lived experience of women convicted of serious violence to inform a series of recommendations intended to improve this offer for both women convicted of violence being supervised in the community, and the staff working with and supporting them.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Rationale for study

As noted in the Introduction, the core rationale for undertaking this research was grounded in my professional experience as the Women's Strategy Lead for the North West probation region.

Through this role, I had become aware that the majority of women on the caseload had been convicted of violent offences (60% in 2019, now 48%, as described in Chapter Two of this report). These statistics, combined with significant gaps in the evidence base for community interventions with women convicted of serious violence and my own desire to better understand women's lived experience of this (both as perpetrator and victim) and anger, underpins the study's three key objectives:

- To identify themes emerging from women's experiences of anger within a sample of women convicted of serious violent offences.
- To contribute to the evidence base for assessing and working with women convicted of serious violent offences.
- To identify the issues and opportunities in developing interventions for women convicted of serious violent offences.

Within this context, the following questions were developed in order to shape the research and meet the key objectives:

1. How is anger experienced and expressed by women convicted of serious violence, and what role has this played in their offending?
2. What is the role of trauma in women's serious violent offending?
3. What have women convicted of serious violence found helpful and unhelpful in terms of their journey through the criminal justice system and, in particular, in building a relationship with their probation officer?

In keeping with the intended method of analysis, these research questions were framed broadly and did not intend to test a predetermined hypothesis but instead aimed to flexibly explore (Smith and Osborn, 2008) the experiences of women convicted of serious violence.

3.2 Research design

The research design was shaped by the research objectives and questions, which informed the decision to take a qualitative approach focussed on exploring lived experience within a small sample group. The decision was made to utilise semi-structured interviews as the singular data collection method. This form of interviewing was chosen as it 'allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise' (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p57).

Similarly, a decision was taken to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) to interpret the data collected. This is an idiographic approach which examines individuals' subjective experiences by exploring how they make sense of both their personal and social world. Informed by hermeneutics, IPA shares the view that human beings are innately sense-making and therefore participant's accounts are seen to reflect their attempts to make sense of their experiences. In focussing upon an individual's subjective lived experience, there is a recognition that people are both physical and psychological entities and that therefore they act or do things in the world, reflect on what they do, and that those actions have meaningful, existential consequences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Typically, IPA is a research method utilised to understand how particular experiences - for example, an event, relationship or process - have been understood from the perspective of particular people within a particular context. The highly individual nature of women's experience and expression of anger and violence therefore made IPA a logical choice owing to its capacity to consider the diversity and variability of human experience (Willig, 2001).

This research design necessitated a purposive sampling strategy (Miles and Huberman, 1994) enabling women with relevant lived experience – those who had committed a serious violent offence and were being supervised within the North West region – to be identified. The aim here was to increase the depth (as opposed to breadth) of understanding (Palinkas et al., 2015), selecting respondents that were 'most likely to yield appropriate and useful information' (Kelly, 2010, p317). Finally, the decision to use IPA to analyse the data shaped decisions about how many participants to

seek to recruit, since IPA is appropriate for exploring the lived experience of only very small numbers of individuals (typically between two and 25) (Alase, 2017).

In order to ensure that the women's own narrative understanding of their lives, offending and anger was given precedence, a decision was taken not to access any casefile information other than to confirm offence and sentence details. This felt important to the integrity of the, ensuring that the women were able to retain ownership of their experiences by avoiding the potentially confounding impact of others' views, interpretations and opinions.

3.3 Recruitment

Having received a favourable ethical opinion from the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge in early 2020, I conducted an initial scoping exercise using probation systems in order to identify women in my local probation regions - the North West and Greater Manchester - who were, at that time, serving their sentences in the community, either on licence or as the subject of a Community or Suspended Sentence Order. This resulted in a pool of approximately 150 women from which I aimed to sample between six and eight for interview in the subsequent months.

However, at the point of applying for research approval from the Ministry of Justice in early 2020, the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic caused a global lockdown. The restrictions associated with the lockdown period rendered primary research with people in prison and probation community settings impossible for more than 12 months.

Following the lifting of restrictions on new applications in the late summer of 2021, research approval was finally sought in January 2022 from the Ministry of Justice's National Research Committee, and was granted in April 2022. Based on an updated version of the information described above⁶, I then began to make contact with supervising Probation Officers via email and (if no response was forthcoming) telephone to promote the research and seek permission and support in contacting any willing supervisees. Unfortunately, this did not yield the take-up expected, with only three women recruited via this approach over five months between April and September 2022.

⁶ Data was extracted on from the Probation Management Information System (MIS) on 20/04/2022. Starting with the full female caseload data for the region and then filtering out custody-based cases, remanded cases, unallocated cases, those without an OASys assessment and all cases without a named offender manager I was then able to generate a list of offender managers holding female cases. I then contacted these staff outlining the focus of the research and requesting their support in recruiting women 'who have either a current or previous conviction for serious violence'.

In light of these difficulties in recruiting participants virtually via probation staff, I decided a different approach was needed. As such, in October 2022 I made contact with a local Approved Premises (hereafter AP) (a housing service for women posing a 'high risk of harm'), to enable more direct access to the women, and in a more residential setting. I arranged to attend the AP in person, gaining advance permission from the residents to attend one of their morning meetings to introduce myself and explain the research and intended outcomes. Whilst there was some negativity from members of the group in part due to a sense of hopelessness ('what's the point?') there was also enthusiasm to be part of making the issue of women's lived experiences more visible. This enabled me to recruit a further four women convicted of serious violence, increasing the total research sample to seven women.

The table (Table 1) below provides an overview of the participants. The women have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Table 1: Demographic details of participants in research.

Name	Age Group	Ethnicity	Current offence	Previous violence	Sentence type	Victim	Children
Hannah	25-30	White British	Assault emergency services worker	Yes	Community Order (12 months)	Emergency worker	No
Natalie	40-45	White Irish	Having an article with a blade or point in a public place	No	Community Order (24 months)	Friend	Yes (4)
Claire	60-65	White British	Murder	No	Life sentence	Husband	Yes (4)
Beth	65-70	White British	Manslaughter	No	Custody (>100 months)	Father	Yes (1)
Holly	50-55	White British	Murder	No	Life sentence	Child	Yes (4)
Laura	35-40	White Irish	Grievous Bodily Harm (Section 18)	Yes	EPP sentence (>150 months months)	Friend	No
Emily	25-30	White British	Arson endangering life	Yes	Custody (>50 months)	Neighbours	Yes (1)

3.4 Interviews and analysis

Once recruited, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in a private room at either a Women's Centre or the AP. Structured questions were focussed on the following:

- Current contact with the criminal justice system and the woman's own narrative as to how they have come to be supervised by NPS
- Experiences of growing up within their family
- How those around them expressed anger (including any gendered differences)
- Their own experience of perpetrating violence, including any triggers, how these were expressed and managed, and the impact of their offending behaviour on their lives and those around them.

All interviews were digitally recorded (with the participants' informed consent), transcribed and then coded using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify emerging themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As IPA is an inductive approach, analysis of the interview data initially focussed on drawing out interesting and relevant extracts and passages from the transcripts which were then developed into more coherent themes. This was undertaken ideographically on a case-by-case basis before a cross-case analysis was completed.

3.5 Ethical considerations and reflections on the research experience

Owing to the nature of some of the questions and the likelihood that these could be potentially upsetting and triggering, all participants were interviewed within settings where appropriate follow-up support was available, either from a support worker (women's centres), a keyworker or residential support worker (approved premises) or their probation officer. A check-in process was utilised at both the beginning and end of interviews and participants were all informed that they need only answer questions which they felt comfortable and able to do so. All participants were given an information sheet (**Appendix 1**) explaining the purpose of the study ahead of taking part and also signed a consent form (**Appendix 2**).

