

**Inside the Revolving Door: A Study
of the Repeat Short-Term
Imprisonment of Women at HMP
New Hall**

by

Lucy Jayne Carr

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ABSTRACT

This thesis empirically explores the experiences of adult women repeatedly serving custodial sentences of less than twelve months at HMP New Hall, a closed female prison located in West Yorkshire, in the North of England. Despite accounting for only a small proportion of the entire prison population, and largely receiving short-term sentences for minor offences, women offenders have high rates of reoffending and often only a short time after release at a large economic cost. The continued use of short-term imprisonment for non-violent women remains a controversial issue. The thesis 'unlocks' the narratives of twenty women prisoners' experiences of repeated short-term imprisonment through in-depth semi-structured interviews. These interviews were supplemented with periods of participatory observation at HMP New Hall and a series of three focus groups with individuals who work with the short-term prisoner population. The empirical research in this study was developed with a view to understanding the nature and dynamics of prison life for this population of prisoners, previous experiences of release from custody and the problems they faced which led to their re-imprisonment.

Key findings from the research suggest that for many women who are repeatedly imprisoned for less than twelve months, a combination of complex, interlinked issues create barriers for exiting the cycle of repeat imprisonment. The thesis concludes that short-term imprisonment for non-violent women is largely ineffective. Imprisonment used as a last resort for women who fail to respond to community penalties must be able to provide a suitable, gender-specific regime that takes into account the shortness of women's sentences and that can assess, prioritise and address the women's needs in a way that will help them lead useful, law-abiding lives on release.

THESIS CONTENTS

PART ONE – WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF IMPRISONMENT

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING WOMEN IN PRISON AND THE REVOLVING DOOR	2
1.1 INTRODUCTION	2
1.2 REPEAT SHORT TERM IMPRISONMENT	4
1.3 THE GENDER-SPECIFIC NEEDS OF IMPRISONED WOMEN	5
1.4 AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH	10
1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS	13
CHAPTER TWO: THE PAINS (AND GAINS?) OF IMPRISONMENT: DO THEY DIFFER FOR WOMEN?	16
2.1 INTRODUCTION	16
2.2 HISTORICISING THE ‘PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT’	16
2.3 CONTEMPORARY ‘PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT’	22
2.4 THE COLLATORAL EFFECTS OF IMPRISONMENT	24
2.5 FACTORS EXACERBATING THE PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT	25
2.6 HOW DO THESE EXPERIENCES DIFFER FOR WOMEN?	27
2.7 THE GAINS OF IMPRISONMENT?	32
2.8 CONCLUSION	36

PART TWO – THE RESEARCH ‘WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY AND HOW’

CHAPTER THREE: (RE)ENTERING THE PRISON.....	40
3.1 INTRODUCTION	40
3.2 THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT	40
3.3 AIMS	42
3.4 THE PRISON	43
3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	43
3.6 METHODS AND PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT	45
3.6.1 OBSERVATIONS	45
3.6.2 INTERVIEWS WITH PRISONERS	46
3.6.3 INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF	48
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	50
3.7.1 INFORMED, VOLUNTARY CONSENT	50
3.7.2 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY	51
3.7.3 PARTICIPANT WELFARE.....	51
3.8 DATA ANALYSIS.....	52
3.9 ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS AND CO-OPERATION.....	54
3.10 IDENTITY	55
3.11 MANAGING MY IDENTITY: DISPOSING OF SUITS AND UNIFORMS	58
3.11.1 DISPOSING OF SUITS AND UNIFORMS	59
3.11.2 A ‘KEY’ ISSUE.....	60
3.12 SOCIAL IDENTITY	61
3.13 DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS AND POWER DYNAMICS	63

3.14 NEUTRALITY AND SYMPATHY	66
3.15 EMOTIONS	69
3.16 CONCLUSION.....	71

CHAPTER FOUR: ‘THE WOMEN’..... 73

4.1 INTRODUCTION	73
4.2 A POPULATION ANALYSIS OF SHORT-TERM PRISONERS AT HMP NEW HALL.....	74
4.2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	74
4.2.2 AGE.....	75
4.2.3 ETHNIC ORIGIN.....	76
4.2.4 NATIONALITY.....	77
4.2.5 HOME AREA (ON RECEPTION TO PRISON).....	77
4.2.6 RELIGION.....	78
4.2.7 OFFENCE TYPE.....	79
4.2.8 SENTENCE LENGTH.....	80
4.2.9 PREVIOUS IMPRISONMENT.....	81
4.2.10 CHILDREN.....	82
4.2.11 DRUG AND ALCOHOL ISSUES.....	82
4.2.12 A ‘TYPICAL CASE’.....	83
4.3 CASE STUDY	84
4.3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	84
4.3.2 ‘NADIA’.....	84
4.4 SUMMARY.....	92

CHAPTER FIVE: ‘THE REGIME’..... 93

5.1 INTRODUCTION	93
5.2 ADMINISTRATION	93
5.3 A VIEW OF THE PRISON	94
5.4 EARLY DAYS IN CUSTODY	95
5.4.1 RECEPTION	95
5.4.2 FIRST NIGHT	97
5.4.3 INDUCTION	99
5.5 ACCOMMODATION.....	99
5.5.1 ‘HOUSES’.....	99
5.5.2 GENERAL LIVING CONDITIONS AND FACILITIES	102
5.6 INCENTIVES AND EARNED PRIVILEGES (IEP) SCHEME	105
5.7 ROUTINE/ UNLOCK TIMES	106
5.8 DEPARTMENTS	108
5.8.1 LEARNING AND SKILLS	108
5.8.2 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT UNIT (OMU)	112
5.8.3 PSYCHOLOGY AND PROGRAMMES	112
5.8.4 RESETTLEMENT SERVICES/ ‘DROP-IN’ CENTRE	113
5.8.5 LIBRARY	115
5.8.6 PHYSICAL EDUCATION.....	115
5.8.7 CHAPLAINCY	116
5.9 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	116
5.10 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM	117
5.11 COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD	118
5.12 SUMMARY	119

PART THREE – UP AND DOWN; IN AND OUT; BACK AND FORTH: WHY DID THEY COME BACK?

CHAPTER SIX: STRUCTURAL ISSUES.....	122
6.1 INTRODUCTION	122
6.2 ACCOMMODATION: ‘HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE’.....	122
6.3 EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT	148
6.4 FINANCIAL ISSUES	158
6.5 CONCLUSION	163

CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL ISSUES	165
7.1 INTRODUCTION	165
7.2 DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE.....	165
7.3 CHILDREN AND FAMILY	178
7.4 RELATIONSHIPS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE	184
7.5 SEX WORK	189
7.6 MENTAL HEALTH	190
7.7 CONCLUSION	194

CHAPTER EIGHT: SYSTEMIC ISSUES.....	196
8.1 INTRODUCTION	196
8.2 SHORT-TERM SENTENCES: INHERENT PROBLEMS	197
8.3 PRISON PERFORMANCE RATINGS, TARGETS AND ‘PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY’	204
8.4 STAFF ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATION	209
8.5 CONCLUSION.....	213

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION.....	216
9.1 INTRODUCTION	216
9.2 OVERVIEW OF THESIS.....	217
9.3 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FACTORS TO CONSIDER.....	223
9.4 ASSESSING CONTRIBUTION.....	226
9.5 REVIEWNG RECENT POLICY CHANGES	227
9.6 REFLECTING ON RESEARCH AIMS.....	229
9.7 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS	231

REFERENCES	235
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APPENDICES.....	257
APPENDIX 1: PRISONER INFORMATION SHEET	257
APPENDIX 2: STAFF INFORMATION SHEET	258
APPENDIX 3: PRISONER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	259
APPENDIX 4: STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	260
APPENDIX 5: STAFF PARTICANT CONSENT FORM	261

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Table showing the ages of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the twenty participants recruited into the study

Table 4.2: Table showing the ethnic origins of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the twenty participants recruited into the study

Table 4.3: Table showing the home area on reception of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the twenty participants recruited into the study

Table 4.4: Table showing the religions of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the twenty participants recruited into the study

Table 4.5: Table showing the main index offences of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the twenty participants recruited into the study

Table 4.6: Table showing the sentence lengths of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the twenty participants recruited into the study

Table 6.1: Table displaying housing arrangements for the twenty women in the sample

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABH	Actual Bodily Harm
AFC	Action for Children
APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group
BICSc	British Institute of Cleaning Science
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BOSS	Body Orifice Security Scanner
CBP	Cognitive Behavioural Programmes
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CC	Cellular Confinement
CCIS	Care in Custody Integrated Services
CIC	Community Interest Company
CNA	Certified Normal Accommodation
CO	Community Order
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DIP	Drug Intervention Programme
DTO	Detention and Training Order
ETE	Education Training and Employment
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLM	Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation
GOOD	Good Order or Discipline

HDC	Home Detention Curfew
HMCIP	Her Majesty's Chief Inspectorate of Prisons
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMPS	Her Majesty's Prison Service
IDTS	Integrated Drug Treatment System
IEP	Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme
IMB	Independent Monitoring Board
ITES	Introduction to the Training and Employment Service
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KPT	Key Performance Target
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MQPL	Measuring the Quality of Prison Life
NAO	National Audit Office
NFA	No Fixed Abode
NHS	National Health Service
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NTA	National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OMU	Offender Management Unit
ORA	Offender Rehabilitation Act

OSG	Operational Support Grade
PD	Personality Disorder
P-NOMIS	Prison National Offender Management Information System
PPO	Prolific and Priority Offender
PREW	Project Recovery Empowering Women
PRS	Prison Rating System
PSI	Prison Service Instruction
PSO	Prison Service Order
PSQ	Psychosis Screening Questionnaire
RDA	Revolving Doors Agency
ROTL	Release on Temporary Licence
SDP	Short Duration Programme
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SMART	Self Management and Recovery Training
SMT	Senior Management Team
SO	Senior Officer
SPCR	Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction
SSO	Suspended Sentence Order
TSP	Thinking Skills Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VO	Visiting Order
YOI	Young Offender Institution

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

- [] Closed single square brackets indicate transcriber added or altered text for reasons of ensuring clarity or anonymity
- (?) Indicates unintelligible speech or unidentifiable speaker
- [[Indicates overlapping speech
- [[]] Closed double square brackets indicate transcriber added text to indicate actions, body movements, facial expressions and so forth
- LOUD Capital letters indicate loud utterances
- _____ Underlined text indicates emphasised speech

PART ONE

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF IMPRISONMENT

Part one of the thesis provides a foundation for understanding the current situation for female offenders in England and Wales compared to their male counterparts. This is considered in terms of the number of women imprisoned for less than twelve months, their needs, the reoffending rates for this population and contemporary official views, attitudes and strategies for tackling problems associated with this population of offenders. The existing, but limited, literature on the pains of imprisonment is reviewed here; taking into consideration how much of what is known about prisoners in general and their experiences of imprisonment can be applied (or not) to a population of women repeatedly serving short-term sentences in England and Wales. In light of this literature, it is considered whether experiences of imprisonment present only pain and deprivation, or whether there might also be potential gains of imprisonment to be sought for the offender, considering how the circumstances might differ for women repeatedly serving short sentences. By examining relevant previous literature, I have been able to identify the gaps in research to establish how this research study fits into and adds knowledge to what has previously been uncovered.

CHAPTER ONE

Introducing Women in Prison and the ‘Revolving Door’

“NOMS is fully committed to ensuring that women prisoners are held in conditions and within regimes that meet their gender specific needs and which facilitate their successful resettlement.”

House of Common Justice Committee, December 2013

“The reality of the situation is that we can’t do any good with someone serving that short of a sentence... it’s been proven time and time again, all we are doing is causing damage which is why the reoffending rate is so high for this sentence group... I think generally the short-term sentences all they’re doing is damaging people’s lives!”

Prison Officer at HMP New Hall, June 2013

“Something needs doing because every time I’m here it’s the same people in and out, in and out all the time, constant. It’s just the same people. It’s sad really”.

Ali, August 2013

(Aged 29, serving her twenty-seventh short-term prison sentence at New Hall since turning eighteen)

1.1 Introduction

Ministry of Justice statistics showed that of the 90,333 prisoners being received under sentence in England and Wales in the twelve months ending March 2015, 51,686 (57%) were serving six months or less, and a further 6,055 (7%) were serving more than six months but less than twelve months (MoJ, 2015a). Data on women and the criminal justice system indicates that a greater proportion of women receive short sentences than men. For example, in 2013, 77 percent of women given immediate custodial sentences received short sentences (less than twelve months), compared to 63 percent of their male counterparts (MoJ, 2014a). In 2011, 65 percent of women received sentences of up to and including six months, compared to 54 percent of males (MoJ, 2012a). Over the last decade, the proportion of females sentenced to a custodial sentence of less than six months has increased (MoJ, 2014a).

On the whole, the figures indicate that almost two out of every three sentenced prisoners received into custody in England and Wales were serving short-term

sentences. At any one time, these prisoners make up approximately eleven percent of the total prison population (MoJ, 2015a). Data on the population in prison under immediate custody between 2007-11 show 21 percent of the female population are made up of short term prisoners compared to ten percent of sentenced males imprisoned, whilst fifteen percent of women were serving a sentence of six months or less compared to seven percent of males (MoJ, 2012a).

The differences across gender are likely to be attributable to a range of factors including differences in the offence types committed by men and women; on the whole, women commit less serious offences. For example, greater percentages of women were sentenced for theft and handling stolen goods, and fraud and forgery, whilst greater proportions of males were sentenced for sexual offences, burglary and robbery (MoJ, 2014a), signifying clear differences between male and female offending. Data show the most common type of offence committed by short sentenced prisoners (22%) was theft and handling (MoJ, 2014a). For females, the largest offence group for sentenced receptions to custody in the same year was theft and handling, accounting for 40 percent, compared to 21 percent for males (MoJ, 2014b). Female offending differs from men's not only relative to seriousness of offences, but also in terms of the prevalence and regularity of their offending.

Research indicates that prisoners serving short custodial sentences are more likely to have a substantial criminal history than those serving the longest sentences. Forty-one percent of those serving less than twelve month custodial sentences in June 2009 had fifteen or more previous convictions or cautions, compared to 24 percent of those serving four years or more (MoJ, 2010a). Until 2015, those sentenced to less than twelve months were released unconditionally at the halfway point of their sentence term, and in some cases, could be released earlier under the home detention curfew (HDC) scheme which enables early release on an electronic tag for prisoners meeting certain eligibility criteria (HM Prison Service, 2013a). Consequently this makes the task of addressing offender risks and needs more challenging for criminal justice staff due to the offender's time in custody being so brief. Prisoners sentenced to less than twelve months in custody are less likely than other prisoners to undertake any programmes or receive substantive services or preparation for release. This inevitably exacerbated the 'revolving doors' pattern whereby high numbers of offenders are reoffending and returning to custody only a short time after release.

Therefore, this thesis examines the realities of how women experience repeat short-term imprisonment, and what problems they experience prior to re-imprisonment, taking on board not only the views of female prisoners, but also those who work with these women in helping prevent their re-imprisonment.

1.2 Repeat Short-term Imprisonment

‘Reoffending of Adults in England and Wales’ (MoJ, 2010b) shows that from a cohort of 4,021 women released in 2007 from closed prisons in England and Wales after serving short-term custodial sentences, 66.5 percent were reconvicted within one year of release. In comparison, only 22.7 percent of those serving over twelve month sentences were reconvicted within one year of release at the same establishments, with New Hall prison producing the highest one year reconviction rate for short-term prisoners discharged of all English and Welsh prisons (male and female), at 76.6 percent (MoJ, 2010b).

The ‘2013 Compendium of Reoffending Statistics and Analysis’ published by the Ministry of Justice (2013a) provides a comparison of the reconviction rates of adult offenders (by gender) given short-term custodial sentences with those given alternative sentences, including community orders (COs) and suspended sentence orders (SSOs). They indicate that prisoners released after having received an immediate custodial sentence of less than twelve months are reconvicted at a higher rate than offenders given COs and SSOs, as well as those given longer custodial sentences (more than twelve months). In terms of gender, a higher percentage of female short-term prisoners in the sample were re-imprisoned within one year, compared to their male equivalents.

According to the National Audit Office (2010), in 2007-08, reoffending by all recent ex-prisoners cost the economy between £9.5 and £13 billion, whilst as much as three-quarters of this cost (some £7- £10 billion a year) was attributed to former short-sentenced prisoners. The cost of looking after short-term prisoners in 2008-09 (excluding education and healthcare), was £286 million (NAO, 2010). The economic cost of imprisonment is especially excessive for women due to their more extensive and complex social problems with the average annual cost of a woman’s place for 2009-10 being £56,415. This cost increases considerably if the woman’s

imprisonment results in children being placed in local authority care. It has been estimated that imprisoning mothers for non-violent offences carries a cost to children and the state of more than £17 million over a ten year period (New Economics Foundation, 2008). However, for short-term imprisoned females, only a small proportion of the money is actually spent on their resettlement needs. The data suggest that despite the large financial expense to the economy, short sentences are largely ineffective and these findings have generated criticisms of the effectiveness and meaningfulness of short-term sentences. The House of Commons Justice Committee (2008:37) stated: “We are disappointed at the Government’s apparent acceptance of the use of short custodial sentences for repeat offenders. There is no evidence that a short prison term will tackle recidivism.”

1.3 The gender-specific needs of imprisoned women

There were 3,919 female prisoners in England and Wales on 11th September 2015, accounting for 4.6 percent of the entire prison population (MoJ, 2015b). The past two decades have seen a significant rise in the numbers of women in prison, though this figure has steadily decreased over the past decade. In 1995, the mid-year female prison population stood at 1,979 (Prison Reform Trust, 2012). By 2000, this figure stood at 3,355, and a further five years on saw 4,596 women imprisoned (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2005). While the overall prison population rose by 66 percent in the ten year period between 1993 and 2003, there was a marked increase in the female population of 191 percent over this period (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2005), rising around three times faster than the population of males in custody (MoJ, 2014a).