I was also very conscious, both in interviewing and analysing the collected data, of my professional background as a probation officer and the values, assumptions and frame of reference which this has engendered. To more confidently and ethically step into the role of the researcher, I made a

very conscious choice to move away from utilising the 'tools of the trade' by not accessing probation records (Delius), assessments (OASys and/or psychology reports) or any Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) documents. Similarly, I was careful to avoid case discussion with the probation officers and workers who I encountered within the course of undertaking interviews. This was a liberating experience in a number of respects as it allowed me to move away from a risk management focus and also served to remove some of the barriers to engaging with the women at face value and with a freedom to solely focus on their subjective experiences.

Reflecting on the experience of the interviews themselves, without the role of 'professional' to get in the way, there was an increased feeling of connection with the women and a sense of permission to engage at a more straightforward human level. This made some of the experiences relayed far more impactful and, with no ongoing role in providing support, an almost intrusive feeling at times of being party to such personal information with no foundational relationship to have 'earned' such openness. I was really struck by this in particular and by the feedback from a couple of the women who indicated that they felt calmer in leaving the interview having had the space and time to be heard. For what felt like quite a passive role, it was testament to the power of 'bearing witness' which made me consider how much professional constructs (risk assessments, sentence planning) can get in the way of this type of conversation and what is potentially lost as a result.

Chapter 4: Findings

This section offers a thematic overview of the findings of the interviews undertaken with the seven women detailed in the previous section, all of whom had either recent or historic conviction for a serious violent offence. It should be noted that most of the women interviewed were not repeat violent offenders and that for a number of the women, this was their one and only contact with the criminal justice system.

As noted in previous sections, this study was intended to be exploratory, in order to better understand the lived experiences of women convicted of violence. As described in Chapter Three, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of contact with the criminal justice system, and their own perspective on how they had come to be supervised by the Probation Service. This was in order to understand the women's own 'origin stories' (Wright, 2015) of their convictions for violence, which almost always focussed on their experiences as a victim of violence in childhood, adolescence and/or adulthood.

These accounts are therefore presented below in a loosely chronological order, reflecting the women's experiences of violent victimisation through the life course. This discussion is followed by their perceptions of how these formative experiences, and other trauma events throughout the life course, have underpinned their own subsequent convictions for serious violence. The role of anger within these offences is paid particularly close attention.

Lastly, this chapter explores the experiences of women convicted with serious violence as they interact with agents of the criminal justice system, with a specific focus on the Probation Service and relationship-building with supervising probation officers.

4.1 Invisible trauma: the foundations of women's violence

4.1.1 Experiences of violence in childhood and adolescence

When asked an open question which directed participants to reflect broadly on their 'experiences of childhood', all women within the sample described some level of childhood trauma or adverse

experience within their formative years. This is in line with existing feminist pathways research which highlights the 'extensive and pervasive array of physical, emotional and sexual abuses' in women's pathways to prison (Dirks, 2004, p102), and Belknap's (2015) observations about the role of women's trauma in their paths to criminalisation. The majority of the women interviewed described early experiences of victimisation, both in terms of sexual and non-sexual violence, and also described witnessing violence within the home. For the women who disclosed a history of childhood sexual abuse, this occurred exclusively within the family.

Natalie described growing up with her cousins and recalls that 'they used to play fight me, batter me, you know what I mean, to toughen me up and they used to say to me Grandma 'we're toughening her up Grandma, we're toughening her up'. Natalie laughed as she recalled these childhood memories stating, 'that were the way I were brought up'. Yet while Natalie seemed to recall almost fondly the normalisation of violence in her childhood, it was more common that such recollections were of the damage caused by abusive experiences and the lasting impact of these on the lives of the women as adults. For example, Beth described how 'from the age of 5 up until late in life', she was sexually abused by her father; that she was 'battered, tortured' until she felt 'just like a dead piece of nothing'.

Similarly, Claire explained that she 'came from an abusive family; I was a victim of child abuse', perpetrated by both parents, and described herself as 'a toy, a plaything' for them. Holly stated she 'didn't have the best child life 'cause there was violence ... with my Dad. My Mum was a bit of an alcoholic'. She also went on to explain that she was '[sexually] abused as a child at home' but did not elaborate on who perpetrated this, other than to confirm that it was a 'family member'. Hannah also talked openly about her experience of violence in childhood, and the difficult process of trying to come to terms with this:

It's a weird one as well with the trauma as well because I always thought I accepted it but I obviously don't...I'm like 'Yeah my Mum was shit, yeah my Dad was an alcoholic, yeah this happened, yeah I was sexually assaulted by my brother, yeah this, yeah'. But just because I know it's happened and I'm able to say it, doesn't mean I accept it and I think that's what I'm learning to think.

Similarly, when describing her relationships with her Mum and older sister, Hannah explained they could 'be trying to cuddle you with their alcohol breath one minute and trying to slap you and rile you the next'.

The impact of childhood abuse in the home was further compounded by experiences in school for five of the seven women. As the victims of bullying, they described how this led to them feeling isolated and rejected, with all having a perception of being different, 'odd' or unlikeable from a young age as a consequence. For example, Emily stated that she 'struggled to fit in' after moving to a large secondary school, finding that she didn't 'quite fit in with [the] well-educated [children], but didn't fit in with the sort of council estate kids [either]'. In exploring the aetiology of some of her earliest experiences of perpetrating violence, Emily described how, after being bullied herself, she 'basically became a bully to fit in with the bullies'. Natalie was impacted by moving around schools, as her father was in the army, and disclosed that this was often the source of her bullying ('I used to get bullied a lot. Being called an army brat') and, in turn, the source of much of her anger at that age. This anger, she explained, was further compounded by her experiences of dyslexia, which remained undiagnosed until her final year at school.

A theme also emerged from the analysis around culture and the perceived normalisation of violence among the women, many of whom described experiences of positive reinforcement and encouragement of violence and aggression from a young age. This was particularly true for Laura and Natalie, who both described having grown up in family and community environments where violence was 'normal' and that having skills as a 'fighter' was therefore important. For Laura, violence had become largely detached from being a response to, or consequence of, anger, and she described being able to access feelings of aggression even when happy ('I could go into a fight happy as anything . But I'd still have to have that fight'). Both women rooted their violence within their cultural upbringing and used this to justify their experiences as typical. This use of a stereotype to normalise their experiences growing up was clearly a strong aspect of both women's identity.

Other women similarly described learning violence in ways that reflect Fleetwood's notion of 'narrative habitus' (Fleetwood, 2016), which provides a means of understanding how individuals' narratives are both shaped by social structure and culture, as well as being creative and agentic. For

example, Laura explains how she was 'brought up with violence', learning from a young age that physical violence was the appropriate – indeed, the *only* – way of 'being taught a lesson':

So I was brought up with violence [...] me Dad brought us up [with] violence like, if you didn't do something, you're taught- if you do something wrong, you're taught a lesson...so you think about it again. It's just teaching you a lesson, in't it? So over here [in England] they'd probably sit you down and have conversations, [but where I'm from], it's a bit different with violence.

She also described experiencing violence at the hands of her Mum and Aunt, although explained that within her narrative habitus, this was nothing to speak out about because it was 'just normal' ('we'd never say to anyone we were getting hit or- 'cause it was the norm for [our area]'). Likewise, Natalie explained:

Thing is I grew up in [...] [a] family [where] me Mum had a bit of a reputation as well, as a fighter. So I've always been in her shadow and had to live up to her.

In this way, the experience of openly violent and aggressive behaviour, particularly (and sometimes exclusively) from female role models, was consistently justified by the women's concept of the culture they grew up in. In turn, this can be seen to have provided a narrative to make sense of their own violence, placing some degree of responsibility for this at a socio-cultural level.

4.1.2 Experiences of familial and intimate partner abuse across the life course

Confirming the wide body of literature on the extensive trauma histories of criminalised women and those in custody (e.g., Bloom et al, 2003; Bloom and Covington, 2003; Belknap, 2015; Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2017), all of the women interviewed described experiencing violence within the home as both children *and* adults. Other traumatic experiences were wide-ranging, and included rape, the loss of a child through adoption, the loss of a parent to suicide and the murder of a sibling. It is impossible to generalise this prevalence of significant trauma as representative of women in the criminal justice system, but the commonality and breadth of traumatic experiences within the sample group serves as a stark indicator of the links between trauma and offending.

In general, it seemed easier for the women to talk about and discuss their experiences of trauma as adults than the abuse and trauma they had experienced as children. Domestic violence in intimate

partner relationships appeared very normalised within the women's narratives. This is most clearly expressed by Holly, who described herself as a 'typical female' and then immediately stated 'I was in a domestic violence relationship' almost as if the two statements had a causal link. She elaborated further stating 'I used to be a Listener in jail and you listen to all these women and I couldn't believe the amount of people that had gone through domestic violence and stuff, and how it'd affected 'em and some people were angry because of it'.

Violence in relationships was present for those in both heterosexual and same sex relationships. Laura for example stated 'even if I looked at someone a certain way, we'd get home and she'd be ragging me about and hitting me' whilst Hannah revealed of a recent ex-partner 'she was the first to ever bust my nose. And I was horrified. Horrified'. This repetition of 'horrified' communicates a level of shock not only at the unexpectedness of this violence but also the repeating pattern of Hannah's formative experiences when she'd 'seen it with my Mum and Dad as well' and also because she'd 'left everything thinking that this [relationship] was the right thing and [...] it just wasn't'.

Claire revealed that the pattern of sexual abuse she had suffered at the hands of her mother and father continued when she married her husband ('out of the frying pan into the fire basically'). She focussed particularly on the links between her father's abuse and the dynamics within her marriage; that like her father, her husband was 'controlling, abusive, volatile', and that in this sense, marrying and moving in with him was like she'd 'never left home'. She explained that her husband 'liked to take photos and watch me with other people' replicating her experiences as a child when her parents would have 'friends over' for a 'little party' and she would be a 'little plaything'.

Beth, whose experiences of abuse at the hands of her father continued well into late adulthood, explained that 'you just feel so stained when you've been abused for so long' and that she 'still get[s] images of all that happened to me' and has subsequently 'lived an isolated, lonely life' and felt that she 'wasn't a functioning person at all really' and a 'bit like a zombie in a way'. This link between trauma and the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is well-documented, namely the dominance of this event or series of events within the victim's consciousness, subsequently depleting their lives of meaning and pleasure (van der Kolk, 2022).

4.1.3 Invalidated/unvalidated trauma

A lack of recognition of trauma was another strong theme among the participants, with all but one describing feeling unheard in their experiences of trauma, either by family members or figures of authority (for example, teacher, hospital staff, and the police). The strongest accounts were from those who had felt unheard or 'missed' as children; a negative experience of being dismissed that was felt by participants to be replicated when they had eventually entered the criminal justice system.

For Beth in particular, she recalled:

When I was a kid my body was screaming out 'hey ho something's going on here, this kid isn't right!' And no one came batting for me. And you know...nobody bothered all through my life, nobody bothered.

Her use of 'screaming' communicates a level of distress which seems impossible to miss or ignore, and yet this was her experience. As an adult, she described feeling similarly overlooked, explaining that when she went to report her offence to the police (the murder of her father) 'it was like, they [didn't] believe me, she's a wind up, she's a nutter, whatever. Sit her in the waiting room, she'll wander off'. She recalled thinking that 'nobody's coming out, nobody's still coming out, nobody's still coming out' and that they just 'left me again and left me again and left me again'. Beth's repetition as she described this experience gives a strong sense of almost monotonous suffering, something which came across strongly in her description of being abused by her father throughout her life. Similarly, she reasoned when meeting with her solicitor to discuss her case prior to court that 'nobody had listened to me in the past so why would these people listen to me now'.

This experience of feeling unheard in spite of what feels to the individual to be a very clear communication of distress was also reflected by Hannah, who stated that she'd always wanted recognition of her victim-survivor status from authority figures ('I just wanted the 'Yeah, we know that's what happened' sort of thing?'). She felt that this validation would have helped her to heal and 'move past' the trauma of those experiences but had almost given up hope of this ('I know that's never going to happen'). Similarly for Holly she stated that 'for years and years I thought it was my fault erm, but it wasn't my fault you know, I was a vulnerable child and that shouldn't have happened'.

For Laura, who described a 'toxic' relationship with her mother who 'put me down my whole life', this feeling of invalidation also appeared very present. Having only very recently re-established a relationship with her Mum, Laura, whose younger sister was murdered by an associate at the age of 16, explained that 'my Mam, sometimes on a daily basis, says to me 'you know that should've been you, that should have been you that was killed''. For Laura, this confirmed a pattern of being a disliked and less favoured child; a pattern that had continued into adulthood ('it's mad that she's done it then [in childhood] and she's doing it now'), and one which she still felt trapped in ('I can't cut contact with her, she's me Ma'). This ongoing neglect and lack of recognition of Laura's emotional needs by her mother appeared hugely relevant in her sense of self as she stated: 'you know three weeks ago I tried killing myself [...] three weeks ago I felt I wasn't good enough for this world'.

Unlike Beth and Laura, who sought validation by trying to communicate with those around them, Holly described her silence following the significant trauma she experienced when raped by a stranger on a night out. Explaining this, she highlighted how she had felt unable to speak to anyone or seek support to help her cope with either the psychological impact or direct consequences of this assault. She explained:

I was absolutely petrified erm...I can't explain that feeling because erm...I don't think there's any way to describe it other than you're normal felt ashamed I, felt dirty, couldn't do anything about it, didn't tell my husband at the time, erm, and I ended up pregnant [...] But then, all of a sudden, just like that I ended up in hospital and had a miscarriage...So that all happened and nobody knew about it.

Holly's lack of psychological safety in feeling able to share her trauma with those close to her or to feel confident enough to report this incident to the police therefore denied her the opportunity to access support and left her to manage the consequences of this assault alone.

4.2 Women's experience of anger and links to violence

Participants were asked explicitly about their own experiences of and attitudes towards 'anger', particularly within the context of their convictions for serious violence. This was for two main reasons, firstly, due to the historical perception of anger within women as 'deviant, monstrous or otherwise taboo' (Kay, 2019: 591), and secondly, as a consequence of the strong association in probation work and programmes (whereby anger management courses are commonly a response to rehabilitating individuals convicted of violence). As noted in the literature review, such courses have historically been designed for men and take little account of women's needs or experiences (de Vogel et al., 2016). This is a concern that is reflected in the final subsections of this analysis, in which the women reflect on their experiences of punishment and support within the criminal justice system, and its efficacy (or lack of) in addressing the root cause or foundations of their serious violence.

In the main, the women linked anger and violence through descriptions of their past experiences of trauma and a deep-rooted protective and preventative determination that this would not 'happen again', either to themselves or a child. In this sense, some elements of Daly's (1992) classic 'harmed and harming' typology of women convicted of felonies appear relevant, chiefly in terms of drawing attention to the 'physical and emotionally harmful experiences' experienced by these women growing up, and the 'diverse and complex ways in which these experiences are reproduced in the women's harming behaviour towards others' (pp28-9).

4.2.1 Protective anger (others) and outward violence

For a number of the women, their recourse to violence was narrated as a mechanism to protect others, specifically their children, partner or a close family member. This fits with the view that anger may be functional for the individual, may fit with the pursuit of their goals and for these reasons, may not be inherently distressing (Howells and Day, 2003).

Three of the women - Beth, Claire and Laura - talked openly about being violent in order to protect others. For Beth and Claire, the risk of their children becoming victim to the same perpetrator was hugely significant. Claire recalled that as her daughter started to enter puberty, her husband described her as being 'ripe for picking'. She described her reaction to this stating:

He weren't going to get near her. He wasn't. Over my dead body would he have got near her. And I always said I would kill him [if he abused her] and I didn't make a secret of it.