Research has indicated that this increase was not a result of an escalation in either the number of females offending, or the seriousness of their offences (Gelsthorpe, 2006). Gelsthorpe and Morris (2002) reported that while the number of women being imprisoned had risen, the actual offences committed by women had remained relatively stable and the increase in the number of women receiving custodial sentences pointed to sentencers’ lack of awareness about the availability of non-custodial penalties and their effectiveness. Earlier research also found that magistrates did not impose fines on women because they were reluctant to penalise

them financially, while not fining women on their first court appearance risks more severe penalties being imposed in the event of subsequent convictions (Hedderman and Gelsthorpe, 1997). Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey (2008:34) emphasised that “a woman convicted of theft or handling at the crown court is now twice as likely to go to prison as she was in 1991”. Evidently, research indicated that the increasing figures were a result of the changes in the response to women, rather than a change in women’s behaviour. Since then, over the last ten years, while the number of male prisoners continued to increase, the female prison population reduced somewhat. Despite the reduction of the number of imprisoned women, the proportion of the female prisoners serving short sentences, especially those sentenced to less than six months, has increased (MoJ, 2014a).

Irrespective of the shifts in the prison population, the large disparity between the number of imprisoned males and females has been consistent. Since female prisoners as a group comprise such a small percentage of the prison population, it is argued that women are put through a system designed for men which overlooks female offenders’ distinctive needs. As Corston (2007:2) highlighted, “women have been marginalised within a system largely designed by men for men for far too long”. In many cases it has been falsely supposed that in order to meet the criminogenic needs of women, provisions can be adapted from those already available for men. There is much evidence to contest this. While some modifications have been introduced sporadically, they have tended to be based on male-focused research and practice while the applicability to female prisoners remains questionable. Heidensohn (2000:172) argued that even within institutions for women with supposed ‘distinctive’ programmes, they are often “premised on gender stereotypes which do not meet their needs”. Research has revealed the distressing nature of imprisonment for women finding they were generally less likely to receive constructive and preventative interventions such as education, training or preparation for employment, and were instead more likely to spend time on domestic duties (Heidensohn, 2002). It is said that as women largely experience the same prison system as men, they are particularly affected by their experiences of these inappropriate conditions and services which results in additional punishment and further limits their prospects of desistance. According to Hedderman *et al.* (2011:16) there remains a “relative lack of evidence about women’s offending-related needs”. This lack of research on the

needs and experiences of female offenders has clear implications for prison regimes which deal with women in terms of which effective interventions and methods should be made use of with women so as to address the factors associated with their offending behaviour effectively. As such, this distinct but under-researched group of offenders in the prison population clearly warrant further exploration.

In 2005, Baroness Corston was commissioned by the Labour Government to carry out a 'Review of Women in the Criminal Justice System with Particular Vulnerabilities'. This independent review was undertaken in March 2006. Twelve months later Corston (2007:i) made the following statement in her report:

"I was dismayed to see so many women frequently sentenced for short periods of time for very minor offences, causing chaos and disruption to their lives and families, without any realistic chance of addressing the causes of their criminality."

Five years on, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Women in the Penal System, chaired by Corston, reported on the developments in England and Wales since the publication of the 2007 report which had outlined the need for a distinct radically different approach to dealing with female offenders. The 2011 report commended the positive developments since made, giving praise to the dedicated effort of those who work with female offenders, but claimed that despite such advances, women's prisons remained unsuitable, and thus damaging, for much of their population. The report highlighted the continuing high number of women imprisoned for minor offences and the high rates of self-harm incidents reported in female establishments, maintaining that "the scale of the problem we face remains significant" (APPG, 2011:9).

Repeatedly it is said that the use of short-term imprisonment as punishment for these non-violent offenders is ineffective. For example, the Howard League for Penal Reform (2005:24) argued:

"Prison custody for women should be virtually abolished so that only those women who are convicted of serious and violent offences and who represent a continuing danger to the public should be held in custody. For other women offenders community-based interventions that make amends for the wrong done and encourage women to change their lives offer the best chance of creating a safer society."

Clinks added in their memorandum ordered by the House of Commons Justice Committee, that: "These short sentences achieve a disruption in housing, employment and family ties, exposing offenders to the damaging impact of prison life without any benefits in terms of addressing the issues that led to the offending" (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2008:36). Furthermore, female prisoners are often imprisoned great distances from their children and families due to the uneven geographical spread of female establishments in England and no women's prisons in Wales, making it problematic for women in custody to maintain close relationships. The geographical disparity generates great difficulties for the families of female prisoners to visit establishments due to the cost implications for making long distance journeys, the rural locations of women's prisons and lack of access to sites via public transportation (Prison Reform Trust, 2014a). The Prison Reform Trust (2014a:37) report "the average distance adult women in prison are held from their home or committal court address is 60 miles" (Women in Prison, 2013). This often leaves the women without visitation from their children and support networks resulting in isolation (HM Prison Service, 2008), despite evidence showing establishing strong community links, reduces the likelihood of women reoffending (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; May *et al.*, 2008).

It is known that female prisoners in England and Wales commonly have significant social and personal issues and that whilst women do commit criminal offences, many have histories of abuse, social exclusion and are victims of an imbalanced society (Corston, 2007). As Hudson (2002:39) highlights: "women offenders can be constructed as victims of biology, of poverty, of abuse and addictions, and more than anything else, of men." Corston (2007:17) stated that "[w]omen with histories of violence and abuse are over represented in the criminal justice system." Women in prison are highly likely to be victims as well as offenders with a vast amount of evidence indicating that between 50 percent and 80 percent have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse (Hooper, 2003; Rungay, 2004; Corston, 2007; Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009), with the Ministry of Justice (2012b) reporting more than half (53%) of imprisoned women have been victims of such abuse during childhood. Evidence also suggests that around 31 percent of women prisoners spent time in care as a child, compared with 24 percent of men (MoJ, 2012b). There is a strong basis for acknowledging female offenders' histories of abuse and suffering,

and considering the ways in which these experiences are linked to their offending behaviour and acknowledged that these forms of victimisation “play a part in the onset and persistence of offending” (Gelsthorpe *et al.*, 2007:2). Recognition of these contributory factors does not mean absolving the offender from all responsibility “or mean that there is direct causal link between victimisation and criminality” (Corston, 2007:17), but it does support the argument for a reform that considers the need for a unique approach to dealing with their criminality. Many argue for the increased support for women whose experiences of abuse are contributory to their offending behaviour. Thus, attaining practical support to address the damaging psychological effects of abuse are essential in minimising female offenders’ likelihood of reoffending. Aid might be offered in the form of assisting them in developing alternative coping strategies and therapeutic interventions to help deal with trauma and assisting their engagement with wider support networks upon release.

Similarly, the importance of substance misuse treatment is considered vital in helping women whose offending behaviour is likely linked to the use of drugs and alcohol (Hale, 2005). Gelsthorpe *et al.* (2007) suggested that female prisoners with histories of sexual victimisation and abuse are often linked with substance misuse; often utilised as a coping mechanism. The Ministry of Justice (2013b) reported levels of drug use to be exceptionally high amongst the most prolific offenders with over half of prisoners (55%) reporting their drug use being linked to their offending; the need to financially fund their drug supply was the most commonly cited explanation. However, practitioners report that women may hide or underplay substance misuse through fear of being separated from their children and further punishment making effective treatment all the harder. Additionally, almost half (48%) of female prisoners in the Ministry of Justice (2013b) study, reported committing offences to support another individual’s drug using habits, compared to 22 percent of imprisoned men.

The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) evidenced a strong connection between substance misuse and mental health issues. It reported that three-quarters of sentenced women in their research with drug misuse issues had at least one mental disorder. On the whole, mental health issues are proportionately higher amongst the female prison population. The Ministry of Justice (2013b) reported 49 percent of women prisoners in their study were assessed as suffering from anxiety and depression compared to 23

percent of male prisoners. This can be compared with sixteen percent of the general UK population; with twelve percent of the general male population and nineteen percent of women. Prisons are simply not able to provide adequate mental health treatment services to accommodate such high numbers of patients. For a long time it has been recognised that a large number of women with mental health issues are failing to be diverted to community-based mental healthcare and are ending up in custody (Corston, 2007), despite attempts to develop more appropriate mental health provision in the community to encourage their diversion (such as The Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP); Home Office, 2004a).

According to the Ministry of Justice (2013c), despite representing such a small proportion of the prison population, women accounted for over a quarter (25.8%) of self-harm incidents. The rate of self-harm incidents amongst women was 1,549 incidents per 1000 women, compared to 201 incidents per 1000 men. These high rates of self-harm demonstrate the emotional distress many imprisoned women experience and arguably support Corston's (2007) recommendation to deal with self-harming, non-violent, low-level female offenders more effectively in a less punitive environment. Although the Government maintains that short-term custodial sentences are being used only as a 'last resort' for persistent offenders that fail to respond to community punishments, evidence suggests that courts have been imposing more severe sentences on women for less serious offences. The instability concerned with short-term imprisonment is known to often exacerbate any pre-existing issues, having profound and far-reaching impacts on the women and their families. As such it is argued that the majority of females serving short-term custodial sentences should not be imprisoned but instead dealt with in the community, at a much lower financial, psychological and emotional cost.

1.4 An alternative approach

The Ministry of Justice (2010c:6) recognised that there is "growing evidence that properly enforced community sentences which combine punishment, payback and rehabilitation can be an effective response [to reducing reoffending]". The apparent development of community-based resources arguably works by offering the courts a more effective alternative to prison; largely reducing the use of custody for women.

The House of Commons Justice Committee (2013:88), following an inquiry into female offenders, concluded that “prison is an expensive and ineffective way of dealing with many women offenders who do not pose a significant risk of harm to public safety” and called for “a significant increase in residential alternatives to custody as well as the maintenance of the network of women’s centres” seen as “more effective, and cheaper... than short custodial sentences”. Corston (2011:4) argued that the development of one-stop shop women’s centres provides courts with “strengthened community sentences as an alternative to custody”. As Hedderman and Gunby (2013:426) point out “in the longer term, this makes good economic sense because so little of the money spent on short sentence women prisoners goes on their resettlement needs”. Evaluations of community-based projects, such as ‘Together Women’ (Jolliffe *et al.*, 2011; Hedderman *et al.*, 2011), and other similar schemes (e.g. Gelsthorpe *et al.*, 2007; Loucks *et al.*, 2006) indicate that such approaches are effective in helping women desist from offending. The All Party Parliamentary Group (2011:4) highlighted that the investment and development in the provision of additional services for women offenders offering holistic support, such as one-stop shop women’s centres, were intended to “better meet the needs of women” and therefore “provides the courts with strengthened community sentences as an alternative to custody.” However, despite a general consensus for an alternative approach, there has been little progress in achieving this.

In response to the stubbornly high reoffending rates, the Coalition Government introduced the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ programme in 2013 which outlined an alternative approach to managing offenders in England and Wales (MoJ, 2013d, 2013e). The reform affects short-term female prisoners in a number of ways. Most significantly, at the time the present research was carried out, prisoners serving short-term custodial sentences – unlike those serving sentences of twelve months or more – were not subject to any statutory supervision upon release. At the heart of the reforms, new legislation under the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014 made provisions for the extension of supervision to all offenders released from custody, including short-term (male and female) prisoners. These changes took effect from 1st February 2015 (after the completion of data collection in this study) meaning anyone sentenced after this date would receive a minimum of twelve months community supervision. Alongside the new provisions of the ORA, the reform involved

outsourcing a large part of the probation service with private and voluntary organisations running Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and taking responsibility for supervising medium to low risk offenders. As a result, the CRCs now hold responsibility for supervising short-sentence prisoners encompassing through-the-gate support starting twelve weeks prior to release. This is likely to particularly affect women, as they are proportionally more likely to serve sentences of less than twelve months.

New payment incentives were also introduced for service providers, with the level of payment being contingent on the reduction of offending they achieve; a scheme referred to as ‘payment by results’ (MoJ, 2010c). This payment model received much criticism and concern that contracted providers will not meet the specific needs of female service users. The House of Commons Justice Committee (2013) shared concerns that because women present relatively high levels of need, they require more intensive and costly intervention which they feared would go unrecognised by potential service providers. Written evidence submitted by the Avon and Somerset Probation Trust (ordered by the House of Commons Justice Committee, 2013:51) warned that “unless a separate framework of outcomes is identified, there is a real danger that a perverse incentive to avoid working with women offenders could develop across the market of probation service providers who will want to avoid the differential “reoffending risk” which women can present, particularly in light of the fact that women’s provision can be more costly to develop and deliver.” The House of Commons Justice Committee (2013:4) predicted the impact of the proposed reforms prior to their implementation, arguing that they “have clearly been designed with male offenders in mind”, despite the Ministry of Justice (2013d:17) having asserted: “We want these reforms to be effective for all offenders. We will ensure that the specific needs and priorities relevant to female offenders are recognised and addressed within our overall payment by results approach”. The value of these recent changes and their effectiveness in reducing the markedly high reoffending rates previously reported for the population of adult female short-term prisoners remains to be seen. These developments are discussed further in relation to the findings from this research in chapter nine.

1.5 Overview of chapters

This thesis is comprised of nine individual chapters, forming four parts. Part one of the thesis includes the first two chapters. The next chapter, chapter two, discusses and critically evaluates the established literature pertaining to the ‘pains of imprisonment’ to provide a context for my own arguments and potential contribution. Since much of the existing literature is concerned with the experiences of adult male prisoners and typically those convicted of more serious offences, chapter two will consider the relevance of previously identified pains and deprivations, to modern day female short-term prisoners. It will argue that there is a distinct set of pains and deprivations experienced by imprisoned women, who present life histories and experiences much different to those reported in research on males. Chapter two will also consider the potential benefits, or ‘gains’ that can be sought from imprisonment for the short-term female prison population.

Part two of the thesis is comprised of chapters three, four and five which collectively provide an overview of the research, providing details of who, what, when, where, how and why this research was designed and carried out this way. Chapter three provides a detailed discussion of the research methods utilised to gather data, which were principally, in-depth semi-structured interviews with female prisoners, participant observations and focus groups with prison staff. Chapter three describes how the research was conducted, how the participants were recruited, and the data analysed. Practical issues such as access and ethical challenges encountered are also presented here. The chapter also provides a reflective account of the rewards and challenges of conducting empirical research in a prison environment.

To contextualise the empirical analysis, chapters four and five provide an overview of the women studied and of the prison where the research was conducted. Chapter four is presented in two parts. Part one presents the statistical composition of the entire population of short-term prisoners at the prison (captured as a snap-shot) and the study sample of twenty women repeatedly imprisoned for short-term sentences. Part two of chapter four presents a narrative case-study of one of the twenty women in the sample. Chapter five presents an overview of the research site and its regime. A detailed overview of the prison environment, services and processes provides

context for understanding the women's accounts of how they experience daily life in prison, presented over the next three chapters.

Chapters six to eight build part three of the thesis and present data gathered from the fieldwork and outline the analytical themes that emerged from the analysis. Chapter six explores the women's issues with accommodation; unemployment and lack of education; and finance, benefits and debt. This chapter engages with the problem of repeat imprisonment and contributory factors to their offending behaviour. It will argue that short-term imprisonment exacerbates these issues, causing barriers to successful rehabilitation, leaving women trapped in the 'revolving door'. Chapter seven is the second of the empirical chapters and analyses the set of key themes categorised here as 'personal issues'. This includes an exploration into the women's drug and alcohol using habits, children and family, relationships and histories of abuse, prostitution and mental health issues. Chapter seven explores how the prison dealt with short-term repeatedly imprisoned women who display a need for clinical and psychological treatment, in addition to the structural issues discussed in chapter six.

Besides the issues women present on entering prison, it is argued in chapter eight that the prison system, largely designed for male prisoners who are typically higher risk and in custody for longer, is not suitably equipped to deal with the needs of these short-term repeat female prisoners. The restriction of time creates obvious barriers and therefore chapter eight will argue against the use of short-term imprisonment for non-violent women due to their proved ineffectiveness. Chapter eight also evaluates whether the limited time these short-term prisoners spend in custody is used as productively as possible. The prison regime is dictated by prison performance targets that were not designed with short-term female prisoners in mind. These systemic issues are discussed in chapter eight, as well as considering whether the attitudes of staff whose firm thinking that nothing effective can be achieved with this population of the prison, creates further barriers for short-termers to access the regime provision that they need.

Part four encompasses the final chapter, chapter nine, which provides an overall discussion of the research findings. It concludes the thesis by summarising the key arguments and assesses its contribution, making a case for a change in the way non-

violent female offenders are dealt with by the criminal justice system. Chapter nine also presents the potential limitations of the research, makes suggestions for future research, and considers the impact of recent policy developments, before finally offering concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER TWO

The Pains (and Gains?) of Imprisonment: Do they differ for Women?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature pertaining to the pains experienced as an outcome of imprisonment with a particular focus on the experience of female prisoners repeatedly serving short-term sentences. The purpose of this chapter is to identify and analyse the key themes within the literature. No two prisons are the same; they vary in terms of their location, culture, regime and population, amongst other things. These factors will indeed impact the offender's experience of imprisonment. Nonetheless, exploring the rich history of prison experiences makes it possible to draw some general conclusions about the nature of prison life. In order to fully understand the extent to which the conditions and treatment of women in prison may differ from male experiences, it is important to evaluate the established literature regarding the experience of prison in general. In doing so, this chapter provides a conceptual framework for the empirical chapters that follow. Therefore, previous studies which identify the forms of deprivations experienced by prisoners will be explored. The chapter will also consider the relevance of previously identified pains and deprivations to modern day prisoners serving various types and length of sentences. The chapter will then proceed to explore the collateral consequences of imprisonment, before offering a comparison between male and female experiences of imprisonment. Finally, the chapter will consider the benefits, or 'gains' that can be sought from imprisonment for the female prisoner.

2.2 Historicising the 'pains of imprisonment'

Unsurprisingly, sociologists have shown a great deal of interest in prisons. Prisons provide an ideal research environment for sociologists to explore "many of the discipline's primary concerns: power, inequality, order, conflict and socialisation" (Crewe, 2007:123). Research into the unique social world of those imprisoned began to emerge in the 1940s; researchers previously having had restricted or no sufficient communication with the confined. Studies of imprisonment initially emerged using participant observation, predominantly from correctional staff who made

observations whilst working in prisons. For example, Donald Clemmer, an American sociologist working with mental health patients at Menard maximum-security prison in Southern Illinois, began studying prison culture which led to the publication of the classic text 'The Prison Community' in 1940. Clemmer's work explored 'the prisoner society' and the effects of imprisonment. From this, Clemmer introduced the concept of 'prisonisation', the socialisation process of prisoners, which he defined as "the taking on in greater or lesser degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (1940:8). He claimed that prisoners undergo certain experiences that make them part of the prison community and that a prisoner's behaviour becomes more antisocial the longer they are exposed to this subculture. However, as this work focused on the transition period from outside life to the prison community, it failed to address the impact of 'prisonisation' upon release.

Clemmer's research on 'prisonisation' also neglected the origins of prisoner culture. However, this omission left an opening for the work of Gresham M. Sykes, an American criminologist, who claimed that the subculture develops to help prisoners cope with the deprivations of imprisonment. Sykes' landmark sociological study of prison environments, 'The Society of Captives' published in 1958, involved participant observation and prisoner interviews over a period of three years at a maximum security male prison in Trenton, United States. Sykes introduced the term 'pains of imprisonment' to depict the different types of suffering he identified being experienced by prisoners. Sykes organised these types of suffering under five main forms of deprivation:

- i. the deprivation of liberty

Sykes (1958:65) stated: "Of all the painful conditions imposed on the prisoners of the New Jersey State Prison, none is more immediately obvious than the loss of liberty". This goes beyond the obvious aspect of being confined to a secure institution, to include: rejection by the community and a loss of citizenship; separation from family and friends (although visitation and mail may - but not always¹ - partially relieve some isolation and anxiety); and degradation, such as the anonymity of a uniform and a number rather than a name, shaven head, insistence of

¹ Richards and Jones (2004:214) state that many of their participants "reported considerable anxiety about the visits they did receive".

gestures of respect and subordination when addressing officials and so on. Sykes proposed that prisoners ultimately adapted to this psychological pain by rejecting their rejecters.

ii. the deprivation of goods and services

This includes things such as being deprived of luxuries, loss of choice about their material possessions and standard of living. Although restricted, prisoners' basic material needs are met in a sense that they are given food, warmth, shelter, clothes, wash facilities, adequate medical care, opportunity for exercise and so forth. Sykes (1958:69) points out that material possessions are such an important part of someone's identity in modern Western culture that, "to be stripped of them is to be attacked at the deepest layers of personality."

iii. the deprivation of heterosexual relationships

Prisoners are subjected to involuntary celibacy and therefore may suffer the frustration of sexual desire. Sykes (1958) argued this is much more than a physical problem, and in fact the psychological problems it causes can be much more serious. A society composed exclusively of men tends to generate anxieties in its members concerning their masculinities. Sykes (2007:422) stated: "there are few prisoners who can escape the fact that an essential component of a man's self conception - his status of male - is called into question".

iv. the deprivation of autonomy

The prisoners are subjected to "a vast body of rules and commands which are designed to control [their] behaviour in minute detail" (Sykes, 1958:73). This deprivation refers to the all-encompassing regulations and precludes individual decision making about even the most basic and mundane daily functions (e.g. eating, sleeping, showering, and interacting). The loss of autonomy, or the loss of self-determination, impairs prisoners' self-worth by treating them as helpless, dependent children and, in this way, humiliating them.

v. the deprivation of security

The loss of security comes with having to live with other unpredictable prisoners, and therefore having prisoners' physical safety put at risk. This enforced association can cause fear and anxiety. As Sykes (1958:77) points out:

“While it is true that every prisoner does not live in the constant fear of being robbed or beaten, the constant companionship of thieves, rapists, murderers... is far from reassuring”

Following Sykes, the pains and deprivations experienced by prisoners were explored in a number of other classic twentieth-century prison studies in the sociological tradition which build on Clemmer’s thesis.

In the United Kingdom, Russell Barton (1959), a consultant psychiatrist at a large hospital near London, looked at the damaging effects of institutionalisation on individuals, particularly their proneness to mental health problems. Barton brought together several studies including Abraham Myerson’s (1939) work in which he used the term ‘prison stupor’ to describe the psychological retreat of institutionalised mental health patients in the United States. Barton also reviewed Bruno Bettelheim and Emmy Sylvester’s (1948) work on ‘psychological institutionalism’, which looked at psychological treatment of emotionally disturbed children in institutional settings in the United States. Barton’s work showed detrimental effects of institutionalisation under the heading ‘institutionalised neurosis’. His work highlighted the deficits developed by individuals institutionalised, not only in hospitals, but also prisons or other remote institutions caused by: loss of contact with the outside world, enforced idleness and loss of responsibility, the authoritarian attitudes of staff, loss of personal possessions and friends, and so on.

Erving Goffman’s (1961) landmark text ‘Asylums’, has had a significant impact on prison studies. Goffman used the term ‘total institution’ to describe places that are cut off from society for a considerable length of time which results in subjecting the residents to an enclosed, regimented life. Goffman highlighted the trauma that many prisoners experience on entry to closed institutions, although his definition included not only prisons, but also mental hospitals, convents, boarding schools and so on. Clemmer (1940) had previously claimed that prisoners are viewed by correctional staff to be without distinction and are obligated to adopt this inferior role. Clemmer claimed that this indistinct, low-level position is reinforced by the removal of their personal identity. Corresponding with Sykes’ description of prisoners’ ‘deprivation of liberty’, Goffman highlighted practices that contributed to the breakdown of prisoners’ prior identities and affiliations, including: the shaving of hair, referral by prison number in place of names, use of standard-issue uniforms, and removal of

personal possessions. Goffman (1961) later referred to this formal procedure as the ‘stripping and notification’ process. He described the process as a practical and necessary feature of any ‘total institution’ responsible for supervising large numbers of individuals. He believed the prison’s level of self-governance was a crucial element in a total institution’s objective to reconstruct its inhabitants. He argued that prisons rebuild and rehabilitate their prisoners by restricting their autonomy at the same time as enforcing new rules and boundaries, which force the adjustment of their behaviour and identity.

Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958), and Goffman (1961) all shared the view that the resources for adjustment come from within the institution. They collectively viewed prisoners as being stripped of their pre-prison social identities, and overlooked how their cultural orientations influenced their behaviour in prison. Irwin and Cressey (1962) presented a critique of this perspective, highlighting the overlooked personal characteristics and behaviour that offenders bring into prisons from the free community, referred to as the ‘importation model’. They argued that upon entering an institution, the prison is “not wholly overwhelmed or over-written by the new world they enter” (Crewe, 2007:128). Instead, the pains of imprisonment are dealt with through “attitudes, cultures, networks and ideologies formed outside the institution, prior to imprisonment” (Crewe, 2009:150). In other words, prisoners’ behaviour and existing identities are adapted in ways that help them survive the pains they experience during imprisonment.

According to Sykes (1958) the pains of imprisonment are the primary influence on an individual’s responses to imprisonment. Clemmer (1940) argued that one way for prisoners to overcome these pains, is to form a united defence against the harshness of prison life. Social solidarity between prisoners develops and creates ‘codes’ that prisoners adhere to. Sykes and Messinger (1960:8) subsequently summarised this ‘inmate code’ that helps prisoners alleviate the pains and deprivations of imprisonment via five crucial rules: (1) never rat on a con, (2) play it cool and do your own time, (3) don’t exploit or steal from other prisoners, (4) don’t show weakness – be tough, be a man, and (5) be sharp – don’t ever side with prison officers and authorities. It is in such displays of autonomy, tolerated by prison authorities, that prisoners develop ways of surviving imprisonment. Crewe (2007:126) described this positive shared identity by stating:

“if [prisoners] were loyal and respectful towards each other, if they shared their goods, caused no unnecessary frictions, kept promises, showed courage and fortitude, and remained staunchly oppositional to the prison administrator, they could collectively deflect the moral censure of lawful society and mitigate many of the practical and psychological problems of incarceration.”

Norwegian penologist Thomas Mathiesen offered an alternative view in his 1965 publication ‘The Defences of the Weak’. Mathiesen carried out observational work in a Norwegian correctional facility and found little evidence of the prisoner hierarchy, social cohesion or solidarity amongst prisoners that Sykes had previously observed, and which Crewe (2007:129) claims is a reflection of “Norway’s relatively undeveloped criminal culture”. Instead, Mathiesen described a disrupted prisoner society after observing a prison environment housing weak and vulnerable prisoners who appeared dependant on staff.

John Irwin’s publication of ‘The Felon’ in 1970 explored the ‘career’ of the criminal. His research was based on two years of participant observation followed by in-depth interviews of males imprisoned in California. The study looked at prisoner identities and prison experiences, focusing on: entry to prison, in-prison social systems, and the in-prison constructs of the ‘outside world’. Resembling earlier reported research findings, Irwin saw a prisoner’s status before imprisonment as affecting their position within the prison. Irwin also explored prisoners’ re-entry to the community and parole systems, but failed to look at re-entry for those who receive no state supervision upon release. Irwin’s focus, corresponding to Clemmer’s (1940) previous position, was on the individuals who were exposed to prison culture for the longest periods, since they became most accustomed to prison life. Similarly in the UK, Cohen and Taylor (1972) focused their study on life sentenced prisoners. They looked at the psychological deterioration of life imprisoned men at Durham prison. They interpreted the prisoners’ behaviour as strategies for coping with, or ‘surviving’, the pains of long-term imprisonment.

James Jacobs’ ‘Stateville’ (1977) bears little resemblance to these previous accounts of prison culture. Jacobs’ research which was carried out in Stateville prison, North Illinois, approximately 40 miles from Chicago City, focused on several large Chicago-based street gangs operating within the institution. Jacobs’ observations contradicted Sykes’ description of a united prisoner code. Instead, he argued that the

prisoner society was “fragmented into mutually antagonistic, ethically defined gangs, with codes of loyalty that stretched beyond in-group members” (Crewe, 2007:129). In support of Irwin and Cressey’s (1962) ‘importation model’, Jacobs reported that the Chicago street gang’s members transplanted their gang values and leadership hierarchies into the establishment. Goffman’s (1961) theory of ‘stripping and notification’, discussed earlier, was also observed by Jacobs (1977:399), who describes this not as an indication of pain for the gang members, but instead, a ‘homecoming ceremony.’ He claimed that gang members would be welcomed upon entry to the prison by their street affiliates. Therefore, in this instance, identities established in the free community were reinforced by the social structure of the institution. It was the gang culture that alleviated its members from the pains of imprisonment “by providing collective identity and both social and economic support” (Crewe, 2007:129).

2.3 Contemporary pains of imprisonment

Sykes’ (1958) work appears unchallenged and unchanged over the last fifty years despite having been focused only on adult male prisoners in an American maximum-security facility, as noted by Liebling and Maruna (2005). In presenting his analysis of the pains of imprisonment, Sykes assumed that it was the psychological rather than the physical pains of imprisonment which routinely characterised prison life. However, in the decades that followed Sykes’ account, prison life in England and Wales was “generally squalid, brutal and degrading” (Crewe, 2011:509), and the prevalence of this abuse, neglect and humiliation has been documented in several studies (such as, King and McDermott, 1995; Crewe, 2011). Since these accounts of prison life were produced, penal policy has softened in terms of the levels of physical, intentional abuse, yet there have been few developments on the pains of imprisonment in contemporary correctional facilities. However, Ben Crewe’s observational work at HMP Wellingborough, a category-C male prison, which focuses on modern penal practices, has challenged aspects of Sykes’ work. Crewe recognises that the pains of imprisonment have been a longstanding concern and revisits the topic identifying a new set of burdens which he claims “differ from other pains in their causes, nature and effects” (2011:1). This is not to say that the pains identified in earlier times have disappeared. Crewe (2011) argued that “the

reconfiguration of penal power in prisons in England and Wales has added an additional layer of frustrations”. Crewe (2011) explores the following pains he claims are consequences of systemic policies and institutional practices:

i. the pains of uncertainty and indeterminacy

In more recent years, a more discretionary style of governance has emerged (for example, the use of parole boards). Crewe (2011) talks of prisoners in his research reporting stress and anxiety caused by uncertainty about the future since it is made especially difficult to make plans. This is particularly the case for indeterminate prisoners who describe their sentence as the equivalent of being on remand (a time associated with high levels of suicide and self-harm (Addicott, 2011)). Crewe describes these sentences as lacking solidarity and predictability, with the route-map to freedom being by no means clear.

ii. the pains of psychological assessment

Psychological assessment is considered an important part of a prisoner’s future, especially those serving indeterminate sentences. Offender assessment involves much categorising which leads to the deprivation of control over personal definitions and highlights to prisoners their lack of individuality. This relates back to Goffman’s (1961) account of the way total institutions attack personal identities. Being set into a risk category exacerbates prisoners’ feelings of de-humanisation and loss of control, and gives the impression that changing is nearly impossible (Zedner, 2007).

iii. the pains of self-governance

Crewe (2011) argued that the prisoner is now given greater autonomy than described previously by Sykes. Nonetheless, although they are given more responsibility for making decisions about their own behaviour they risk the consequences of ‘irresponsible’ behaviour. Crewe claims that when behaviour was patrolled by staff, “the main onus on the prisoner was to stay out of trouble” but now “there is less freedom to be left alone and move through the system passively, yet there is also less insistence on pure obedience” (2011:519). In other words, they are no longer told how to behave in a specific way, but equally are not left to serve their sentence how they please.

Crewe (2007) depicts the modern pains of imprisonment as being predominantly psychological as opposed to physically painful. As Crewe (2007:449) stated:

“[a]lthough these pains seem unlikely to have very long-term psychological consequences of brutalization, in the moment they feel no less frustrating”.

2.4 The collateral effects of imprisonment

The series of deprivations presented by Sykes (1958) and Crewe (2007, 2009, 2011) highlight the psychological harm suffered by prisoners and generally portray an image of institutions as dangerous and damaging. Many scholars believe the pains of imprisonment to be so severe that offenders leave custody in a worse state than when they entered (Clear, 2009; Vieraitis *et al.*, 2007). The effects of imprisonment have also been expressed by various official sources in England and Wales, including a report of the Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders on Preventive Detention (Home Office, 1963) which sought to abolish the use of preventative detention. More recently, the British Home Office argued in the 1991 White Paper, *Custody, Care and Justice*, following the Woolf report:

“[Prison] breaks up families. It is hard for prisons to retain or subsequently to secure law-abiding jobs. Imprisonment can lessen people’s sense of responsibility for their actions and reduce their self-respect, both of which are fundamental to law abiding citizenship. Some, often the younger and less experienced, acquire in prisons a wider knowledge of criminal activity. Imprisonment is costly for the individual, for the prisoner’s family, and for the community.”

(Home Office 1991: para 1.16)

Liebling and Maruna (2005:1) use Florence Nightingale’s (1859) famous argument that the first principle of the hospital should be to do the sick no harm, arguing that the same principle should apply to prisons and their inhabitants. There is no rationale, they argue, to a system of rehabilitation that makes “its subjects more likely to offend upon release than they were prior to admittance” (Liebling and Maruna, 2005:1). Johnson (2002:61), based on his work exploring the life of male prisoners in the United States, stated:

“it is, in my view, misleading to say that we as a society seek to harm or damage offenders when we punish them. Pain and suffering need not produce damage and, indeed, can be a source of moral education... Moreover, the general thrust of modern prison practice is to minimize pain and suffering and

in my view, to avoid inflicting damage on offenders. Pain has become, in other words, a necessary evil we aim to minimize, not a policy of choice.”

As Irwin and Owen (2005) point out, the stated official purpose of imprisonment does not include harming prisoners. Irwin and Owen discuss the considerable harm that is inflicted upon prisoners, in obvious and subtle ways, not only during imprisonment, but also upon release. Based on their exploration of prisons in California, they state: “continuing beyond the prison term, these ongoing harms create significant obstacles to successful community reintegration, extending the harm of imprisonment and, for most prisoners, diminishing life chances” (Irwin and Owen, 2005:94). They discuss the difference between the ‘pains’ which are inherent in imprisonment, and the unintended harm that comes from other features of imprisonment.

In England and Wales, the prison service’s statement of purpose indicates that the intention of imprisonment is “to provide an element of punishment, which involves the deprivation of liberty and all the consequences that has for the prisoner” (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2009), but states that additionally it must aim to rehabilitate the individual, so that they “return to society as better individuals”. However, rehabilitation programmes and initiatives have received much criticism over the years. According to Irwin and Owen (2005:104) “[b]eyond not being educationally or vocationally prepared for life on the outside, prisoners are ill-prepared to achieve the goal of rehabilitation because the prison experience incites their anger, resentment and sense of injustice towards the conventional society”. Irwin argued in his earlier study ‘The Felon’ (1970:51) that:

“Adult criminals have felt some sense of injustice for various reasons for many years. This feeling stemmed, first, from the perception of the inequality in the social circumstances in which they were born, grew up, and competed as adults. Second, they perceived inequality and unfairness because corruption and class bias in the way they were handled by law enforcement agencies and the courts.”

2.5 Factors exacerbating the pains of imprisonment

In addition to the pains of imprisonment described in previous work, other commonly reported problems include the experience of overcrowding and

inadequate standards of living conditions. Globally, there are many reports of facilities operating well over capacity resulting in substandard living conditions for prisoners. The United States imprisons more people than any other country in the world with a prison population of around 2.3 million (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Prison reform groups and human rights campaigners continue to contend that US prisoners are subject to inhumane conditions. In 1999, the Human Rights Watch described the living conditions for US prisoners as “barely tolerable”, as many prisons were found to be “dirty, unsafe, vermin-infested, and lacked areas in which prisoners could exercise or get fresh air” (Human Rights Watch, 1999:387). Since then, the Human Rights Watch (2012) has reported little improvement and with the prison population continually rising, under-staffing and overcrowding is resulting in prisoners receiving substandard care. Such levels of overcrowding can have psychological consequences and are arguably a leading contributor to prison violence and unrest (Gaes, 1985; Lawrence and Andrews, 2004; Pollock, 2004), especially for those prisoners diagnosed with mental illness (Kupers, 1999).

In England and Wales, the HM Inspectorate of Prisons annual report (2011:30) states:

“We expect to find prisoners living in a safe, clean and decent living environment within which they are encouraged to take personal responsibility for themselves and their possessions. The accommodation witnessed during our inspections ranged from new, state of the art modular-built cells with pre-designed integral sanitation, data points and vented window units, to damp Victorian cells with failing wall rendering, ill-fitting, draughty and leaky windows, damaged or no cell furniture, broken toilets and dirty, damaged mattresses.”