Similarly, Beth described standing up to her father to protect her daughter in a way that no one had for her. She recalled telling him:

'You've got me, you can do what the hell you like with me because you have done for years so, but you lay a finger on my daughter, and I know about it [...] You will not touch her; you will not do anything to her'.

For these two women, then, the link between anger and their conviction for violence was rooted in a desire to protect loved ones from experiencing the same (sexual) abuse that they had experienced as children.

Laura, also committed an act of violence stemming from a desire to protect others. Yet unlike Beth and Claire, Laura's index offence was not grounded in experiences of familial sexual abuse, but in the childhood trauma of witnessing domestic violence perpetrated against her mother, and the complex experience of being rewarded for retaliating violently against the perpetrator. Laura, who consistently described herself as a 'fighter', used violence in a manner which seemed to have been born out of her experiences in childhood, when she 'had to prove my love and loyalty to my Ma by beating men, by protecting her [...] by rescuing her; rescue, rescue, rescue, rescue'. Laura recalled that enacting this 'rescue' would then result in the positive affirmation and affection from her mother that she craved:

She'd give me a hug, tell me she loved me [...] that's what I wanted. Like I said, I wanted to be loved my whole life 'cause I knew that was good- well, I seen it as a good thing, you know?

This is echoed in Laura's index offence, a Section 18 GBH (grievous bodily harm with wounding), which was instigated by her ex-partner saying 'if you fuckin' love me you'd go and do something about it' following a dispute with a neighbour. Laura described that '100% it was definitely expectation [that I would attack our neighbour], 'cause I was a fighter, so why wouldn't she want me to?' and her perception that 'by me doing that [...] it's proving my love for her'. For Laura then,

this protective behaviour appeared to come from a feeling of obligation, of proving loyalty and seeking the reward of love.

4.2.2 Protective anger (self) and outward violence: the trauma-precipitated 'snap' or 'switch'

For other women, the link between anger and their conviction for serious violence was described as an act of protecting the self; an act which, similar to the women above, was consistently narrated as a direct consequence of the abuse that they had experienced as children.

The 'snap' or 'switch' moment, specifically the experience of reaching a critical point at which an individual was no longer being able to tolerate something *within the specific context of past trauma*, was spoken about vividly by all of the women interviewed. 'Losing it' in this way was a striking feature for a number of the women, with a sense of a tangible pause prior to violence; a moment of conscious decision-making in response to reaching a limit to what they were prepared to tolerate before responding with aggression.

In describing her index offence, during which she threatened a close friend with a knife due to her belief that he had sexually assaulted her son, Natalie stated:

So I just think, I just lost it then, I thought 'nah I'm not putting up with this'. The police have done nothing to help me. I were constantly on that phone t'police and thought, 'Well, I'll take the law into my own hands'.

Natalie's actions here are clearly redolent of Griffiths (2000) account of 'cumulative anger' and the 'cyclical' experience of violence among 'women who fight back' (pp143-44). Her experiences are also similar to those of Beth, who described herself as otherwise 'quite a passive person', as she recalled an argument with her father just prior to killing him, explaining 'that moment was a complete 'snap' moment; I saw red and I just completely snapped'. Her subsequent comment – that at this moment, she recalled thinking 'I wanted him to go; I wanted [the abuse] to end' - served to locate this 'snap' within her lifelong history of being sexually abused by her father. This seems qualitatively different to more androcentric notions of 'seeing red', in which 'the red mist' is more commonly associated with the male experience of seeking to justify the killing of a female intimate partners in a 'jealous [...] rage', to punish them for (presumed or proven) infidelity (Howe, 2013, p410).

Emily also narrated the moment before seriously assaulting her male partner in a previous offence some years prior as a 'snap' precipitated by her cumulative experience of historic and contemporary victimisation. Like Natalie and Beth, she described the way that, as he was attacking her, 'something switched in me and I thought *'I'm not having this anymore, I'm not having him treat me this way'*'. Again, there is an indication of a thought process preceding serious violence, and a sense of clarity in the moment – grounded in her history of cumulative victimisation - to express and react against the violent behaviour of her partner.

This 'snap' moment played out slightly differently in Emily's current offence which involved an attempt on her own life. She explained:

I've struggled to process my emotions the right way, so I think growing up I was very angry as a teenager and hence why I beat people up [...] but as I've got older and I've learnt to kind of not get angry anymore, that anger's like gone inward. So instead I hurt myself and try and kill myself.

This 'snap' experience was not always talked about by the women exclusively in relation to their index offence (that is, the offence which resulted in probation supervision), with some describing similarly violent 'snaps' in other situations. However, it was a commonly described occurrence in the women's accounts when explaining the origin of their violent acts, and how these were linked to repeated trauma, suppressed emotion and the seeming lack of an internalised model of how to express anger appropriately, in part inhibited by social expectations.

To this end, there is a strong theme of long-repressed anger which suddenly comes to a head and culminates in serious violence. For example, Hannah recalled standing up for herself in a violent intimate partner relationship:

*I remember the switch, I know what it was, I know exactly the thought, what it was - I thought *'You're not doing this to me'* and that's when I grabbed her. Cause I'd seen it with my Mum and Dad [...] I thought *'No; this isn't happening'*.*

Her repetition of 'thought' throughout this statement is suggestive of a connection between her outward behaviour and a degree of cognitive clarity in this moment. It also serves to demonstrate the impact of her childhood experiences and related determination not to allow the same victimhood to infiltrate her adult life.

4.2.3 Women's reflections on experiences of their anger resulting in serious violence

Some of the women talked about fearing the repercussions if they were to 'lose control' again, with some participants talking about seeking psychological intervention as they felt that their experiences of anger were 'not normal'. Hannah stated:

I've genuinely- I-I'm going to be honest with you, I've genuinely questioned that: 'Could I kill someone?' And I've had those questions with myself – 'Am I a psychopath?' Because I know I'm not normal.

Similarly, Beth explained:

I was frightened, after I did that anger thing, I was frightened of ever getting angry again...I used to say, when I'm starting to feel anger about someone's wound me up or something and I'm getting a bit wound up, I want to shut it down because I did that; I killed somebody. My anger went to that 0-100 and I-I thought, 'If I'm- if I'm like that will I do it again? Will I do that again? Will I'- and [my mental health worker] said 'You're allowed to feel, Beth -you're allowed to feel anger'.

Natalie also reflected when thinking back to her offence and her general behaviour and thoughts around this time; 'it was scary [...] I scared myself. I literally scared myself. Of what I was capable of doing'.

Holly made reference to the impact of cultural norms on perceptions of women's anger. She stated, 'I think a lot of women don't get angry...they put women on pedestals, that women shouldn't do these naughty things, and I think they forget that we're human, just like everybody else'. This comment serves to frame the consequences inherent in women's violence and anger being construed as 'abnormal' and the implications that this has both in terms of repressed feeling but also the shame and confusion experienced by women who *do* express anger or act violently.

4.3 Women convicted of violence: Interactions and missed opportunities within the criminal justice system

4.3.1 Missed opportunities

Most of the women stated that, first and foremost, what they needed was for someone to have noticed what was happening to them in childhood and to have intervened. They also talked about what they viewed as missed opportunities within 'the system' to both identify and address their experiences of trauma and enable them to reflect on the link between this and their violent behaviour. Considered in the context of how positively women spoke about their experience when they *were* able to access support, the need to ensure responsive, targeted interventions which reflect women's experience is made all the more apparent. As is the need for adequate support for criminal justice staff who may be the recipient of these conversations and disclosures.

Six of the seven participants described their needs and cries for help as being missed. For some this was linked to early experiences of the criminal justice system and a focus on their criminalised behaviours rather than the factors contributing to this. Emily stated:

There's like a gap in the criminal justice system where everybody's- they seem to think everybody thinks the same and should be treated the same and should have the same therapies...there's no individual plan...for anybody.