This report goes on to give details of cells with damp and crumbling plaster, leaking windows and damaged floors, dirty showers with inadequate ventilation and screening in many prisons in England and Wales. Similar to reports made in the US, it was not uncommon to hear of two occupants in cells originally designed for one, or three prisoners in cells considered sufficient for just two people. This resulted in the occupants being unable to store possessions properly and discomfort when eating their meals in their cell. Lack of screening around in-cell toilets - which were reported as unclean and stained - meant prisoners were deprived of any privacy. Numerous prisons reportedly still have use of electric night sanitation which resulted in prisoners being made to wait for considerable lengths of time to access toilet

facilities. Consequently, it was reported common practice for prisoners to throw urine and faeces out of their cell windows. This practice was seemingly accepted by some prisons which routinely issued buckets to assist prisoners in this act (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2011).

2.6 How do these experiences differ for women serving short sentences?

Understanding the role that gender plays in prison experiences has been constrained by a lack of recent research. As we have seen, most prison based studies have been carried out in male establishments, exploring the male experience. This is not surprising considering that on the whole, female offenders commit less violent offences, presenting less of a threat to public safety than men and accordingly men have a considerably higher rate of imprisonment, making women the minority (as detailed in chapter one). Therefore, most prison researchers have been drawn to the dynamics of men's prisons, treating women as 'correctional afterthoughts' (Ross and Fabiano, 1986). Very little attention has been paid to the differential experiences within the women's prison population and to the examination of what works for female offenders. As described in chapter one, Corston (2007) highlighted the need for different approaches to dealing with men and women in the criminal justice system, and argued that treating men and women the same results in inequality of outcome (see Corston, 2007:3). All too often it is assumed that what works for men will also apply for women, subjecting female offenders to the treatment services and systems originally developed for male offenders which fail to recognise females' criminogenic needs (Hollin and Palmer, 2006; Blanchette and Brown, 2006; Gelsthorpe *et al.*, 2007; Martin *et al.*, 2009).

Although female offenders became the subjects of extensive research in the 1960s, studies examining their adjustment to imprisonment in recent years have been few and far between. Three key studies provided an initial understanding of the world of women's prisons and found it to be very different from life in men's prisons. David Ward and Gene Kassebaum (1965) studied adult female prisoners' sexual behaviours at the medium security California Institution for women. Prisoner records of over 800 women were examined, interviews took place with correctional staff and

questionnaires were responded to by staff and 293 women concerning their experiences of imprisonment and homosexual behaviour. It was suggested by Ward and Kassebaum that approximately half of the women in their study had engaged in homosexual activities during their time in custody. Rose Giallombardo's 1966 work entitled 'Society of Women', builds on the work of Ward and Kassebaum by reviewing sexual practices at Alderson Women's Prison in West Virginia, United States. Based on a year of ethnographic work and interviews with imprisoned women, she explored women undertaking roles in make-believe families in prison. Esther Hefferman, in 1972, also explored women prisoner subculture and the family roles they forged. Hefferman's work was based on interviews and questionnaires with 100 women and correctional staff in the Women's Reformatory of the District of Columbia in Occoquan, Virginia. However, Hefferman claimed that due to the institutions strict disapproval of homosexual activity, women were reluctant to cooperate or engage in the research. Giallombardo (1966) and Hefferman (1972) agreed that these pseudo families were substitutes for existent family during their imprisonment.

Although each study differed somewhat from others in its specific focus, they all concluded that women cope with the pains of imprisonment in distinct ways from male prisoners described by Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958). These three studies carried out over the late 1960s and early 1970s, found prominent similarities: (1) women's prison culture and experience was in many ways dissimilar to the prison life experienced by males, (2) prisoner roles in women's prisons were linked with gender role expectations, and (3) the 'importation model' proved existent in female prison culture.

In the UK, Pat Carlen has done extensive work looking at women's imprisonment over the past three decades. Carlen's (1983) study involved interviews with women in Scotland's Cornton Vale prison. Based on findings from this research Carlen argued that the pains of imprisonment were much harsher for women than men, with the main reason being isolation, and distance and separation from their family and children. More recent studies focusing on imprisoned women have also shown that the effects of imprisonment are especially severe for women since women display vulnerability in a number of ways. Corston (2007) claims female prisoners' vulnerabilities fall into three categories: (1) domestic circumstances, (such as:

domestic violence, child-care issues), (2) personal circumstances (for instance: mental health issues, low self-esteem, substance misuse), and (3) socio-economic factors (such as: poverty, unemployment, isolation). Prison is often the outcome for women who experience these difficulties, especially when combinations of these issues are apparent. As Carlen (2002:39) points out, “[w]omen offenders can be constructed as victims of biology, of poverty, of abuse and addictions, and more than anything else, of men”.

Much of the literature argues that women in prison are forced to adapt to an environment designed to respond to the behaviour of men. Consequently, the reaction to, and the experience of imprisonment is different for women since they have to adapt more than their male counterparts. Deprivations and pains will therefore be different for women than previously portrayed by Sykes (1958) and others. Zaitzow (2003:25) claimed that the deprivations outlined by Sykes “apply equally to female prisoners, and some may be more severe for women”, with separation from family being the most obvious example. Female prisoners respond in a different way to men when separated from children and significant others. Most research on imprisoned women highlights the importance of family, especially children, in their lives (Owen, 1998; Prison and Probation Ombudsman, 2014). For a mother, being separated from her child is often argued to be the most painful aspect of imprisonment.

More recently, Abigail Rowe (2011) conducted extensive ethnographic research which explored the experiences of women in two English prisons (including HMP New Hall) over eight months in 2007-08. Rowe’s work highlighted how research on women’s experiences of imprisonment had remained relatively under-developed and with little attention given to women’s interactions with penal regimes. However, Rowe’s work does not consider the experiences of repeat short-term sentenced female prisoners exclusively and concentrates much on the shock, anxiety and fear associated with women’s first time prison experiences. Where Rowe does encounter a woman who she described as having “estimated that she had spent half her adult life in prison on multiple short sentences”, this woman described a frustrating scenario where nothing was done to address her issues in custody and instead she relied on support outside the prison (Rowe, 2016:8). Many of the pains identified in Rowe’s work are relative to those women with no prior experience of the criminal

justice system, ignoring the chaos and anxiety experienced as a result of repeatedly serving short-term prison sentences.

There are serious consequences associated with the population of female prisoners being so small. In England there are currently only thirteen prisons and none in Wales. As discussed in the previous chapter, the uneven geographical spread of female establishments made it problematic for women in custody to maintain close relationships with relatives and their children. This geographical disparity is well documented (e.g. Devlin, 1998; Hale, 2005; Prison Reform Trust, 2010, 2014a; Women in Prison, 2013) and highlights the difficulties faced by female prisoners' families when trying to make the often long distance journeys. Consequently, many women bear the consequence of having limited or no visits from their support network and children resulting in isolation (HM Prison Service, 2008). Additionally, the rural locations of many of the women's prisons are not ideal for those reliant on public transport (Prison Reform Trust, 2014a). Bloom and Chesney-Lind (2000) claim these boundaries often compromise the efforts of mothers in maintaining close relationships with their children. Lord (1995:266) argued that while men in prison "do their own time", women "remain interwoven in the lives of significant others, primarily their children and their own mothers".

A number of studies have shown that rehabilitation is made easier for women who establish strong community links and reduces the likelihood of reoffending after release (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; May *et al.*, 2008; Prison and Probation Ombudsman, 2014). On the other hand, Irwin and Owen (2005:111) argue "connections to the free world can make it much harder to 'do time', particularly for those with a long time to serve". Caddle and Crisp (1997) found that only half the mothers who were primary carers for their children prior to custody had maintained contact through visitation with their children whilst in prison.

Although there are no definitive statistics on the number of women in prison who are mothers, Ministry of Justice research (2009) estimates around two-thirds of imprisoned women in England and Wales have dependents under the age of eighteen, and perhaps more notably, approximately thirty-nine percent of known female young offenders are mothers. As Irwin and Owen (2005:111) point out, it can become particularly hard for mothers in custody when living amongst expectant mothers, as

it is “a reminder of loss and reinforces their feelings of separation and guilt at leaving their child”. In addition to women experiencing pregnancy and child birth in prison, there are also many social and personal consequences for women that men do not experience due to biological differences which Pat Carlen continues to point to in her work. Carlen (2002:9) stated:

“because of [the women’s] previous life experiences, gynaecological needs and the cultural demands made on women outside prison, certain aspects of imprisonment formally imposed on men and women equally are likely to occasion more pain for women than males.”

Additionally, women menstruate and are subject to a monthly cycle which brings about fluctuations in hormone levels. Many women experience emotional disturbances associated with menstruation. These biological factors may have an influence on the way in which women experience stressful events during their lives. As pointed out in the Corston Report (2007:17):

“Women’s physical and emotional health and well-being is damaged by their experience within the criminal justice system in a way that differs from men’s experiences and is beyond the comprehension of some men.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, despite women accounting for only a small percentage of the prison population, the Ministry of Justice has published figures showing women accounted for over a quarter (25.8%) of self-harm incidents (Ministry of Justice, 2013c). Figures indicate that the initial period of imprisonment is the most ‘painful’ for the women, for example, in 2010 there were as many as 2,816 reports of self-harming within the first four weeks of imprisonment. This high rate of self-harm demonstrates the emotional distress many imprisoned women experience (MoJ, 2010d). The Ministry of Justice (2013b) state that 46 percent of imprisoned women have attempted to commit suicide at some point in their lives, compared to 21 percent for imprisoned males. Almost a third of the women have been subject to formal monitoring whilst in custody (Prison Reform Trust, 2010). Despite the prison service’s attempts to monitor all prisoners identified to be at risk of self-harming, a total of 75 women in prison between 1999 and 2003, took their own lives. The Ministry of Justice (2009) reported that in 2003, almost fifteen percent of all prison suicides were female and half of prison resuscitations were on women prisoners. The Howard League for Penal Reform (2003) claim that the

general adult male population are three times more likely to commit suicide than women, however in prison the gender imbalance is reversed. Pratt *et al.* (2006) also report that women are 36 times more likely to commit suicide within the first year of release in comparison to the general female population.

The limited research on female imprisonment indicates that female and male offenders experience imprisonment very differently from one another (e.g. Ward and Kassebaum, 1965; Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Carlen, 1983, Owen, 1998; Carlen and Worrall, 2004). Previous research on the ‘pains of imprisonment’ explored male prisoners’ experiences, particularly males experiencing long-term imprisonment, and fails to consider how this differs for other types of offenders such as women. To date, there has been no published research on repeatedly imprisoned female short-term prisoners. As such, this distinct but under-researched group of offenders in the prison population warrants further investigation.

2.7 The gains of imprisonment?

As Haney (2006:265) stated: “It is ironic and instructive that the debate over psychological effects of imprisonment virtually always revolves around how much *harm* is inflicted rather than how much *benefit* is produced”. There are few reports of the benefits or what could be referred to as the ‘gains’ of imprisonment. Kappeler and Potter (2005:295) discussed the wide spread belief they labelled the ‘country club myth’, that prisoners are provided access to a range of luxury accessories and electrical goods and therefore lead a ‘pampered lifestyle’. They argued that even with the possession of, or access to, so-called ‘luxury items’, such as large televisions, games consoles and music players, this does not warrant labelling prisoners’ lives ‘easy’ and pain-free. They argued that in reality, prison is a harsh and painful experience and prisoners do suffer the pains and deprivations that Sykes and others have documented.

Arguably, for some individuals, there are a number of ‘gains’ to be sought from being imprisoned, both during imprisonment and after release. Imprisonment provides for individuals’ basic needs such as: shelter, warmth, food, clothing, wash facilities, health care, and opportunity for exercise. Research in the UK reported that a third of prisoners were not in stable accommodation before imprisonment and one

in twenty prisoners were sleeping outdoors (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Moreover, a large majority of those entering custody previously suffered from poverty and many had unaddressed health issues particularly relating to mental health and/or substance abuse. Therefore, these simple necessities may well be comforts they were deprived of prior to entering custody. However, as previously mentioned, Human Rights Watch (2012) has reported the deprivation of some individuals' basic needs in many US prisons, often due to issues of overcrowding. In addition to those deprivations previously identified, Irwin and Owen (2005:95) report on the health care amenities based on their work in California prisons:

“For those prisoners with few health problems, the modern prison is a good place to maintain general health due to the consistent routine, adequate diet and absence or great restriction of many common deleterious activities such as drug and alcohol use and cigarette smoking.”

On the other hand, Irwin and Owen (2005) state that for those individuals with serious health issues, the prison is not an appropriate place to contend with those needs due to insufficient staffing and resources. Health problems such as heart disease, AIDS/HIV and hepatitis C are particularly wide spread in prisons due to the prisoners' histories of dangerous health behaviour such as intravenous (IV) drug use.

In England and Wales, the HM Prisons Inspectorate annual report (2011) also reported many complaints relating to the inadequacy of some of the prisoners' basic needs. For example, clothing and access to laundry was frequently observed as being of poor quality, and despite the inadequacy of prison-issued clothing, requests to wear their own clothing were denied, even in some male category D prisons.

Sykes' record of deprivations included 'deprivation of security' suggesting prisoners' physical safety is put at risk by being imprisoned with other unpredictable individuals. However, Sykes' reports of deprivations were based on maximum security male prisoners in the US in the late 1950s. It might be argued that prison acts as a refuge for some individuals. For example, in the UK, it is reported that one in four women experience domestic violence in their lifetime (SEU, 2002), while experiences of sexual and domestic violence are significantly more common among women offenders than the general female population. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) reported research findings that indicate approximately half of all women in prison have suffered domestic violence and one third have experienced sexual abuse.

Research conducted by 'Women in Prison' in 2009 revealed significantly higher prevalence rates with 80 percent of their survey respondents disclosing experiences of domestic and/or sexual violence. Also, in comparison to men's prisons, women's prisons are reportedly physically safer with recorded assaults in prison custody being disproportionately lower in female establishments, and especially lower for incidents categorised as 'serious' (MoJ, 2014c). Physical violence between female prisoners is much less frequent and especially serious violence involving weapons. Riots and collective disturbances, as well as organised conflicts between gangs and racial conflict are much less common in female establishments. Despite women committing fewer physically violent offences during imprisonment, McClellan (1994) argued it is less tolerated in women's prisons. Women are punished more severely and subject to disciplinary proceedings at a higher rate than men for violent behaviour in custody.

Besides these basic needs, there are other potential 'gains' of imprisonment, which may benefit prisoners post-release. John Irwin (1980) argued in 'Prisons in Turmoil', that most prisoners:

"were caught in somewhat destructive social webs or were being swept along out of control, careening and ricocheting through the days. Imprisonment affords these persons a respite from their involvements during which they can extricate themselves from destructive dynamics, sort through their values and beliefs, pull themselves together, and make new plans and preparations for a new effort at life."

Potential gains which prisoners may benefit from long-term include: education, training and work experience, as well as treatment programmes and counselling. It is believed that education and training are key elements of rehabilitation for prisoners as they can increase the individual's opportunity to choose an alternative to crime and therefore contribute to reducing reoffending. It is not just a case of attaining qualifications for employment for the prisoners once released; education can aid prisoners in other aspects of life. Education can build confidence, raise prisoners' aspirations, and equip them with skills to help them manage the difficulties and complexities of daily life to help them become contributing members of society once released. During imprisonment, some prisoners are also encouraged to engage in offending behaviour programmes, interventions which endeavour to transform the way offenders think, in order to transform their offending behaviour and ultimately

reduce reoffending. The programmes educate offenders in how to manage the aspects of their lives that increase the risk for reoffending. There are a number of different types of cognitive behavioural programmes including ‘general’ offender programmes which are designed for reducing reoffending across a range of criminal offences. There are also more ‘specific’ programmes that focus on particular behaviours which relate to their offending, for example: drug and alcohol abuse, violence and aggression, and sexual offending. However, despite the widespread use of these programmes, their effectiveness remains uncertain. As Goggin and Gendreau (2006:210) state:

“despite such advances in our knowledge of what works, and a broad consensus supporting the benefits of empirically – validated programme standards, the majority of real world offender treatment programmes continue to be relatively unsuccessful in reducing recidivism.”

Carlen (2003) argued that these programmes are most probably harmless, and perhaps let the time in custody pass more pleasantly, and, may even be beneficial; but their claims to reduce reoffending are unproven.

Regardless of the apparent lack of evidence to illustrate whether these so-called ‘gains of imprisonment’ are at all realised, in the longer term, they are not accessed by all prisoners. In England and Wales most short-term prisoners (sentences of less than twelve months) serve only half of their sentence term in custody. This consequently makes the task of addressing offender risks and needs more challenging for criminal justice staff due to the offender’s time in custody being so limited. This is more the case for women offenders, as research presented in chapter one evidences that women serve shorter prison sentences than men for less serious offences, yet they have more extensive needs. Research carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) found that women serving short-term sentences often have significant personal and social problems around the basic needs of accommodation, finances, substance misuse, health, relationships, education and employment which are often exacerbated by being sent to prison (SEU, 2002). Those offenders sentenced to less than twelve months in custody do not easily have access to offending behaviour programmes despite their higher reconviction rates. The grounds for there currently being no rehabilitative regime for short-term prisoners

can be attributed to the reality that these offenders are not in custody long enough to complete a rehabilitation programme.

It seems fair to conclude that imprisonment is more psychologically harmful for some prisoners than for others since prison is not a uniform experience. Although we can recognise the pains expressed in previous prison work, it should be noted that findings tend to take undifferentiated samples and report general patterns. As Cullen and Sundt (2000:495) observe, “in general, it has been found that the effect of prison is not uniform; rather, prisons seem to make some people worse, have no effect on others and make some better”. Our understanding of exactly what pains of imprisonment are suffered by whom remains unclear. The pains expressed in the literature primarily relate to male offenders in the United States or United Kingdom, experiencing long-term imprisonment or indeterminate sentences. These general studies neglect the experience of particular groups and individuals, such as prisoners experiencing short-term imprisonment or females.

2.8 Conclusion

Exploring the history of experiences of imprisonment highlights the extent of both physical and psychological pains and deprivations prisoners have experienced; many of which are still apparent in literature pertaining to contemporary prison life in England and Wales. Nonetheless, much of this previous research has been conducted with male prisoners, neglecting the experiences of women. This chapter has argued that assumptions cannot be made that men and women experience imprisonment alike, and presents evidence to the contrary. It has been argued that the experience of imprisonment is in fact harsher for women than it is for men, with authors such as Carlen (2002) claiming domestic, personal and socio-economic factors to be the cause. However, this work, based on women in Scotland published in 1983, is outdated. Evidently, there is a general lack of research on the ‘pains (and gains) of imprisonment’ for women, which warrants further exploration.

Furthermore, the ‘pains of imprisonment’ literature fails to consider the experiences of those offenders who receive short-term custodial sentences. Sykes’ previously identified forms of suffering; he listed as five types of deprivation. This work assumes that a short length of sentence simply equates to a shorter duration of

suffering. In the same way, the more contemporary forms of pain and deprivation identified by Crewe such as the pains of psychological assessment, suggest that these pains are simply not experienced by short-term prisoners since they are typically ineligible for psychological assessments. Arguably, failing to identify the short-term prisoner's needs through assessment prevents their access to treatment and support. The deprivation of attention, treatment and support for the short-term prisoner population is arguably just as damaging as many of the previously identified pains. We can claim that the 'pains of neglect and abandonment' are just one of a distinctive set of pains that exist for the short-term repeat female prisoners. A further distinct 'pain' identified for repeat short-term female prisoners would include 'the pains of isolation'. This could be described as a deprivation notably suffered by women due to the remote locations and geographical spread of female establishments making the maintenance of family ties especially difficult for this population of prisoners. A lack of visitation from support networks and children intensifies the deprivation of close relationships with relatives and children and as this chapter highlights, research has shown that rehabilitation is made easier for women who maintain relationships with families and their children and reduces the likelihood of reoffending after release (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; May *et al.*, 2008; Prison and Probation Ombudsman, 2014).

'The pains of uncertainty' is a further pain identified from this chapter. Unlike the pains of uncertainty and indeterminacy described by Crewe (2011) who talks of uncertainty in relation to indeterminate custodial sentences which lack solidarity and fail to indicate a clear path to freedom for the prisoner, women who receive a definite but short prison sentence face the pains of uncertainty of what will happen once they leave the prison gate, such as where they will reside upon release as it is unlikely that all of their needs will have been successfully addressed in the limited time they are in custody.

A number of so-called 'gains' have been identified in this chapter, such as access to education, emotional support and counselling, and support with securing provision to access in the community after leaving custody, all of which comes to the prisoner at no financial cost. Most of these perceived 'gains' cannot benefit female repeat short-term prisoners since their time in custody is so limited, access to these services is often not realistic. Additionally, it has been discussed that imprisonment affords

offenders time to rest and re-evaluate life, make new plans for a fresh start and a new future. Time is not a 'gain' that can be applied to women with extensive needs and an extremely short sentence. These perceived 'gains' or benefits can therefore be described as 'adverse gains' for this population of prisoners. The only clear 'gains' that can be identified for the short-term repeat female prisoners relate to basic needs, such as shelter, food, wash facilities, healthcare, clothing and so forth, as these essentials are often not available for these women in the community. Any other potential gains for this population remain unclear. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the need for a distinct look at how the short-term female prison population experience imprisonment.

PART TWO

THE RESEARCH ‘WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW AND WHY’

Part two of this thesis presents details of what the research is about, who the research is about, when and where it took place, and by whom, and why it was carried out in this way, with this population, in this location, by this researcher. This part of the thesis contains three chapters. The first presents the research methodology, detailing the design and methods for the research, with reflexive descriptions of the methodological issues faced during the research period and how they were handled. The second chapter is dedicated to providing a detailed overview of the population of women being explored in this study to establish exactly who it is being researching, their circumstances and backgrounds, to ensure a thorough understanding for the reader of how imprisonment impacts their lives (and their families' lives). The third chapter in this part provides an overview of the regime of the prison where the research took place to set the scene and give a more detailed insight to how this population of women spend their time in custody and experience imprisonment on a day-to-day basis.

CHAPTER THREE

(Re-)Entering the Prison

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology of this empirical study. I begin this chapter by setting the scene with a synopsis of how the research transpired, followed by an outline of the specific aims of the project and a brief overview of the research location. The research draws upon in-depth semi-structured interviews with women who have a history of repeatedly serving short-term custodial sentences, supplemented by participant observation and focus groups with prison staff and workers. The chapter proceeds to examine these methods, describe my methods of recruitment and give an account of how the methods were essentially implemented. The ethical issues raised by the research are also considered, and I provide a narrative description of how I organised and then analysed the data. This discussion is followed by a description of my research experience through personal reflections, incorporating how my personal biography, identity and emotions became ‘entangled’ with and inevitably shaped the data gathered during the process, starting with access to the research site and the co-operation I gained within it. Here, I reveal the methods I employed in my aim to appear ‘unofficial’ and approachable to prisoners; giving explanation for the considerations and conscious decisions I made in the management of my identity, such as, dress and the possession of prison keys. The chapter then presents reflections on my identity within the social relations of fieldwork and how I developed relationships and the power dynamics associated. I describe the tensions and challenges I encountered in retaining neutrality during my time in the prison and discuss the emotional dimension of my research experience.

3.2 The research in context

My interest in female offenders and their experiences began whilst working for the prison service. I was fascinated by the different lives these women experienced and saddened when many of them seemed unable to survive in the world outside the prison, realising they would likely reoffend and return.

In 2007, as an undergraduate student, I negotiated access to HMP/YOI Askham Grange (a female open prison, in North Yorkshire) with nothing more than an enthusiastic letter to the Governor requesting an opportunity to gain a few weeks' work experience over the academic holidays, and showing willingness to undertake work in just about any suitable capacity. This generated a voluntary work placement encompassing a small-scale project analysing the general population of the prison. From this, I sustained part-time voluntary work undertaking further projects alongside my studies, which later led to a paid service position as a researcher and data analyst in 2008.

I was based at HMP New Hall, a closed establishment located in Wakefield, within the Yorkshire and the Humber region of England, which accommodated adult female prisoners of all categories, and was conducting research which explored the clinical and psychosocial interventions available to drug users in custody, many of whom were short-term repeat offenders. Repeat offending statistics associated with the short-term prisoner population had become a subject of significant interest to New Hall prison since the publication of the 'Reoffending of Adults in England and Wales' report (MoJ, 2010b) that demonstrated a growing proportion of women reoffending upon release. As revealed in chapter one, HMP New Hall was reported to have the highest one year reconviction rate for short-term prisoners discharged of all (female and male) English and Welsh prisons, at 76.6 percent (MoJ, 2010b) making New Hall prison an ideal location in which to explore the experiences of women repeatedly imprisoned for short periods of time. During this period, the prison was in turmoil. The May 2010 General election saw the new Conservative-led coalition Government come to power, and set out new proposals for a 'rehabilitation revolution' (HM Government, 2010:23). This included extended and accelerated prison contracting (as described in chapter one); funding cuts were made through reduced staffing levels, with recruitment freezes and the offering of redundancy and exit packages for long-serving members of staff. With discussions of reassembling prisons and privatisation threats, concerns centred on the risk to the establishment's continuance and job security for staff, arguably diverting some focus from the prisoners' needs. Conducting research within my employed position had become increasingly difficult due to internal funding restrictions making it almost impossible to complete work effectively with unrealistic deadlines and limited resources. The

desire to continue research with the necessary research training, supervision, funding and most of all time to do qualitative work that allowed for prisoner involvement, formed my determination to undertake doctoral research. When approaching the prison with this proposal, the prison officials were in full support. This arrangement with the prison preceded the issue of the PSI 41/2010 (HM Prison Service, 2010), which details a more formalised and extensive application process going through a central system (HM Prison Service National Research Committee). Under the direction of the now expired PSO 7035 (HM Prison Service, 2005), research applications proposing to take place in only one establishment were to be directed for review to the prison's Governor or named research contact; that was, at the time, my line manager. Upon leaving my employed position at New Hall prison, my staff access remained open to allow me to return to the establishment to carry out fieldwork. Although this may seem relatively straightforward given the difficulties usually reported by researchers seeking access to prison, in reality this arrangement generated its own set of difficulties which I endeavour to illustrate in this chapter.

3.3 Aims

This research presents the experiences of imprisoned women repeatedly serving short-term custodial sentences (less than twelve months) at New Hall prison. The specific aims of the project were:

- (i) to explore why short-term female prisoners are repeatedly imprisoned within twelve months of release and what problems they experience prior to re-imprisonment
- (ii) to explore the orientations of the prisoners towards their imprisonment, and to examine their understandings and views of imprisonment
- (iii) to explore what HMP New Hall's role is in helping them resettle and desist from offending and how these short-term prisoners spend their time in custody
- (iv) to explore what support interventions are, or would be, most effective in stopping this repeat imprisonment cycle

3.4 The Prison

HMP/YOI New Hall, which has been in existence as a female establishment since 1987, is a closed prison located near Wakefield, West Yorkshire with an operational capacity of 447 at the start of the fieldwork (January 2013), which reduced to 406 at the end of the year (December 2013). At the time the research took place (January 2013- June 2014), New Hall housed adults, young offenders and juveniles (seventeen year old females and on very rare occasions when a fifteen or sixteen year old is unsuitable to be located in a Secure Unit). In addition to the “stand alone” juvenile unit (Rivendell Unit) there was a Mother and Baby Unit (Acer House) which could accommodate up to nine mothers and babies. New Hall had normal reception arrangements and received most offenders direct from court. At the time of the research, New Hall was one of eleven public prisons (including two open establishments), accessible by women sentenced to custody in England and Wales (although all eleven female establishments were located in England, with none in Wales). A detailed account of New Hall prison’s regime and services is presented in chapter five.

3.5 Research methodology

A carefully considered research approach and design is important in all research, but arguably more so when preparing to conduct research with offenders in a prison setting. Carlen and Worrall (2004) document two main reasons for this: firstly, overcoming the difficulty and efforts required in gaining access to this type of research site increases the pressure of making the most of an opportunity as there is no guarantee of a second chance, and secondly, more importantly, because the participants are an inherently vulnerable group of individuals. This research sought to capture the understanding and experiences of female short-term prisoners who repeatedly reoffend upon release from prison and have become trapped in a repeat imprisonment cycle. Despite the issues recognised with female short-term repeat offenders, the outlook and views of this population have tended to be under-represented in published research to date. The methodological choices were driven by the desire to facilitate the active participation of these female prisoners. Qualitative research methods are typically employed when a more comprehensive understanding of the issue being studied is required or desired (Attride-Stirling,

2001). It is to this end that a qualitative methodological approach was adopted in an attempt to address the research questions presented. Elliott *et al.* (1999:216) summarised the purpose of qualitative research:

“The aim of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage and live through situations. In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to develop understandings of the phenomena under study, based as much as possible on the perspective of those being studied.”

As Bernasco (2011:3) stated, “offenders are potentially the richest source of information on their crimes and on their lives”. Therefore, to enable us to gain the most accurate and full picture of imprisonment, nobody can better inform us than those experiencing imprisonment who can convey directly to us their personal thoughts, feelings, experiences, hopes and needs. As Nee (2004:3) stated: “If we can show that we can research offenders’ understandings of their own behaviour reliably...then surely a grounded approach to research, using the offender as expert, is a method we ignore at our peril.” Qualitative methods were an integral feature of the research design since they offered a means to get an in-depth understanding and appreciation of issues and generate explanations and depictions of why these women are repeatedly imprisoned that may have been missed if instead I had collected quantitative data in isolation.

In the case of this research, theorising the behaviour of the women to explain their offending was not employed, but instead accounts and explanations were obtained directly from the women themselves to discern the truth as they saw it and reflected on it. Although the information attained from qualitative data collection methods can provide a wealth of information, we also need to be aware that there may be inaccuracies in self-report data as it relies on the honesty of the interviewees. There are various reasons why respondents might intentionally fabricate accounts, such as: self-protection, discomfiture, overconfidence and pride, to name a few. It is also likely that the women’s self-reports of events may be inaccurate simply due to confusion or memory loss, especially considering the chaotic lives, long-term substance abuse and trauma many have experienced. There is a risk that the women’s accounts will provide what Denzin (1989:24) described as “an imaginative organi[s]ation of experiences that imposes a distortion of truth... a mixture of fiction

and non-fiction... about life and particular lived experiences”. In my attempt to try and mitigate against the potential for bias or error, a ‘triangulation’ of data was sought to increase validity of the women’s reports; more explicitly, the employment of multiple research methods, sources of data or types of data to address the same research questions; the assumption being that isolated sets of data collated using distinct methods of collection which draw similar conclusions, strengthens confidence in their validity. As suggested by King and Liebling (2008), in prison-based research, whilst all information from respondents should be taken seriously, verification should be sought from other sources wherever possible.

3.6 Methods and participant recruitment

The main techniques of data collection used in this research were as follows: participant observation and participation; semi-structured, in-depth interviews with prisoners, and focus groups with prison staff and workers. In addition to this, utilisation of the prison service IT system: P-NOMIS (Prison National Offender Management Information System), allowed me to verify details such as periods of time and dates, for example, between spells in prison, release dates and so forth, which can be difficult for short-term repeat prisoners to recall. The use of these records also allowed for the collection of demographic and other data that does not require explanation by the prisoners, which allowed me to use the discussion time with offenders to concentrate on more pertinent issues. One of the limitations of these records was the absence of any documentation relating to the women prior to, and in between prison spells.

3.6.1 Observation

Participant observations were carried out as an aid to understanding how the women lived and experienced short-term imprisonment. It allowed me to build a rapport with the women (and staff) that were later recruited as interview participants. As with all methods of data collection, participant observation does have certain drawbacks; it raises multiple ethical considerations (examined in this chapter), is arguably flawed on the grounds of subjectivity and is often costly and largely time consuming (Bryman, 2012). The fieldwork took place over a period of eighteen

months (between January 2013 and June 2014), including visits at different times in the day, on weekends, and at night. I spent an intense period dedicating three to four long days a week at the prison over six weeks before slowly reducing my appearances; this allowed necessary time for recuperation and reflection on my research experience which was encouraged through the use of a hand-written diary. My observation experience was very much participatory. During the observations my researcher role was analogous with that of a 'participant-as-observer' (Gold, 1958), as I participated in the daily activities taking place in the prison. Although there was confusion over my identity (discussed later in this chapter), the research was not covert as the women I was researching understood I was not a prisoner and efforts were made to convey why I was present.

Although much of the data found in this thesis is derived from the interviews with women and prison staff, the utility of my observations should not be underestimated. The participant observations were particularly useful for understanding the dynamics, norms and feel of prison life; it allowed me to observe the women in the prison setting and gain an understanding of the sorts of issues they experienced through imprisonment which could later be explored further in interview. The insights gained from the interviews were supplemented by the informal discussions that took place over the lengthy period of time that was spent at the establishment, opportunities for which emerged frequently. The participant observations enabled me to place the perspectives of the women and staff in context and brought about opportunities for more informal exchanges with prisoners and the staff which encouraged the development of rapport prior to the interview phase of the study.

3.6.2 Interviews with prisoners

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they provided a greater degree of flexibility than structured interviews; they offered more opportunity to probe and allowed the women to be more active participants in the dialogues. There was no strict ordering to the questions to be covered which allowed respondents to speak freely and spontaneously. This way, issues which arose during the course of the interview could be explored until the topic was exhausted. A flexible approach allowed interviewees the opportunity to introduce topics of importance to them, and

which may not have been anticipated by the researcher. The issues identified in this way, could then be explored with other respondents in subsequent interviews.

Having some structure meant that prepared questions could be used to guide the interview, giving a greater level of consistency and comparability than would be apparent with unstructured interviews.

The women engaged willingly in the interviews and were extremely candid. Interview lengths varied, from around 30 minutes to 90 minutes, with most lasting approximately one hour. All interviews with prisoners were conducted on a one-to-one basis; focus groups were considered unsuitable taking account of the sensitivity of the discussion topics and the intention to preserve confidentiality. Additionally, the study sought to gain an understanding of the personal narratives of imprisoned women's experiences rather than collect a perspective of group norms and dynamics. In interview, prisoners would be asked about their life histories considering factors or experiences they considered contributory to their offending, experiences of offending, imprisonment, previous resettlement attempts, expectations and intentions for the future and consideration for what they felt would put a stop to their repeat imprisonment cycle. The interview schedule used with the women was intentionally broad and designed with a view to determining the issues of most pertinence to the women concerned. A copy of the semi-structured interview schedule can be found in appendix three.

The sampling criteria for interview were relatively broad: specifying that participants be over 21 (and therefore – at the time of the research – ineligible for access to probation supervision upon release from custody), and serving a sentence of less than twelve months (therefore excluding recalls). The intention was to confine the sample to repeat offenders who had been sentenced to custody on two or more previous occasions, with the last imprisonment being no more than twelve months prior. A total of twenty women were interviewed in-depth at least once. Some of the women who had been interviewed were released and re-imprisoned at New Hall during the period of conducting fieldwork. In such cases, follow-up interviews in custody were conducted if practically and logistically possible which resulted in five follow-up interviews. The study did not, for practical and time-restricting reasons, include a follow-up interview post-release.

Employment of the P-NOMIS allowed me to assemble a directory of women at New Hall fitting my inclusion criteria for interview. The listing consisted of approximately 45-50 women at any one time and was updated regularly with new receptions and eliminating those women released, transferred to another establishment or previously invited to participate. Recruitment was very much opportunistic; using a record of potential interviewees, whilst conducting fieldwork I would be alert to these potential participants. When encountering these women, usually at work or on the prison wings, I would present details of my research to them and offer an opportunity to contribute. There was a high response rate to the invitation to participate in the study. Only one woman who was invited to participate declined to do so, offering no explanation for her refusal. None of my interviews were scheduled to take place during the women's free time, and an opportunity to take time out of work or their cells provided a significant incentive to enrol.

As I gradually developed rapport with a number of the prisoners, a snowball sampling method was used. The prisoners began assisting me with the recruitment of suitable interview participants; women who had knowledge of my research would share a research information sheet (see appendix one) with other prisoners they knew to be eligible for participation and generated occasions for us to be introduced. Eventually, as word of my research got around the prison, I began to receive a number of written requests from women expressing a desire to be a part of the study. The recruitment strategies employed, while often opportunistic, resulted in a fairly diverse group of women (see chapter four for selected biographical details).