After describing a period of counselling in prison as a turning point which helped to change her 'way of viewing' herself, Emily went on to question why the various statutory organisations she had been involved with from childhood failed to support her for the trauma she had experienced:

Why did it take me, or why did it take services 'til I was 28 to pick up on that? I was involved in the Youth Offending Team like from 12 - why couldn't of somebody just, found that out earlier, maybe saved a lot of heartache?

It was clear from Beth's comments that by the time she had been incarcerated, the time for intervening had long since passed. Instead, what was most vital to her at that time – and, importantly, what she did *not* receive in prison - was to be 'listened to':

I would just have liked for someone to have listened. I just wanted to be listened to. And-and have more officers because, what I found in jail was, because [...] I was very quiet, you just get overlooked completely.

This experience was corroborated by Laura who explained 'being naughty gets you somewhere', in terms of people in authority paying attention, as she reflected on her experience of the children's residential care system:

Years ago in care, I was the kid that kicked off to be heard; like you shouldn't have to kick off or be violent to be heard [...] but kicking off does get you heard, no one can say it doesn't and it's not right.

More generally, Beth talked about the impact of low staffing within prisons explaining:

They've never got enough staff, the girls can't even get a proper association there, they're not even getting half an hour sometimes and it's not fair [...] You're going to have more mental health issues in the community when they come out of prison than they did before they went in.

The impact of low staffing and resources was also reflected in the women's experience of probation with Emily stating 'I feel my probation officer's far too overworked [...] I've seen her once since I've been out in 6 weeks. Far too overworked'. Claire also reflected that her probation officer had a 'lot on her plate' and that at times, this made her reluctant to share how she was feeling. This perceived lack of time and space can be seen as compounding difficulty in expressing feelings with the potential for emotional build-up and possible increase in risk, therefore undermining the purpose of probation supervision in reducing risk of reoffending and risk of harm.

These accounts starkly demonstrate the individual impact of known issues relating to low prison and probation staffing resources. There has been much written about the difficulties of staff retention within both professions in recent years (Webster, 2022) and the knock on impact in terms of women (and men) having the space and opportunity to engage with and address factors

relating to their offending meaningfully is suggestive of an opportunity lost to deter future re-offending.

4.3.2 Positive and rehabilitative experiences

More than half of the women described experiences of imprisonment or probation supervision in positive terms; as having 'made' them and as enabling much needed time out from their lives. This had proved to be a nurturing experience for some and an opportunity to 'grow up' which they would not have been afforded had they not entered the criminal justice system. Three of the women stated that without this intervention they would 'not be here'.

There was also an acknowledgement of the efforts made by probation officers to provide support. Claire in particular repeated the same phrase a number of times stating of her probation officer, 'God love her, she worked tirelessly'. Similarly, Natalie stated 'I can't fault me probation officer [...] she's been really there and supportive. She hasn't judged me for what I've done'. This seemed to be in contradiction of her expectations as she explained 'the idea I got from probation was that they look down at you like your this criminal. And they don't [...] when they read between the lines, there's always a reason' and concluded that 'it's took summat bad to get summat good' seeming to suggest that whilst her experience of going to court had been very anxiety-provoking, the outcome in receiving support through probation had been positive.

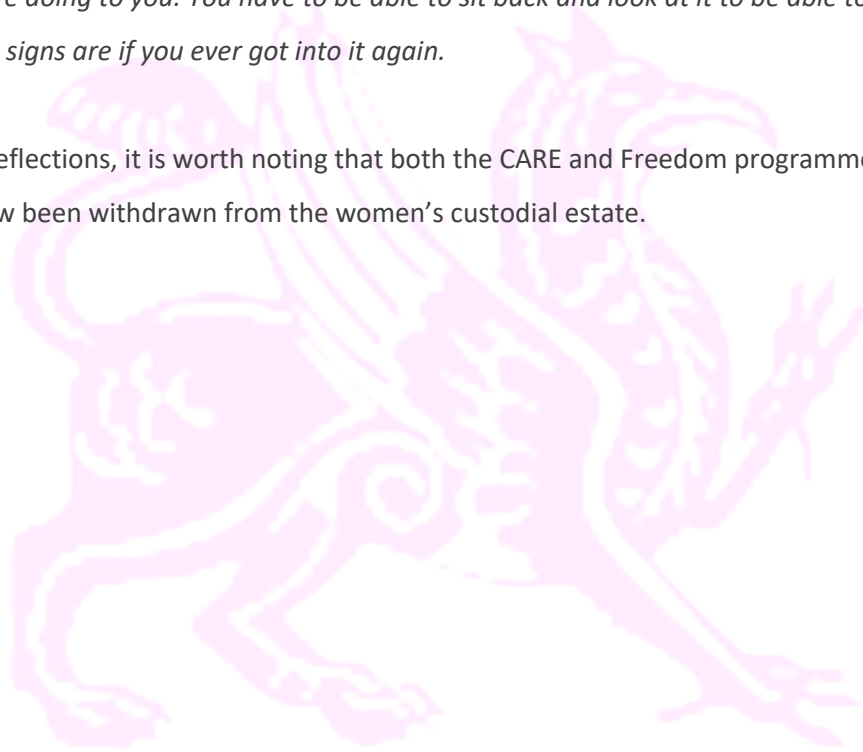
Some of the women described specific initiatives within the criminal justice system which they felt had been beneficial for them. For example, Hannah talked about her experiences of attending problem solving court, a sentencing approach which includes regular review hearings where magistrates adopt a strengths-based approach. Her reflections indicated that it was less about what the criminal justice system did and more about *how it did it* that was important to her:

I loved it. They were so nice to me. Honestly [...] I went in thinking [...] 'Is this a trick' you know? And I was stood there like I was back in the dock, but then they were like, you know it's not like that [...] But what was really nice to me was when one of the magistrates took the time and said 'by the way I just want to say, we don't usually say this to people but, we are as magistrates really impressed with you [...] you should be really proud of yourself'. [...] And I got upset and my Dad never cries and he was welling up.

Others reflected on the important role of psychologically-informed interventions in custody. For instance, Holly described a positive experience of attending the CARE (Choices, Actions, Relationships and Emotions)⁷ and Freedom⁸ programmes. Of her experiences of CARE, she reflected: 'I enjoyed it, thoroughly enjoyed it and it's really helpful, it proper- you know like we did scenario work as well and I didn't like it but I made myself do it [...] For me it worked'. Similarly, Holly had found Freedom helpful in understanding the signs of an abusive relationship, and ways out that do not rely on violence, as she explained:

I got loads out of it, because when you're in the situation in the relationship, you don't see what they're doing to you. You have to be able to sit back and look at it to be able to see, to know what signs are if you ever got into it again.

In light of these reflections, it is worth noting that both the CARE and Freedom programmes have unfortunately now been withdrawn from the women's custodial estate.



⁷ An accredited custodial intervention aimed at women who have a history of violence, complex needs and a medium risk of reconviction, CARE was designed in response to an identified gap in provision for women convicted of interpersonal violence and seeks to reduce reoffending by helping women to, gain insight into their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, manage their emotions, problem-solve and develop a pro-social identity.

⁸ The Freedom Programme is a domestic abuse programme. It examines the roles played by attitudes and beliefs on the actions of abusive men and the responses of victims and survivors. The aim is to help individuals make sense of and understand what has happened to them. It also describes in detail how children are affected by being exposed to this kind of abuse and very importantly how their lives are improved when the abuse is removed. (www.freedomprogramme.co.uk)

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research set out with the intention to explore the experiences of women convicted of serious violence, including their histories of trauma and their own reflections and beliefs about the factors relevant to their violent offending. It was anticipated that this would help to inform a series of recommendations intended to improve the offer for both women convicted of violence under probation supervision, and, by extension, the probation staff working with and supporting them. Currently, the evidence-base for how best to work with women convicted of serious violence is limited leaving probation staff reliant on male-based theories of violence to inform assessment and underpin intervention work.