The interviews with prisoners were conducted in the privacy of classrooms, offices, or prison cells, escaping the surveillance of staff as I felt it was important to try and create an interview environment in which the women felt at ease speaking about often traumatic and disturbing experiences. However, this did raise issues of personal safety as there was nobody to hand had a threat emerged. An extended discussion of these issues of personal safety is presented later in this chapter.

3.6.3 Interviews with staff

In order to investigate the contribution of the prison to understand their role in reducing reoffending and how these short-term prisoners spend their time in custody,

focus groups took place with the people who work with the women in custody, including prison employees of various positions and grades, police and probation officers and workers from third sector agencies. A series of three focus groups were conducted including a total of twenty participants. Representatives from various departments, including both male and female workers, were brought together to assemble a diverse focus group of six to seven people.

Until recently, prison employees have been largely neglected in prison research (Crawley, 2004; Bennett *et al.*, 2008; Liebling *et al.*, 2011). The decision to involve prison staff in the research related to the desire not only to understand how they experienced working with imprisoned women but also to explore the potential relationship between the attitudes of prison workers and the experiences of the women. The focus groups included discussion of the support interventions available to the target population of prisoners, and consideration of where there might be a lack of provision, what they felt would help stop this repeat imprisonment cycle for short-term female prisoners, and the challenges they face in working with these women.

Interviews with staff were conducted in empty offices, which did result in the occasional interruption from telephone calls and visitors to the office (who were kindly asked to return at a later time), in addition to the unavoidable interruption from on duty prison officer and senior managers' radios, which for obvious reasons could not be ignored. The three focus groups lasted between 40 and 75 minutes in length. All twenty participants did manage to stay the duration of the discussions despite having informed me prior to giving their consent to participate that they may have to depart at any time if immediately required elsewhere in the prison, given that they were all still on duty.

Candidates were recruited opportunistically; during the observational fieldwork, those members of staff I encountered who exhibited a general interest in the study and communicated a desire to comment on issues pertinent to the research were invited to participate. There were initial concerns as to whether the presence of high-grade management team members and Governors might intimidate other, less senior members of staff and deter them from contributing openly and honestly. However, it soon became apparent that staff were confident in expressing their viewpoints,

including opinions that reflected negatively on the establishment, its regime, services and problematic staff attitudes. Furthermore, despite the disparity in authority levels of the participants, there was a general consensus amongst attendees as to the key issues and concerns relative to the short-term repeat prisoner population. Employing a group discussion method was valuable as it arguably encouraged staff to draw confidence from one another to raise these issues and they provided insights into the institution and its facilities, regime, management, as well as its accomplishments and its failures.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The methods outlined above evidently raise a multitude of ethical considerations. Ethical practices are an integral element of any empirical study, but as mentioned, are especially pertinent to this type of research since the participants are considered particularly vulnerable, and the research aimed to explore potentially traumatic and emotive experiences. Unethical practices not only undermine the integrity of the immediate research project, but immoral or improper behaviour can jeopardise opportunities for other researchers to carry out similar work in the future. The key considerations were: informed, voluntary consent; confidentiality and anonymity; data protection; and the welfare of the participants. Details of the research were submitted to the University of Sheffield research ethics committee for approval. A letter indicating ethical approval from the University research ethics committee was provided to the prison Governor before undertaking any research within the establishment.

3.7.1 Informed, voluntary consent

Informed and voluntary consent entails all research participants having a complete understanding of what the research entails and the implications for their participation. All prisoners were given an information sheet, written in appropriate language, providing: an overview of the research, the researcher and appropriate method of contact, what participation entails and how their information would be used and protected (see appendix one). A separate research information sheet was available for staff outlining the same information relevant to their participation (see appendix

two). Consideration was made of possible low literacy abilities amongst prisoners and it was ensured that the content of the information sheets was reviewed verbally with each participant prior to conducting any interview. All participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about the research process and their role as a participant before commencing the interviews.

3.7.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

All data were collected, stored and handled in an anonymous form. All participants were informed at the beginning of the research that any sensitive information would be treated confidentially and that their identities would not be revealed. In order to achieve this, all participants were given appropriate pseudonyms. Other information such as references to specific places or other people were also anonymised through use of pseudonyms, or substituted or referred to more broadly (for example, a woman's home town of Sheffield, might be substituted with '[Leeds]' or simply denoted as 'a Yorkshire city').

After discussions with the Governing Governor at New Hall prison, it was decided that it was not necessary to anonymise the institution. Although this may have further protected the anonymity of the participants involved in the study, it was decided that the narratives of the women were not detailed to a point of exposing their identity in any event.

It was not possible to offer absolute confidentiality and the participants were informed about the boundaries of confidentiality at the beginning of the interview: confidentiality would not be honoured if they disclosed plans to cause harm to themselves or others. Had an assurance of complete confidentiality been given but then discarded, this would have undermined the integrity of the research and the researcher. However, no such safeguarding concerns arose during the interview process.

3.7.3 Participant welfare

Undertaking empirical research in a prison with vulnerable women, exploring potentially distressing events and experiences, carries a risk. I was aware that if the interview provoked a certain emotional reaction, which seemed likely considering

the complex and delicate nature of the issues linked to offending and imprisonment, subsequently sending a woman back to confinement without further support could be destructive. In seeking to ensure this research was not harmful to the welfare of the women and the staff, research participants were informed that they could terminate the interview at any point or move past a question without a response. I intentionally designed the interview schedules to end on a more positive note; the dialogues would end with discussion of their hopes for the future, before asking how they would use a magic wand to fix the issues, which consistently generated laughter.

I was acutely aware that by asking individuals to participate in the study, I was demanding something of the participants and offering little in return. Participation required an emotional investment and, for the women predominantly, a disclosure of personal information and honest reflection on self. Staff were inconvenienced by having to desert their existing workload and responsibilities to accommodate my request for their contributions.

Participants were not offered any financial incentive for their involvement. None of the participants showed any irritation about the lack of compensation, unlike Crewe's (2006) reports from a study with male prisoners who challenged the lack of reward for their input. Since the prisoners were taken either from work, or from their cells, the women were often grateful to be occupied for approximately an hour that would otherwise have been spent in solitude or in a production workshop. The women excused from work to take part in the study suffered no reductions to their daily financial earnings.

3.8 Data analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded, then subsequently transcribed, coded and analysed. Participants were informed that digital recording was for the purpose of allowing the researcher to listen more attentively and review all the points made more thoroughly following the interview. Indeed this did allow for a more engaging and natural discussion, in preference to the task of taking contemporaneous notes. The women seemed untroubled by the use of a digital recorder; it was considered that this be due to their repeat experiences of enduring police interviews. To

reinforce the distinction, I would re-affirm my student status and assure them that they were not being interviewed in any official capacity.

For staff and workers, the use of the digital recorder was potentially more disconcerting, or, at least, may have engendered a cautious response to the interview questions. For example: one prison officer joked that she was conscious of the digital recorder, stating: “I better watch what I say on here”, followed by laughter. This illustrates one of the potential disadvantages of digital recording.

Data analysis began from the moment I started collecting data and can be described in broad terms as a form of thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). Although time-consuming, I made the decision to carry out my own transcription work since I felt it would give me an opportunity to familiarise myself with the data and reflect upon the content. I transcribed the interviews as I went along, between interviews, in order to continually develop ideas as more data were gathered. Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that the coding process can be done with a data led approach (inductive) or theory led approach (deductive). The early phase of ongoing analysis I have described here reflected an inductive approach to the data analysis. Some researchers taking a data led approach work within a ‘grounded theory’ approach and so advocate tackling the data with no prior influences of preconceptions (Glaser, 1992), while Layder’s (1998) ‘adaptive theory’ encourages the use of relevant knowledge and considers the ‘clean slate’ approach as being somewhat naïve, arguing that a more effective way of analysing data is to “target the theoretical pertinence of data as soon as possible” (Layder, 1998:57). The latter approach was taken here, primarily as the literature review was essential in identifying an appropriate focus for conducting semi-structured interviews with the women in a time-limited setting where there was no guarantee of being able to conduct subsequent interviews with participants.

From the interview transcripts, a clear set of themes emerged and a series of codes were subsequently developed manually. This was a continual process of review which permitted greater familiarity with the raw data allowing time to reflect upon, and draw links between, the pertinent themes. This process enabled me to focus upon those thematic areas that were similar across women’s accounts of their experiences, rather than being focussed on the individual and their lives as had been the case at

the early analysis stage. The analysis was inductive in that my data served as a guide to coding, but certain themes did stand out as especially significant because they resonated with areas of literature I had explored prior to entering the research site which will have inevitably shaped, to some extent, the frame of interpretation that I brought to the data (see Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.9 Access, arrangements and co-operation

Much of the literature on gaining ‘access to prisons’ and ‘gatekeeping’ discusses the many difficulties and barriers would-be researchers must face. King and Liebling (2008) explore the lengthy processes and challenges in acquiring access to prisons for research purposes. They explain that the would-be researcher is expected to produce a viable research proposal presenting something additional to the ‘official’ research agenda that could have some benefits for the institution(s), but is not too disruptive and that there is the funding, or at least the prospect of funding. On top of that, the would-be researcher needs to evidence they have the right credentials for conducting such research in the establishment. Difficulties do not stop at gaining initial, physical access, but are reportedly an ongoing struggle, as Malloch (2000:16) states: “[t]hroughout the research project, gaining access continues to be an ongoing process often strengthened by the gatekeepers’ expectations of what they might gain through co-operation”. As previously outlined, my problems and challenges of attaining access were somewhat different. For my part, physical access to the prison proved less problematic than gaining access and cooperation from staff within the establishment. I had to acquire the trust, co-operation and assistance from staff within the prison using tact, diplomacy and interpersonal skills.

Access to New Hall for the purpose of doing my own research had been granted on the basis that I would use my existing knowledge of the establishment to manage the logistics of the project independently, occupying very little prison staff time. Because of this prior understanding, I was not handled in the way other visiting researchers to the prison would have been. For example, I was not allocated a ‘contact’ staff member who helped orchestrate and supervise my work within the prison and I used my staff identification and access to prison keys in order to move around the prison independently. It was taken for granted that I would follow correct

protocol for accessing what I needed using my existing familiarity with the establishment and the prisoners, causing little distraction to other prison workers. The downside was that nobody was obligated to accommodate my needs; my research although recognisably beneficial to the prison, was not part of the prison inspectorate requirements and consequently not a key priority to the prison. Carlen and Worrall (2004:185) highlight the dilemmas of working to suit the prison, noting that prison staff can often be “wary of researchers, especially of any who fail to show their full appreciation of prison staff priorities and institutional concerns”. I felt I was expected to appreciate the establishment priorities even more so, due to having previously been a part of the prison community.

No longer working directly for the prison meant becoming overlooked and I soon realised how unimportant I was. In some respects this proved advantageous; it gave me the freedom to conduct the research as designed, not subject to influence and close scrutiny from the prison officials. The negative aspect of this arrangement meant that assistance was not easily obtained when it was required. Lack of supervision within the prison also raised some concerns with regards to my personal safety. The prison relied on me using my own discretion and previous experience on matters of personal safety. The location of all prisoners is closely monitored, therefore officers knew when I was occupying an individual and the location, but concerns as to whether I was with support or unaided was never questioned. I did not carry a radio, nor did I have access to a panic alarm of any sort; I relied on my common sense and caution when conducting the research.

3.10 Identity

“[D]on’t get involved, don’t take sides, express opinion, breach confidences or react to very much at all; don’t be mistaken for a probation officer, social worker, psychologist, volunteer or governor grade – or ‘someone from the parole board’ – or identify with any of the last; don’t be dependent on the staff, but never overlook them; don’t get in the way, but don’t neglect to explain yourself, sometimes apologetically, to each individual when they ask: ‘Who did you say you were exactly?’”

(Liebling, 1992:118)

There was much confusion as to my identity for those employees who did not know me, due to my level of access and familiarity with the prison and many of its staff members; it was noticeable I was not a conventional 'visitor' to the establishment. I was often cast in a number of different roles, most commonly mistaken for a psychologist or external agency worker. In most instances, I was able to disclaim my employee status and describe my role as a research student. However at times, being identified as a student seemed to work against me and I occasionally encountered some anxious attitudes from staff members who showed concern over my unsupervised access to all areas of the prison, including, staff-access-only IT systems, prisoner files and records, and the prisoners themselves. The apprehensions exhibited by staff were perhaps professional concerns over access to the protected material (and the prisoners themselves) since I presented no evidence of having approved clearance for retrieving such data and staff perhaps feared being held liable for allowing my apparent misconduct to take place under their watch. More often it seemed like sheer interest, curiosity and confusion from staff as to who I was and what I was doing which prompted their interrogations. However, this occurrence was rare and as previously mentioned, I was generally overlooked.

My apparent inexperience also resulted in prison staff rendering the full description of terms and abbreviations used in the prison community and describing issues and functions to me in the simplest terms. Although some might consider this condescending, it was intended in a helpful and accommodating manner rather than an intention to belittle or patronise me. On these occasions, I would react by showing appreciation for their instruction and support rather than describing my pre-existing knowledge of such information.

On the other hand, certain biographical elements contributed to the processes of developing relationships and of overcoming the institutional fear of outsiders. I sensed staff appreciated the fact that I had not come from a purely academic background but had some experience of working on the wings and could empathise with the difficulties of 'the job'. Like Liebling (1992), I consider that having an understanding of the concerns pertinent to staff (job security, privatisation threats, limitations of role and so forth) minimised hesitation about conversing with me.

Prison employees who knew me in my previous capacity were often unaware of my new ‘independent’ researcher and student status. It was commonly assumed that I had been absent from New Hall to undertake research in another prison (not an unusual scenario in my previous role). Staff would often introduce me to other staff members as ‘a HMPS researcher’ and fail to mention my student status. Implicit in this, I felt, was a sense that I was ‘one of them’. Staff would occasionally call upon me to carry out duties pertinent to my previous employed role and I would have to inform them I no longer held such responsibilities and was there only to conduct my own research, which left me conscious I may be perceived as uncharitable and self-seeking. Despite my best efforts, but perhaps inevitably and necessarily, my identity remained blurred throughout the course of the fieldwork.

Prisoners also expressed great confusion over my identity. Again, my familiarity with the establishment and its staff seemed dubious for someone claiming to be an ‘outsider’. A number of the women recognised me, or knew me, from my previous position causing further suspicion; they would question my employment status and dispute my claims to be a student. For example, one prisoner asserted “you’re not a student, I remember you, you were doing those questionnaires at Askham [Grange prison]”. The woman announced that three years earlier I had interviewed her as part of an investigation I had carried out under the direction of the governor at HMP Askham Grange which assessed the quality of various aspects of the prisoners’ lives in custody. The women light-heartedly made jokes concerning my identity and motives after recognising me as an ex-prison employee. The women alleged I was an ‘informant’ of some kind, covertly gathering intelligence and ‘snitching’ or feeding back to authorities. Unfortunately, the nicknames I was assigned by this particular group of women: the ‘undercover copper’, ‘Governor’s spy’ and so forth, stuck with me for a number of weeks. These playful, teasing remarks actually enhanced the relationship with the women. I would typically overcome any suspicions by explicitly clarifying, quite honestly, that I left my employed position in order to conduct research objectively as an ‘independent’ which allowed me to explore the women’s experiences and include their viewpoints and perceptions. This usually relieved the women’s concerns and allowed me to build a rapport. By sharing this personal biographical account, it felt I had offered something of my life which meant the women sharing detailed accounts of their lives in discussions or interviews was

somewhat reciprocal. This not only allowed me to develop a relatively trusting relationship with the women, in an environment where trust is valuable, but it also opened additional doors as some of the discussants and interviewees were recruited on a rolling basis. During the fieldwork, the women would essentially vouch for my credibility to other inmates, often affirming “she’s alright, you can talk in front of her”. The encounter described in the following diary extract demonstrates such dilemmas:

“When [Ashleigh] returned from her video link [session with her wife] she became emotional. I tried to comfort her and made her a cup of tea from my tea pack (a form of sharing which is forbidden amongst the prisoners)... [Ashleigh talked at length] about her relationship with her wife and disclosed how she was abusing the use of [prescribed medication] she had traded... to help with the pains of separation. At this point [Katy-Anne] interjected and [scolded Ashleigh] for talking so openly to me, stating in front of me “watch what you say to her” and pointed at me!... [Ashleigh] was quick to jump to my defence saying “she won’t say shit”. Not knowing how to respond, I sat in silence while they argued my allegiance in front of me!... [Katy-Anne] has been more wary of me than the others from the start; I’ve noticed she is the only one who doesn’t take her turn for a smoke in the toilets (a forbidden act) until she thinks I’m not looking. When I see them signal for her turn [to smoke], I purposely go to talk with [Jane] at the folding table so that I have my back to the toilet door... and I saw [Katy-Anne] [signal] towards me [as if to warn of my presence] when [Louise] was describing her techniques for hiding the lighter in her bra. [Louise] just shrugged it off though.”

3.11 Managing my identity

There were a number of ways in which I tried to manage my identity by considering factors such as self-presentation. My aim was to appear non-threatening and without institutional power to the prisoners in order to encourage the building of trust and rapport.

In my previous capacity, prisoners would routinely address me as ‘Miss’, as would staff in the presence of inmates. During the fieldwork I continually insisted on the abandonment of formal terms of address and insisted on being called Lucy. Prisoners acknowledged this request and used my given name comfortably, while staff, particularly discipline officers, continued to address me as ‘Miss’. Prison officers at New Hall often use formal terms of address for one another but call prisoners by

their first names, therefore it was considered that staff may have felt uncomfortable with using my given name since it would have been almost marking me a prisoner. Nonetheless, I did note that other visitors were customarily called by their first names by staff and therefore by addressing me formally, officers were essentially categorising me as one of them. It was also considered that the use of formal address could have been simply due to their forgetting my name.

3.11.1 Disposing of suits and uniforms

Although dress might seem a trivial matter, I was conscious of how it fundamentally represents power within the establishment and I was keen to exhibit my transformation from staff member to independent researcher by abandoning my recognised formal wear. It was noted during the fieldwork that women would occasionally refer to discipline staff as ‘the uniforms’, and similarly, Governors, Senior Management Team members, high-ranking visiting officials, for example, were dubbed ‘the suits’.

Female prisoners at New Hall are permitted to wear their own clothes if deemed appropriate. Many women arrive at New Hall with only the clothes they are wearing; many have lived homeless, dependant on drugs and working as prostitutes; where clothes are deemed inappropriate (for instance: excessively damaged, insanitary or exposing), a set of alternative attire is provided from a depository of unwanted prisoner clothes. In many cases a work-place uniform is pre-requisite, such as kitchen whites, gardening overalls, and so forth, but generally the women opt for casual or comfortable wear, typically: tracksuits, hooded sweatshirts, trainers. Although my aim was to appear approachable and accessible to prisoners, at the same time, I was aware that I would be expected to present a professional image. I did not wear a suit, nor did I wear a tracksuit and trainers, however I did try and dissociate myself from the institution by wearing clothes that made me look unofficial. The downside to this was the attention it attracted from prison staff; it highlighted me as the unsupervised visiting student I essentially was. Occasions where I visited the gymnasium wearing casual sports clothing, I noticed a difference in the way I was received by prisoners as I was often mistaken for a prisoner.

3.11.2 A 'key' issue

What I initially feared would be the most destructive factor to my attempts to appear 'unofficial' to prisoners was the matter of prison keys since they are emblematic of institutional power within prisons. A number of authors have discussed the issue of researchers holding keys within prison (Genders and Player, 1995; King, 2000; King and Liebling, 2008; Liebling, 1992; Mills, 2004; Sparks *et al.*, 1996), and opinions on the matter are somewhat divided. King (2000:305), for example, argues that researchers should not hold keys to the prison as "the possession of keys is so symbolic of the difference between freedom and captivity that it would place the researcher too close to staff" and thus decreases trust. I did not at any time feel that my keys negatively impacted my efforts to appear approachable and accessible. Mills (2004) also debates the need for researchers holding keys, in reference to issues of personal safety, particularly as a female researcher. However, Mills (2004) research was conducting research in a male establishment investigating rape perpetrators, which certainly raises issues of personal safety less pertinent to my own experience.

Possessing keys was the inescapable compromise I made for having unsupervised access to all areas of the establishment. My access arrangements required me to carry keys in order to limit the burden on prison staff by diminishing the need for an escort. Although they may have contributed to some of the women's confusion over my identity, despite my initial concerns, I did ultimately view them as valuable. Without the possession of keys I would have been fully reliant on staff escorts and would not have enjoyed some of the experiences and developed the relationships with prisoners I was able to, having had a uniformed escort in constant close proximity to me. Keys granted me freedom to move around the prison between wings, workshops, classrooms and offices during the course of the day, allowing me to manage my time more effectively. The women appreciated my capability to offer privacy; keys allowed me to take the women to a space where they could talk without interruptions and the presence of discipline officers.

3.12 Social identity

There are many aspects of my identity I am not able to control or manage which arguably impact my role as a researcher, for instance: my age, sex, ethnic origin, regional background and accent, vocation, and so forth. According to Warren (1988:13):

“The fieldworker’s reception by the host society is a reflection of the cultural contextualisation of the fieldworker’s characteristics, which include marital status, age, physical appearance, presence and number of children, and ethnic, racial class, or national differences as well as gender”.

Bosworth *et al.* (2005) argued that qualitative researchers should reflect on their identity within the social relations of fieldwork. Nonetheless, there is little discussion around what impact social identity factors have, if any, on the research’s role. This omission in the literature is highlighted by Gelsthorpe (1990:95) who argues these factors are “often underplayed, if not ignored” in the research literature as they “do not ask how far personal biography and experience influence the research role, what the significance of age is on field relations, what it is like to be a woman/man doing research in a male/female setting” and so on, despite its significance.

With regards to race, I am a white British researcher in a predominantly white setting (with more than eighty-five percent of New Hall’s population being white, and correspondingly, fifteen percent of my informants represented ethnic minority groups). There were no apparent issues of ethnicity differences impacting the relationships with participants. I did not observe or encounter any incidents of racism and there was no mention of it being a feature in their lives; although this outcome may have differed had I represented a different ethnic group. However, in the course of conducting the research I noted a number of significant dynamics, particularly around my gender, age and personal biography.

The HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2013) recognises that “the management of prisons, and individual prisoners, can often be dominated by men... The ratio of male to female staff is too high in some prisons.” Employees at New Hall appeared relatively gender balanced with a seemingly equal number of women and men in positions of management, administrative and discipline roles. A female prison researcher is not a new phenomenon; much research has been carried out over the years in both male

and female establishments by female researchers (e.g. Campbell, 2002; Genders and Player, 1995; Liebling, 1992, 2001; Morris and Morris, 1963; Scully, 1991). In relation to the prisoners at New Hall, I consider being female an influential factor to the positive engagement and trusting relationships I built with the women which helped with the recruitment of interviewees. Conversely, Martin (2000) argues, “[i]t is the skills, not the gender, of the researcher that establishes his/her credibility and this is the crucial factor in determining the willingness of prisoners to participate in a research project”. I would argue that many of the women would be more open to discussion on certain issues, perhaps, motherhood, prostitution, sexual assault, with another woman. Many of the women reported being in, or having previously been in, intimidating, violent and/or sexually abusive relationships with men. HM Inspectorate of Prisons reported in its most recent inspection of New Hall prison (2012) that 38 percent of women had experienced sexual abuse or rape, 38 percent had experienced emotional abuse; 21 percent of women had worked in the sex industry; and 46 percent had experienced physical abuse, most of which was at the hands of a male perpetrator. Therefore, although it cannot be verified, I would contend being female proved advantageous in speaking with vulnerable women on such sensitive topics. I encountered this resonance from some of the women’s comments implicating identification with me as a woman. For example, one woman when discussing feeling overpowered as a woman and dominated by her male partners, she alleged “well, you know how it is”.

Age was a more significant factor which I feel affected my interactions within the research setting. Although maturity might be considered an asset in carrying out prison research as it indicates experience, signifying respect and authority, I found the contrary to generate additional advantages. A large majority of the prisoners were older than me with the average age of New Hall’s women, at the time of the research, being 33 years old. I was in my mid-twenties at the time of carrying out the fieldwork, although I suspected many of the prisoners perceived me as somewhat younger. My apparent ‘youth’ was a common discussion point amongst the prisoners. Unsubtly, women frequently made comments with regards to my age, such as: “you’re just a baby”, “what do your mum and dad say about you doing this [research]?” and so forth. They would regularly ask me how my ‘school project’ was going. Evidently, I did not present an image of power and authority. In my previous

employed position, although I joined the prison service as a teenager, I do not recall experiencing the same level of protection and attentiveness from prisoners as I did on this occasion despite being several years older. Clearly, the image I presented in my employed capacity was much different. Not only were there conscious transformations made in relation to my physical appearance (i.e. abandoning my suit) and my tolerance for misconduct (i.e. allowing rule-breaking to go unpunished), but perhaps more significantly, inadvertent changes in my behaviour and personal character. For my part, I felt much more confident and at ease in my employed capacity having close supervision and the support of the establishment and its staff, and therefore probably exhibited much more self-assurance and poise, in contrast to my more recent image of naivety and inexperience during the PhD fieldwork. I did not consider this a negative dynamic. In some respects, being perceived as naïve, worked to my advantage. This image of a ‘green’ research student supported my aim to appear unthreatening, which in all probability contributed to the women’s ease in talking openly to me, and in front of me.

3.13 Developing relationships and power dynamics

The prison staff had very little involvement in the design, arrangement and organisation of the research. It was assumed I would conduct the research complying with all prison procedures and causing little disruption to the regime and the prison staff. In the event, there were occasions when due to not receiving notification on alterations to regime practices, I was often in danger of causing disruption. Ironically, the prisoners would often notify me of correct protocol to safeguard me from causing commotion to the regime with regards to completing the necessary paperwork and inform me of the organised times for ‘movement’ around the prison. Prisoners are only permitted to move between areas of the establishment (for example, to attend work) during ‘line route’ or ‘movement’ periods which occur at set hours of the day. The opening of ‘line route’ involves operational support grade staff supervising the pathways between various areas of the prison, ensuring all women reach their arranged destination. Following the ‘movement’ period, central control office will conduct ‘roll count’ which involves accounting for every prisoner by contacting all of their arranged destinations for confirmation of their arrival. If staff require a prisoner to move outside the ‘movement’ period unescorted (for example, allowing

the prisoner to leave work to attend a doctor's appointment), they are to be issued with a 'movement slip'; this is essentially paperwork authorising their movement which involves a phone-call from the sending location to the receiving site, signatures, times stamps and so forth. When taking the women from one site to another to allow privacy when conducting interviews, the prisoners would inform me of correct movement times and ensure I completed their movement slips correctly when allowing them to 'move' unsupervised, asserting that "you will get in shit if you do it wrong". Occasionally I experienced some of the women almost 'mothering' me. Often, but not intentionally, I found myself consumed with anxiety and uneasiness in unfamiliar and challenging positions. As previously described, my observation experience was very much participatory; I immersed myself with the women by taking part in daily activities in the prison. This included acquiring a 'job' in the prisoner workshops; for the most part, a sewing factory but also for a short period in an assembly workshop where I spent my days packaging toilet rolls. In the assembly workshops I worked hard, contributing fairly to the workload and would take my breaks at the customary times alongside the other prisoners as if the work were officially imposed on me as it was for them. I would often eat with the prisoners and spend association time on the prison wings alongside the women doing things I would not ordinarily do such as; sit watching television soaps, do the ironing, played pool, sit with the women looking at clothes in mail order catalogues and I tried to join in discussions on subjects I often knew very little about. Some occasions saw me attend the chapel and sports and fitness classes in the prisoners' gymnasium, again things I would not typically do in my normal daily life. Not only was I in unfamiliar surroundings, I was engaging in activities and affairs that would have been alien to me even outside the prison walls, which added to my uneasiness. Had I been a confident athlete, been able to hold a snooker cue properly, had some knowledge of Coronation Street's storyline, and so forth, I might not have felt so far out of my depth. For example, during my time in a sewing workshop, I positioned myself at a workstation alongside the other women; my intention being to 'blend' into the environment and observe everyday life in the workplace. The women were fully aware of my student researcher status and we would often discuss my research interests whilst at work. I was given a patch of navy blue material (practice cloth for new starters), to allow myself to become familiar with the machinery and refine my technique before I would be assessed for progression into the actual operational line

where I would be tasked with sewing elastic waistbands onto male prisoner boxer shorts. Unfortunately, due to my inexperience of using sewing machinery and general lack of skills in needlecraft, I failed to keep up with operations. In truth, I failed to even get started until my station neighbour who observed my embarrassed panic, took pity on me and helped me get underway. My apparent position of vulnerability led to the offering of ongoing support and encouragement throughout my time in the workshop from the women. I recall one occasion where a woman who had been providing me with support during that session had to leave work to attend a visit and she appointed somebody to supervise me, requesting “will you keep an eye on Lucy for me while I’m gone?” as if I required a babysitter. Regrettably I was never promoted from the ‘practice cloth’, but the women would instead task me with less challenging projects, such as stitching shapes, and would offer congratulations on my slight progression. This mentoring arrangement completely altered the power dynamics in our relationship. I did notice that ‘mothering’ was a feature of how older prisoners relate to younger prisoners who were perceived as more vulnerable. This ‘matronising’ seemed more common on the prison wings when the younger girls showed more need for attentiveness, not typically in the sewing room. For example, a number of the older prisoners talked of how they have tried to ‘watch over’ or comfort the younger prisoners who were self-harming. The older women regularly depicted imprisonment as especially difficult for the younger girls and would often refer to them as the ‘youngsters’ or the ‘babies’.

Similar to my experience in the workshop, I attended volleyball training practice, feeling compelled after receiving an invitation from a woman I had been working alongside in the workshop. Despite my best efforts, I was not only hopeless, but very much a hindrance, causing disruption to the flow of the game and preventing a victory for whichever team that was burdened with me. In spite of my ineptness, the women were kind and encouraging, assuring me that I would improve with practice. What positively came from this interaction was an occasion to exhibit my sense of fun and humour with the women, allowing them to make jokes of my incompetence, diminishing any image of power I might have previously displayed. This image of a ‘dippy’, naïve student did not jeopardise my attempts at effectively collecting data; although unintended, I felt it essentially worked to my advantage by allowing me to appear unthreatening and approachable. This became evident when they would

commit actions forbidden by the prison in my presence, such as trading items and smoking in no-smoking areas. They were aware of the fact that I was intentionally overlooking and not reacting to any misconduct I observed. In a respect, I was demonstrating a sense of loyalty to the prisoners by not reporting such actions to staff. I was however conscious that by immersing myself with the women in such a way, that I could be perceived by staff as ‘taking sides’ with the women.

3.14 Neutrality and sympathy

Although my aim was not to distance myself from staff, other researchers have reported intentionally doing so in order to develop rapport and credibility with their study group (Cohen and Taylor, 1972). However, this research aimed to explore the needs and experiences of incarcerated women at New Hall through discussion with the woman but also to explore the prison employees’ observations and experiences of working with these women; dissociation from staff would jeopardise this opportunity. Therefore the initial intention was to follow the advice of King and Liebling (2008:444): ‘retain your neutrality; try not to take sides’.

Although there are general expectations on qualitative researchers to remain objective, maintaining a neutral position is not so straightforwardly accomplished for various reasons. Firstly, some might argue the impossibility of my capacity to remain completely impartial based on my previous knowledge of and experiences within the prison service. Additionally, some might contend that as a result of my gratitude in receiving support and ongoing access to the establishment exclusively for the purpose of conducting my own research, I might feel compelled to display a sense of loyalty to the organisation. Indeed, it would be difficult to write a hyper-critical report on an institution that had previously employed me and had accommodated my requests in doing research, but at the same time, the gatekeepers were fully aware that my approach was not a quest to ‘dig up dirt’ or expose poor treatment or conditions, but to better understand the experiences of repeatedly imprisoned women serving short-term sentences, constructively highlighting system failures, without being unfairly critical. The institution was aware that my motivations were to help the prison help the prisoners who were generating increasingly high reoffending rates, and that my methods involved encompassing the

views and opinions of not only the women but also those who work with the women. Not at any stage did I feel any pressure or expectations from the establishment to generate particular findings. Throughout the fieldwork, I avoided feeding back any findings to the prison until the fieldwork was complete in agreement with King and Liebling (2008:445) that sharing information with officials before the fieldwork is complete “is potentially difficult, especially if views of reality differ, if bad news emerges, and is likely to undermine prospects of maintaining a ‘neutral’ position in the eyes of staff and prisoners”.

One of the most uncomfortable situations during the fieldwork was receiving complaints from prisoners about the prison, its services, and the regime. However, these were not reports of serious incidents or abuse but more of a general frustration at the lack of support within the prison. My initial concerns were that reporting negative feedback of this type to management could have been viewed as me taking sides with the prisoners, although these frustrations were generally shared by prison workers. Staff frequently complained of reduced spending in prisons limiting their capacity and impacting the quality of the services they delivered. Fortunately this meant I was not placed in a compromising position between the prisoners and those who confine them. Unlike Crewe (2009) who talked of the anxieties he faced in having to decline requests from prisoners to bring innocuous items into the prison, the women at New Hall made no demands or requests that would place me in such an awkward position. Despite my seeming naivety, the women made no attempts to exploit my vulnerability in such a way, and as previously revealed, the women made great efforts to safeguard me from generating conflict with prison officials.

Although I expressed great interest in listening and understanding the prisoners’ views and opinions about their imprisonment, positive or negative, it was made clear to the women that my function was not to impose changes or resolve issues since I did not hold the power or authority to do so, but to accurately depict their experiences and outlooks in my research write-up. Prisoners did not challenge this explanation of my role and since I was generally seen as powerless, I felt I was essentially being used as an outlet for their complaints and aggravations rather than being expected to resolve their issues. Like Crewe (2009) I felt I became a ‘lightning rod’ for complaints and grievances from prisoners after developing a reputation for being a good listener.

At the time, there was also the prospect of my returning to New Hall for employment post-PhD. This generated a number of concerns, including that, if re-entering the site as a member of staff, I would have a duty to the prison to enforce rules and impose discipline upon those who violate or challenge regulations. After making assurances to prisoners of my nonalignment and impartiality, I would be conscious of appearing deceptive and was concerned about the potential to generate anxiety in those women who had previously disclosed negative personal feelings against the prison and staff or performed prohibited acts against prison regulation in my presence.

Becker (1967:239) highlights the issue of researchers being ‘caught in a crossfire’ in his paper suitably titled ‘Whose side are we on?’. Becker strongly believes that qualitative research cannot be value free, and therefore “the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on” (1967:239). In contradiction to Becker’s claim that it is impossible to not take sides, Liebling (2001) argues that the prison researcher does not have to take only one side, but that an appreciation and degree of allegiance to both sides is possible. Liebling claimed that building rapport with all contributors by supporting all sides is not only achievable, but vital. In the context of my research, although it might be assumed that the two sides in the power dynamic are to be the prisoners and those that confine them, it was rather, ‘the prison’ as the subordinate, and ‘the Government’ (those who generate sentencing laws, dictate the prison regime, set the prison targets, restrict the funding, and so forth) as what Liebling (2001) describes as the ‘superordinates’.

In agreement with Becker, completely impartial research is improbable in this type of environment due to the human nature of research and the level of intimacy with the prisoners I experienced during the intensive fieldwork period. With the focus of my study being on the prisoners and their experiences, it was difficult to not feel sympathy with the women, something which Becker (1967) considered perfectly normal and logical. Many of the staff and workers at the prison also exhibited sympathy for the short-term prisoner population and their frustrations, which is arguably a natural effect of working so closely within such a confined environment (Arnold, 2005). It would seem inconceivable to some that these women, who have been removed from society for transgressing society’s norms by committing criminal acts, some violent, would engender feelings of sympathy, but human nature sees us make attachments that may seem illogical.

All things considered, the prisoners are humans and my choice of an ethnographic approach combined with the very personal nature of the discussions caused me to form relationships with them. I was conscious that my involvement with prisoners could be open to criticism in terms of researcher bias but I consider it both valid and unavoidable that our real selves, personal biographical experiences and personalities become 'entangled' with others in the dynamic. Although a concerted effort was made to retain neutrality, I found it was impossible to disregard sympathy. Becker strongly maintains that all research is inescapably contaminated by these emotions and despite best efforts to minimise individual values and biases, they cannot be eradicated. Being sympathetic and taking one side or another could undoubtedly impact on the data but it does not invalidate it. Ethnographers and qualitative researchers invariably leave an individual mark on the data collection process.