5.1 The prevalence of trauma

Most important within the findings was the prevalence of trauma histories within the cohort of women interviewed. These were pervasive and spanned both childhood and adulthood with most women revealing 'complex trauma' experiences, specifically 'trauma [which] occurs repeatedly and cumulatively, usually over a period of time and within specific relationships and contexts' (Courtois, 2008, p86). The women also described a lack of recognition of the trauma they had experienced, stating that they felt unheard in these experiences by both family members and figures of authority (for example, teacher, hospital staff, and police). The strongest accounts were from those women who had felt unheard or 'missed' as children, although this was also a clear deficit felt by participants when they had entered the criminal justice system. Key learning for probation staff working with women convicted of violence therefore is the importance of 'bearing witness' (Anderson, 2016) to these experiences, and the importance of these to the narrative and desistance journey of women within the criminal justice system. In turn, this emphasises the importance of the relational intervention at the heart of probation work and the related role to be played in both recognising and validating these experiences. Indeed, whilst it is clearly not possible to undo the damage caused by these experiences, much has been written about the reparative opportunities in validating trauma later down the line, making it possible for 'unspeakable things to be told and unbearable feelings to be borne' (Herman & Schatzow, 1987, p13). As such, the need for a trauma-informed approach to be front and centre is fundamental for all cases, even when a woman may

not initially be upfront about her experiences or when concerns about her level of risk may make it more challenging to consider her vulnerability. Of similar importance is the incorporation of 'Pathways Theory' (Belknap, 2015; Gehring, 2016) into the probation professional discourse around working with women. This feels a particularly glaring omission given the increased focus in recent years on trauma-informed practice and the subsequent significance of understanding and responding to women's routes into (and out of) the criminal justice system.

5.2 The relevance of trauma: Women's experience of anger

When revealing their experiences of anger and the links between this and their conviction(s) for a range of serious violent offences, a high proportion of the women described this in terms of protection, either of themselves or others, specifically their children. This is not to say that all violence by women is reactive in nature but there was less of a sense of instrumental violence than might be expected – in my professional experience - from a cohort of men convicted of serious violence. Instead there was a perception of the women reaching a limit of what they were prepared to withstand, within the context of a lifetime's experience of abuse, and with their violence coming very much at this tipping point of no longer being able to cope or put up with a situation or behaviour which was reminiscent of earlier trauma.

Due to the strength of this feeling, some of the women talked about fearing the repercussions if they were to 'lose control' again, with some participants talking about seeking psychological intervention as they felt that their experiences of anger were 'not normal'. As such, there would seem to be a role for probation intervention here in normalising anger as an aspect of healthy human functioning, and supporting women to express this in pro-active and pro-social ways in order to avoid the build-up of emotion and distress which formed the foundations of their violent offending. As with taking a trauma-informed approach, there is perhaps a need to be assumptive and not rely on women to self-report difficulties or discomfort with anger but to pro-actively raise and explore this.

5.3 The need for practitioner support

Considered in the context of how positively women spoke about their experiences when they were able to access support, the need to ensure responsive, targeted interventions which reflect women's experience is made all the more apparent. As is the importance of staff understanding

around child sexual abuse and the correlation between this and negative outcomes. Indeed, significant associations have been found between 'reporting CSA and experiencing domestic violence, rape, sexual problems, mental health problems, low self-esteem, and problems with intimate relationships even after taking into account a range of family background factors' and that 'women who had experienced abuse involving intercourse were the most vulnerable to these negative outcomes' (Fleming et al, 1999, p145). The need for training in understanding and responding to such disclosures and feeling equipped to respond 'in the room' is therefore highlighted.

Similarly, there is a corresponding need for adequate support for probation staff who may be on the receiving end of these conversations and disclosures. The growing body of evidence looking at the effects that trauma work has on individuals working with traumatised individuals (Cohen & Collins, 2013), specifically secondary post-traumatic stress (Sabin-Farrell & Turpin, 2003) and vicarious trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990), give this need particular weight. Secondary post-traumatic stress refers to the experiencing of symptoms similar to those seen in people with posttraumatic stress disorder whilst vicarious trauma refers to personal changes resulting from a cumulative and empathic engagement with another's traumatic experiences (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995a). These can cause long-term impact on an individual's way of experiencing themselves, others and the world including symptoms that may parallel those of their client (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995a). As such, if probation staff are to work in a trauma-informed way and bear witness to the 'unspeakable things' and unbearable feelings' which may be divulged and expressed, then there is a need for adequate support systems to be in place to reduce the potential for vicarious trauma and burnout.

5.4 Limitations

In considering the findings of this research, it is important to acknowledge that these are based on the lived experience of a small sample group of just seven women, all of whom were located in the north west of England. It should also be recognised that all of the women were some way into their sentence. Those who had received a custodial sentence had served their time in prison and were on licence at the point of interview, while those on community-based orders were over halfway through their sentence. This meant that, as a sample group, the women all had a felt sense of having made significant progress since the point of sentence, and as such were able to reflect on their offending and their anger from a slightly distanced position. This time to reflect and come to

terms with some of the contributing factors both to their offending and experiences of anger enabled a level of self-reflection and openness which would perhaps not have been possible with a newly sentenced group of women still coming to terms with their circumstances. Many of the women had completed offending behaviour programmes and undertaken considerable psychological work on the self, both structured and individual, to make better sense of themselves and their offending behaviour and was evident in their level of insight and self-awareness. The experiences of the women presented in this report are therefore likely to be distinct from women who may have been only recently convicted of serious violence.



Chapter 5: Recommendations

The findings of this research evidence the need for a distinct approach to working with women convicted of serious violence. They highlight the need for specialist training to inform probation practice, alongside the need for enhanced supervision to support practitioners in undertaking this complex and emotionally demanding work and in turn, to enhance the support available to women convicted of violence.

On the basis of these findings, I would therefore make the following recommendations:

1) **The Female Offender Strategy (MoJ, 2018) already contains an acknowledgement that gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches should be at the heart of all work with all women in contact with the criminal justice system.** Given the current lack of practical guidance for practitioners in working with female violence and the inherent complexity of this work, this commitment should be extended to inform specific practice guidelines and structured interventions for women convicted of serious violence.

2) **Specialist training aimed at working with women's anger and violence should be made available to all probation staff working with women convicted of violence.** This should include education on the factors and contextual considerations outlined in the literature review section of this report and the contributions of feminist pathways research on the role of trauma in women's criminalisation. One Small Thing's 'Trauma Informed Training' would offer a ready-made and accessible training package.

a) By extension, women who have been convicted of violence should only be supervised by probation staff who have received specific training around female violence. This could be in the form of online training to increase reach and practicality.

b) This training should also be mandated for probation managers working within a multi-agency setting (e.g., MAPPA) to ensure that this learning informs wider system

understandings of female violence and guides appropriate multi-agency risk management strategies.

- 3) **Staff working with women convicted of serious violence should have access to specific support to manage the emotional demands of this work.** This should be in addition to standard line management supervision and could be delivered in a group setting to enhance models of peer support for practitioners.

- 4) **The Probation Service should invest in developing a specific programme or intervention for working with female anger and violence.** This should not rely on cognitive behavioural methods (how you think and behave) and should instead focus more on distilling, containing and managing emotions with a relational focus (Covington and Bloom, 2003). It should not be based on the male-focused 'red mist' model of inter-personal violence discussed in Chapter Four, and should instead recognise the myriad ways in which women's lifelong experiences of abuse and trauma feed into and precipitate their own anger and interpersonal acts of violence.

- 5) **A follow-up study focused on the experiences of probation staff in managing, working with and responding to female violence** would be beneficial in providing additional information to guide policy and guidance around practitioner support.

- 6) **Development of the new Assess, Risks, Needs, Strengths (ARNS) assessment tool** (which will replace the existing OASys assessment) should be responsive to the differences in male and female criminality and include consideration of how the tool will both facilitate and promote gender-responsive assessment.

Bibliography

- Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9-19.
- Anderson, S. E. (2016). The value of 'bearing witness' to desistance. *Probation Journal*, 63(4), 408-424.
- Archer, J. (1994). *Male Violence*. London: Routledge.
- Archer, J. (2004). Sex differences in aggression in real-world settings: A meta-analytic review. *Review of general Psychology*, 8(4), 291-322.
- Babcock, J. C., Miller, S. A., & Siard, C. (2003). Toward a typology of abusive women: Differences between partner-only and generally violent women in the use of violence. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 27, 153-161.
- Bandura, A. (1978). Social learning theory of aggression. *Journal of communication*, 28(3), 12-29.
- Bartlett, A. (2010). Gender, crime and violence. Chapter Five in, Bartlett, A. (Ed.), *Forensic Mental Health: Concepts, systems and practice* (pp53-66). Oxford University Press.
- Bartlett, A., Walker, T., Harty, M. A., & Abel, K. M. (2014). Health and social care services for women offenders: current provision and a future model of care. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 25(6), 625-635.
- Batchelor, S. (2005). 'Prove me the bam!': Victimization and agency in the lives of young women who commit violent offences. *Probation Journal*, 52(4), 358-375.
- Belknap, J. (2015). *The invisible woman: Gender, crime, and justice* (4th ed.). Stanford: Cengage Learning.
- Benda, B. B. (2005). Gender differences in life-course theory of recidivism: A survival analysis. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 49(3), 325-342.
- Bloom, B., Owen, B. & Covington, S. (2003). *Gender responsive strategies: Research, practice and guiding principles for women offenders' project*. Guiding principles and strategies draft document. Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, Routledge.

- Brody, L. (2000) The socialization of gender differences in emotional expression: Display rules, infant temperament, and differentiation. *Gender and emotion: Social psychological perspectives*, 2(11), 122-137.
- Cho, H. (2012). Examining gender differences in the nature and context of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(13), 2665-2684.
- Cohen, K., & Collens, P. (2013). The impact of trauma work on trauma workers: A metasynthesis on vicarious trauma and vicarious posttraumatic growth. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5(6), 570.
- Coid, J., Yang, M., Roberts, A., Ullrich, S., Moran, P., Bebbington, P., ... & Singleton, N. (2006). Violence and psychiatric morbidity in the national household population of Britain: public health implications. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 189(1), 12-19.
- Corston, J. (2007) The Corston Report: A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System, London: The Home Office
- Courtois, C. A. (2004). Complex trauma, complex reactions: Assessment and treatment. *Psychotherapy: Theory, research, practice, training*, 41(4), 412.
- Covington, S. & Bloom, B. (2003) Gendered justice: Women in the criminal justice system. *Gendered justice: Addressing female offenders*, 3-23.
- Covington, S. & Bloom, B. (2006) Gender-responsive treatment and services in correctional settings. In E. Leeder (Ed.), *Inside and out: Women, prison, and therapy*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press. *Women & Therapy*, 29(3/4), 9-33.
- Crewe, B., Hulley, S., & Wright, S. (2017). The gendered pains of life imprisonment. *British Journal of Criminology*, 57(6), 1359-1378.
- Crick, N. (1997). Engagement in gender normative versus nonnormative forms of aggression: links to social-psychological adjustment. *Developmental Psychology*, 33, 610–617.
- Daly, K. (1992). Women's pathways to felony court: Feminist theories of lawbreaking and problems of representation. *S. Cal. Rev. L. & Women's Stud.*, 2, 11.
- Davis, M., LaRosa, P., & Foshee, D. (1992). Emotion work in supervisor-subordinate relations: Gender differences in the perception of angry displays. *Sex Roles*, 26, 513–531.
- Denno, D. W. (1990). *Biology and violence: From birth to adulthood*. Cambridge University Press.

- de Vogel, V., Stam, J., Bouman, Y. H. A., Ter Horst, P., & Lancel, M. (2016). Violent women: a multicentre study into gender differences in forensic psychiatric patients. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, 27*(2), 145-168.
- Dirks, D. (2004). Sexual revictimization and retraumatization of women in prison. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 32*(3/4), 102-115.
- Ellison, L. (2019). Coercive and controlling men and the women who kill them. *Wolverhampton Law Journal, 3*.
- Fleetwood, J. (2016). Narrative habitus: Thinking through structure/agency in the narratives of offenders. *Crime, Media, Culture, 12*(2), 173-192.
- Fleming, J., Mullen, P. E., Sibthorpe, B., and Bammer, G. (1999). The long-term impact of childhood sexual abuse in Australian women. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 23*(2): 145-159.
- Funk, S. J. (1999). Risk assessment for juveniles on probation: A focus on gender. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 26*(1), 44-68.
- Gehring, K. S. (2018). A direct test of pathways theory. *Feminist Criminology, 13*(2), 115-137.
- Griffiths, S. (2000). Women, anger and domestic violence: the implications for legal defences to murder. In J. Hanmer and C. Itzen, with S. Quaid and D. Wigglesworth [Eds.]. *Home Truths about Domestic Violence: Feminist Influences on Policy and Practice. A Reader* (pp.133-152). London: Routledge
- Hart, C. H., DeWolf, M., & Burts, D. (1993). Parental disciplinary strategies and preschoolers' play behavior in playground settings. In C. H. Hart (Ed.), *Children in Playgrounds* (pp271–313). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Heilbrun, K., Dematteo, D., Fretz, R., Erickson, J., Yasuhara, K., & Anumba, N. (2008). How "specific" are gender-specific rehabilitation needs? An empirical analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 35*(11), 1382-1397.
- Herman, J. L., & Schatzow, E. (1987). 'Recovery and verification of memories of childhood sexual trauma'. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 4*(1), 1.
- HM Prison & Probation Service (2023). *First Steps to Change: A Toolkit for Working with Women*. Unpublished internal document.
- HM Prison & Probation Service / Ministry of Justice (2019). *RAR Guidance*. Accessed 7th October from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rehabilitation-activity-requirement-in-probation/rar-guidance>

Hollin, C. R. & Palmer, E. J. (2008). Offending behaviour programmes: History and Development. In C. R. Hollin and E. J. Palmers (Eds.) *Offending Behaviour Programmes: Development, Application and Controversies* (pp1-32). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Howe, A. (2013). 'Red mist' homicide: sexual infidelity and the English law of murder (glossing Titus Andronicus). *Legal Studies*, 33(3), 407-430.

Howells, K. (1989) 'Anger management methods in relation to the prevention of violent behaviour', in J. Archer and K. D. Browne. (Eds.) *Human Aggression Naturalistic Approaches* (pp182-216). London: Routledge.

Howells, K. (1998). Cognitive behavioural interventions for anger, aggression and violence. In N. Tarrier, A. Wells, and G. Haddock (Eds.), *Treating Complex Cases: The Cognitive-Behavioural Approach* (pp295-318). Chichester: Wiley.

Howells, K., & Day, A. (2003). Readiness for anger management: Clinical and theoretical issues. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 23(2), 319-337.

Howells, K. (2004) Anger and Its Links to Violent Offending. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 11(2), 189-196.

Husserl, E. (1927). Phenomenology. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14, 699-702.

Johal, R. and Davies, N. (2022). *Reunification of probation services*. London: Institute for Government.

Justice for Women (2017). *Sally Challen*. Accessed 9th August 2023 at: <https://www.justiceforwomen.org.uk/sally-challen-appeal>

Kaschak, E. (1992). *Engendered lives*. New York: Basic Books.

Kay, J. B. (2019). Introduction: Anger, media, and feminism: The gender politics of mediated rage. *Feminist Media Studies*, 19(4), 591-615.

Keitner, C. (2002). Victim or vamp? Images of violent women in the criminal justice system. *Columbia Journal of Gender & Law* 11. P38-87.

Kelly, B. C. (2010). Sampling and recruitment issues in qualitative drugs research: Reflections on the study of club drug users in metro New York. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 45(5), 671-683.

Kozol, W. (1995). Fracturing domesticity: Media, nationalism, and the question of feminist influence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 20(3), 646-667.

- Lauritsen, J. L., Heimer, K., & Lynch, J. P. (2009). Trends in the gender gap in violent offending: New evidence from the National Crime Victimization Survey. *Criminology*, 47(2), 361-399.
- McCann, I., & Pearlman, L. (1990). Vicarious traumatization: A framework for understanding the psychological effects of working with victims. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 3, 131-149.
- McDonough, D. (1999). *Federally sentenced women maximum security interview project: not letting the time do you*. Canada: Correctional Services of Canada.
- Miles, M. & Huberman A. (1994) *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Ministry of Justice (2022a). *Pivot table for the Number of Defendants in England and Wales prosecuted, convicted and sentenced by: Offence Type, Offence Group, Offence, HO offence code, Type of Defendant, Sex, Age Group, Age Range, Ethnicity, Police Force Area, Quarter, for years ending June 2018 to June 2022*. London: Ministry of Justice.
- Ministry of Justice (2022b). *National Statistics: Women and the Criminal Justice System 2021*. London: Ministry of Justice.
- Ministry of Justice (2018). *Female Offender Strategy*. London: Ministry of Justice.
- Naylor, B. (2001). Reporting violence in the British print media: Gendered stories. *The Howard Journal*, 40(2) p180-194.
- Nicholls, T. L., Pritchard, M. M., Reeves, K., & Hilterman, E. (2013). Risk assessment in intimate partner violence: A systematic review of contemporary approaches. *Partner Abuse*, 4, 76-168.
- National Offender Management Service (2015). *Working with offenders with personality disorder: A practitioner's guide* (2nd Ed.). London: Ministry of Justice.
- Odgers, C. L., Moretti, M. M., & Dickon, N. R. (2005). Examining the science and practice of violence risk assessment with female adolescents. *Law and Human Behavior*, 29, 7-27.
- Office for National Statistics (2021) *Women and the Criminal Justice System 2021*. Accessed on 30th July 2023 from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/women-and-the-criminal-justice-system-2021/women-and-the-criminal-justice-system-2021#offence-analysis>
- Ogle, R. S., Maier-Katkin D., & Bernard T. J. (1995). A theory of homicidal behavior among women. *Criminology*, 33, 173-193.

Owens, L., Shute, R., & Slee, P. (2000). "Guess what I just heard!": Indirect aggression among teenage girls in Australia. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression*, 26(1), 67-83.

Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, et al. (2015) Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5): 533–544.

Pearlman, L. A., & Saakvitne, K., W. (1995). *Trauma and the therapist: Countertransference and vicarious traumatization in psychotherapy with incest survivors*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Pennix, P. R. (1999). An analysis of mothers in the federal prison system. *Corrections Compendium*, 24(12), 4-6.

Pollock, J. M., Mullings, J. L., & Crouch, B. M. (2006). Violent women: Findings from the Texas inmates study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(4), 485-502.

Sabin-Farrell, R., & Turpin, G. (2003). Vicarious traumatization: Implications for the mental health of health workers? *Clinical Psychology Review*, 23(3), 449-480.

Shields, S., & Koster, B. (1989). Emotional stereotyping of parents in child rearing manuals, 1915–1980. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 52, 44–55

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis In: J. A. Smith (ed.) *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp53-80). London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage.

Straus, M. A. (2008). Dominance and symmetry in partner violence by male and female university students in 32 nations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(3), 252-275.

Suter, J. M., Byrne, M. K., Bryne, S., Howells, K., & Day, A. (2002). Anger in prisoners: women are different from men. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 32, p1087-1100.

Van der Kolk, B. (2022). Posttraumatic stress disorder and the nature of trauma. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*.

Wattanaporn, K. A., & Holtfreter, K. (2014). The impact of feminist pathways research on gender-responsive policy and practice. *Feminist Criminology*, 9(3), 191-207.

Webster, R. (2022). *Prison And Probation Officers Leaving In Doves*. Accessed on 10th August 2023 from: <https://www.russellwebster.com/prison-and-probation-officers-leaving-in-doves/>.

Widom, C. S. (1989). Child abuse, neglect, and violent criminal behavior. *Criminology*, 27(2), 251-271.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Wright, S. (2015). *'Persistent' and 'prolific' offending across the life-course as experienced by women: chronic recidivism and frustrated desistance*. University of Surrey: Unpublished doctoral thesis.



Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

A research project looking at how women experience and express anger.

I would like to invite you to participate in this Griffins Society supported research project which focuses on how women experience and express anger, particularly those women who have a conviction for a violent offence.

Why am I doing the project?

Whilst a lot is known about male violence and anger, the same cannot be said for female violence and anger which means that often this is misunderstood. This project seeks to try and better understand this and contribute to improving probation training and intervention in working with women.

What will happen if you agree to take part?

- (1) An interview will be arranged at your local probation office or women's centre. This will be an informal interview but will need to be audio recorded.
- (2) I will ask you a number of questions about your experiences of anger and violence which we will then discuss together.
- (3) The interview should last for around 60- 90 minutes and there will be a 10 minute debrief period at the end, if needed, which will not be recorded.
- (4) When I have completed the [study](#) I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.
- (5) You are able to withdraw from the study for up to two weeks after participating. All data will subsequently be destroyed.

How much of your time will participation involve?

One interview lasting no more than 90 minutes.

Will your participation in the project remain confidential?

If you agree to take part, all data collected will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used. This data will be used for the purpose of this project only and I will not have access to any of your case records. The only reason confidentiality may need to be breached would be if concerns were raised in relation safeguarding at which point this would need to be raised outside of the interview process.

What happens now?

If you are interested in taking part in the [study](#) please let your Probation Officer know. We will then arrange a date and time to meet at your local probation office or women's centre at a time convenient for you. If you change your mind about participating in this study in the meantime, please just let your Probation Officer know.

Researcher: Rachel Reed
Griffins Society

Supervisor: Dr Serena Wright
Royal Holloway, University of London

Appendix 2: Consent form

Participant consent form



Study: The experience and expression of anger in women convicted of violence

This study will be conducted by Rachel Reed on behalf of the Griffins Society. This is an organisation which commissions research focussed on women and girls in the criminal justice system with a view to ensuring that their treatment within this is proportionate, fair and just. The research is supervised by Dr Serena Wright who is contactable via e-mail; serena.wright@rhul.ac.uk should you wish to contact her before consenting to participate in this study.

I.....have been made aware of the purpose of this research study and give my consent to be interviewed/take part in a focus group (delete as applicable) which will be audio recorded using a Dictaphone. I also agree that the data gathered from the interview can be used in the final analysis and report of this study. I am aware that I will remain anonymous and that my name will be referred to using a pseudonym in the reporting of results. All information will be stored separately and securely and will be held for a minimum period of 6 years.

You MUST consent to the following statements to enable your participation in this study:

- I agree to my data being used as part of a Griffins Society research project and am aware that my data will be recorded.
- I can confirm that I am over 18 years old.
- I understand that the transcript data will be anonymised.
- I am aware that I may withdraw from the study before, during or up to two weeks after my interview has taken place without providing a reason for doing so and that all data will subsequently be destroyed, including all group data.
- I am aware that if any safeguarding concerns are raised during the interview that action may need to be taken and confidentiality breached.

The following to statements are optional:

- I give permission for my data transcripts to be used in research publications and presentations.
- I give permission for my audio recording to be used in research publications and presentations.

Signed:

Date:

ENDS