3.15 Emotions

While the majority of research relationships are uncontentious, on occasions researchers can find their emotions caught up with the field-research experience, especially when undertaking research of a sensitive or emotional nature (Smith and Wincup, 2000). While the nature of the research undertaken here in practice involved a great deal of involvement with participants in an intensive environment discussing emotional and sensitive topics, I am mindful that my emotional response to the field-research is of relevance. Understandably it is hard to not be affected emotionally to respondents describing difficult or distressing experiences, which is certainly the situation I endeavour to illustrate here. Although it is acknowledged that one might be affected in an emotionally positive way, during this research which focused on the women's problems and negative experiences that had led to their imprisonment, the emotions demonstrated (and felt) were predominantly ones of distress.

The very act of exploring women's imprisonment proved to be an emotionally exhausting experience. I was moved by the strengths and insights demonstrated by the women in sharing their stories and felt privileged to have been permitted access to their emotions and experiences, but at the same time I found the undertaking of the field-research at times emotionally challenging. The repeated listening for long periods of time to emotionally distressed women's detailed and often graphic reports

of traumatic life experiences, such as, incidents of brutal domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse throughout their lives, often starting in childhood; self-harm and suicide attempts, homelessness, battles with drug and alcohol addiction, and having children removed and the pains of separation, is a psychologically taxing experience for the researcher, but undoubtedly more so for the women sharing their accounts. This underlines the importance of the research investigating sensitive issues in an intensive environment have access to a debriefing source following interviews to deal with emotional issues if necessary. This came in the form of regular formalised meetings with supervisors, and also informally with close friends and colleagues.

Many occasions saw older respondents exhibiting concern for my emotional state and questioning my boundaries for hearing sensitive detail before continuing. Despite my efforts in appearing composed and unaffected by their reports, they would often verify “are you okay with me telling you about this?” before revealing disturbing or upsetting information. I would positively assure them of my aptitude to cope with hearing their accounts and encourage them to continue. There were times when I watched the women weep, particularly when talking about estrangement from their children, and it did require great effort to contain my reactions. Admittedly, this type of emotive demonstration from some discussants contributed to my inability to disregard feelings of compassion and empathy for the women and the traumatic experiences some have suffered. Although many of the women commented on how they found our discussions satisfying, valuable and ‘healing’, the reality of the situation is that nothing was practically resolved through these interactions (other than for my own gain in nearing the completion of my doctorate). The women did not just suffer for the period of my research project but continue to suffer and were not able to walk away from these problems at the end of it all as I was, yet despite this, they continually expressed concern for my welfare. I was intensely mindful of the fact that, given certain circumstances, arguably any woman might find herself in a similar situation, and it was difficult not to envisage how different my own life would be if I were to endure some of their life events. In some respects, I saw aspects of myself, my friends and my relatives in the women I interviewed. Arguably, this realisation encouraged me to listen more intently to their reports. Not only can the interviewing experience have an emotional effect on the researcher during the actual encounter, but it was also problematic bringing these discussions to a close

and walking away from the prisoners and their problems at the end of the research day without harbouring feelings of guilt. Although I could not disconnect my emotions and reactions from the research process, I would argue that they positively led me to a deeper understanding of the reality for these women.

Through self-reflexivity I have examined the identities I inhabited through my research study. By allowing such transparency and openness with regard to my own emotions, character and behaviour within the research setting, I run the risk of feeling uneasy and perhaps slightly foolish. However, this is a risk worth taking, because at the same time it allows the data collected during my research experience to be interpreted in its wider context with an honest consideration to how the research process was moulded by the person I am and the image I presented.

3.16 Conclusion

There is no substitute for the insight and experience gained through prison ethnographic research. Lee (1993) has argued that when researchers emphasise the problematic nature of field-research, the depiction is often one of a 'heroic tale' in which the disinclination of those being studied is overcome as a result of the diligence and cleverness of the researcher. This is not a 'heroic tale'; admittedly there were times when I failed to manage my researcher self appropriately in a way which shaped the research process. I cannot claim that the openness of the women I encountered was a result of my skill and artifice; instead, my unintentional but apparent youth, naiveté and vulnerability in the research setting built a two-way supportive relationship which stimulated openness.

Recollecting the women's stories through repeated listening to the interviews and reviewing my reflective journal kept the information very much alive in the months following the fieldwork period. This has urged me to do justice to the stories and experiences illustrated by the women and the staff. Whilst many of the sights, sounds and smells are often lost in translating the empirical experience to paper, it is hoped that what follows in the next five chapters is an accurate portrayal of the experiences of those women who are repeatedly imprisoned for short periods of time. I endeavour to express the problematic, depressing and concerning reality of the

challenges and barriers the women face in escaping the 'revolving door', through the hopeful voices of the women and those that work to support them.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Women

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is designed to give an overall depiction of the women at HMP New Hall who were repeatedly imprisoned for short periods of time and whose experiences are the focus of this study. The chapter will outline the demographics for the targeted population of female prisoners and my sample, exploring commonalities in their social backgrounds and characteristics, as well as a view of some of the shared experiences and struggles these women typically encounter.

This chapter is presented in two parts. Part one presents the statistical composition of the short-term adult prisoner population at HMP New Hall. The population analysis considers the following basic demographics: age, ethnic origin, nationality, home area on reception to prison, religion, offence type, sentence length, previous imprisonment record, descendants, and substance misuse issues. A comparison between the short-term prisoner population and the women who were recruited for interview as part of this study will be presented. The objective is to illustrate how representative my participant group was of the population of adult short-term prisoners at New Hall. It should be noted however, that the population analysis has not been restricted to include only those who are categorised as repeat offenders due to complications in obtaining such information, despite criteria for inclusion in this study being restricted to those who had a history of repeat imprisonment. The explanation for, and consequence of, this inconsistency is explored later in this chapter. Part one will finish with a descriptive summary of a typical adult female short-term prisoner at New Hall based on the sample characteristics presented, accompanied by a comparable description of a typical woman from my participant group. Part two of this chapter presents a case study of a representative woman from my sample group, who for the reason of ensuring anonymity has been given the pseudonym 'Nadia'. The case history of Nadia provides an up-close narrative, representing many of the issues typically experienced by repeat short-term prisoners at New Hall. The case history of Nadia tells of her ongoing experience of repeatedly being imprisoned for short lengths of time and the circumstances surrounding her offending in relation to her substance misuse issues, destructive relationships with

offending partners, previous experiences of violent and sexual abuse starting in childhood, involvement in the sex industry, homelessness, negative attitudes, financial difficulties, separation from her children, along with her successes and positive outlooks for the future and her personal view as to what support provisions she considered would better her chances of being able to leave a life of crime.

4.2 A population analysis of short-term adult prisoners at New Hall

4.2.1 Introduction

This snap-shot population analysis at New Hall prison is based on roll figures from 30th August 2013 (approximate halfway point through the fieldwork). All data were obtained using the P-NOMIS (Prison National Offender Management Information System) and the OASys (Offender Assessment System), and analysis presented on the study sample of women included self-report data.

In 2013, New Hall accommodated over ten percent of the entire female prison population of England and Wales. On the date of analysis, New Hall housed a total of 371 women, which exceeded 87 percent of its occupational capacity of 425, and occupied 100 percent of its 'in use' CNA (Certified Normal Accommodation)². New Hall prison's population was made up of both remand prisoners (n=54) and convicted prisoners (n=317). Of the sentenced prisoner population at New Hall, 21.5 percent (n=68) were short-term prisoners (explicitly, serving a sentence of less than twelve months). Eighty-eight percent of the short-term prisoner population (n=60) were over the age of 21. A total of twenty women were recruited for interview for the purpose of this study from the short-term adult population at New Hall between May 2013 and December 2013. A separate analysis of these twenty women is presented for comparison. It should be noted, that some of the participants are also contained in the overall population figure if they were in custody at New Hall at the time of the snap-shot analysis.

²Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA), or uncrowded capacity, is the Prison Service's own measure of accommodation. CNA represents the good, decent standard of accommodation that the Service aspires to provide all prisoners. 'In-use' CNA figure excludes places not available for immediate use, for example: damaged cells, cells affected by building works (HM Prison Service, 2012a).

4.2.2 Age

Unlike the adult (over 21 years of age) short-term population who left custody unconditionally and did not (at the time of the research) receive supervision in the community, the ‘Young Offenders’ (18-21 years of age) differ in that they received supervision post-release, which entailed reporting regularly to a probation officer. This supervision ends at three months or on reaching their 22nd birthday, whichever came first. If conditions of supervision were broken, the young offender may have been fined or sentenced to thirty more days in prison. This analysis concerns only the adult prisoner population serving short-term sentences and therefore excludes the eight young offenders from this analysis. The average age of the remaining 60 short-term prisoners is 35 years, with the youngest being 22 and the eldest being 64. Table 4.1 below shows that the prisoners aged 31-35 made up the highest proportion of the targeted population accounting for 22 percent (n=13), closely followed by the 22-25 year old group at twenty percent (n=12).

Table 4.1: Table showing the ages of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the 20 participants recruited into the study

Age group	No. of women from targeted population	% of targeted population	Number of participants	% of participants
22-25	12	20%	4	20%
26-30	9	15%	5	25%
31-35	13	22%	6	30%
36-40	9	15%	2	10%
41-45	10	17%	1	5%
46-50	3	5%	1	5%
51-55	2	3%	1	5%
56-60	0	-	0	-
60+	2	3%	0	-
Total	60	100%	20	100%

The average age of the twenty women recruited as part of this research was 33, with their ages ranging from 24 to 51. Table 4.1 shows that nearly a third of the women in the study (30%, n=6) were in the 31-35 years age bracket, a quarter of the sample (n=5) were in the 26-30 years age bracket and a fifth of the participants (n=4) were aged 22-25 years, and the remaining quarter (n=5) were over the age of 35. This shows that the average age of the participants recruited was slightly younger with a

slightly shorter range. Only fifteen percent of the sample (n=3) were over the age of 40 with the oldest participant being 51; no participants occupied the 56-60 and 60+ categories. For the most part, the sample is considered representative of the short-term prisoner population.

4.2.3 Ethnic origin

Table 4.2 below shows that the majority of the short-term adult prisoner population (88%) reported their ethnicity as ‘White British’ (n=53), five percent of the targeted population stated their ethnic origin as ‘White Other’ (n=3), three percent as ‘White Irish’, with 2% categorised as ‘Black Caribbean’ (n=1), and two percent as ‘Mixed White/ Black Caribbean’ (n=1). Of the twenty women who participated in this study, seventeen (85%) were ‘White British’, two (10%) were ‘Mixed White/Black Caribbean’ and one woman was ‘Black Caribbean’.

Table 4.2: Table showing the ethnic origins of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the 20 participants recruited into the study

Ethnic Origin	Number of women from targeted population	% of targeted population	Number of participants	% of participants
Asian Indian	0	-	0	-
Asian Pakistani	0	-	0	-
Asian Bangladeshi	0	-	0	-
Asian Other	0	-	0	-
Black Caribbean	1	2%	1	5%
Black African	0	-	0	-
Black Other	0	-	0	-
Mixed White/ Black Caribbean	1	2%	2	10%
Mixed White/Asian	0	-	0	-
Mixed Other	0	-	0	-
Other	0	-	0	-
White British	53	88%	17	85%
White Irish	2	3%	0	-
White Other	3	5%	0	-
Not stated	0	-	0	-
Total	60	100%	20	100%

This comparative table shows the study participants contained a slightly higher 'BME' representation than the overall short-term prisoner population with 85 percent of participants being 'White', while 97 percent of the overall population are represented by those whose ethnic origin was categorised as 'White'. However, those categorised as 'White Irish' and 'White Other' in the short-term adult prisoner population do not feature in the study, as all 'White' participants are 'White British'.

4.2.4 Nationality

New Hall's short-term adult prisoner population consists of mainly British nationals (92%, n=85). This leaves only five prisoners within this population which divide among three other nationalities: Irish, Romanian and Polish. All twenty participants in this study were British nationals, so my study therefore the sample omits representation from Foreign Nationals.

4.2.5 Home area (on reception to prison)

Table 4.3 below illustrates that of the 60 short-term adult prisoners at New Hall, just over a quarter (27%, n=16) were from West Yorkshire (including the areas of: Wakefield (the prison's local area), Halifax, Leeds, Bradford, and Dewsbury), the same number were from South Yorkshire (including the areas of: Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster, and Barnsley), a fifth (n=20) were from East Riding of Yorkshire (areas within and around Kingston upon Hull) and the remaining 27 percent (n=16) were categorised under 'Other'. Those categorised under 'Other' divided amongst the areas of: Lincolnshire, West Midlands, North Yorkshire, Lancashire, London, Cumbria, County Durham and Dorset, as well as Ireland.

Of those twenty participants recruited for the purpose of this study, 40 percent (n=8) were from West Yorkshire (including areas of: Wakefield, Halifax and Leeds), 30 percent (n=6) were from South Yorkshire (including areas of: Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield), a fifth of the women in the study (n=4) reported being from Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire, while the remaining ten percent (n=2) reported being from areas within Lincolnshire and Lancashire (categorised below as 'Other').

Table 4.3: Table showing the home area on reception of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the 20 participants recruited into the study

Home area on reception	Number of women from targeted population	% of targeted population	Number of participants	% of participants
East Riding of Yorkshire	12	20%	4	20%
South Yorkshire	16	27%	6	30%
West Yorkshire	16	27%	8	40%
Other	16	27%	2	10%
Total	60	100%	20	100%

The majority (90%) of the participants in the study were from areas of Yorkshire, which correlates with the home areas of the majority (77%, including those from North Yorkshire) of the population of the short-term adult prisoners at New Hall. However, only ten percent of the sample (n=2) were from other areas of the country despite 23 percent (n=14) of the short-term population being from areas outside of Yorkshire.

4.2.6 Religion

Of the 60 short-term adult prisoners at HMP New Hall, 35 percent reported being of no religion (n=21). The main religion reported was Church of England - Anglican by 32 percent of the targeted population (n=19), followed by Roman Catholic accounting for twenty percent of the population (n=12), five women (8%) reported being 'Christian' without specifying any denomination, whilst two percent (n=1) reported being Muslim. The remaining three percent (n=2) did not declare their religious beliefs.

Of the twenty women in the study, 40 percent (n=8) reported being of no religion, 35 percent (n=7) reported Church of England – Anglican as their religion, fifteen percent (n=3) were Roman Catholic, whilst five percent (n=1) reported being Christian without specifying a denomination or branch of Christianity, and five percent were Muslim (n=1). This sample is considered representative of the short-term prisoner population.

Table 4.4: Table showing the religions of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the 20 participants recruited into the study

Religion (religion code)	Number of women from targeted population	% of targeted population	Number of participants	% of participants
Christian	5	8%	1	5%
Church of England – Anglican	19	32%	7	35%
Muslim	1	2%	1	5%
No religion	21	35%	8	40%
Not specified	2	3%	0	-
Roman Catholic	12	20%	3	15%
Total	60	100%	20	100%

4.2.7 Offence type

Table 4.5 shows that the most commonly recorded main index offence committed by the short-term adult prisoners at New Hall was ‘theft’ (with the large majority being theft from a shop or stall, but also including theft from the person and theft of a motor vehicle, 58%, n=35). Of course, many prisoners have been convicted of a number of offences; therefore table 4.5 represents the main index offence. Where a prisoner has been convicted on a number of counts for the same offence type (particularly theft), this has been counted only once.

Of the 60 short-term prisoners at New Hall, ‘Robbery’ (which includes burglary offences here) accounts for twelve percent of the population’s main offence (n=7), crimes of violence accounts for seven percent (n=4) and divides between the following offences: wounding, ABH and battery. Fraud (which has included deception) was the main index offence for five percent (n=3) of the short-term adult population, and one woman was convicted of supplying drugs, categorised under drug related offences, whilst the remaining seventeen percent (n=10) were categorised under ‘Other’ offences. These ‘Other’ offences included: breach of anti-social behaviour order; abuse of an old age pensioner; display of offensive weapon in public; failing to send child to school; sexual assault on a woman; and using threatening, abusive, insulting or provocative words or behaviour likely to cause disturbance.

Of the twenty women recruited for interview in this study, 60 percent (n=12) were in custody for theft from a shop or stall, while the other 40 percent (n=8) divide between fraud, violent offences, robbery and ‘other’, excluding anyone with a drug related offence as their main index offence, although many had drug possession offences on their records alongside their main index offence. ‘Other’ offences for these participants include: breach of anti-social behaviour order and breach of community order.

Table 4.5: Table showing the main index offences of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the 20 participants recruited into the study

Main index offence	Number of women from targeted population	% of targeted population	Number of participants	% of participants
Drugs	1	2%	0	-
Fraud	3	5%	1	5%
Theft	35	58%	12	60%
Violence	4	7%	2	10%
Robbery	7	12%	2	10%
Other	10	17%	3	15%
Total	60	100%	20	100%

4.2.8 Sentence length³

Table 4.6 below shows that more than half of the short-term adult prisoners at New Hall (53%, n=32) were serving a sentence of less than six months. The group for sentence lengths of ‘three months to less than six months’ contains the highest number of short-term prisoners with eighteen, accounting for 30 percent of the targeted population, followed by those serving sentences of ‘six months to less than nine months’ (27%, n=16), with nearly a third of the targeted population (23%, n=14) serving sentences of less than three months, whilst a fifth of the population (n=12) were in the ‘nine to under twelve month’ sentence category.

³ Sentence length refers to the actual sentence sanctioned by the courts, not the length of time to serve in custody bearing in mind that prisoners receive automatic release halfway through their sentence.

Table 4.6: Table showing the sentence lengths of the 60 short-term prisoners at HMP New Hall on 30th August 2013 and the 20 participants recruited into the study

Sentence length	Number of women from targeted population	% of targeted population	Number of participants	% of participants
< 3 months	14	23%	7	35%
3- <6 months	18	30%	6	30%
6- <9 months	16	27%	3	15%
9- <12 months	12	20%	4	20%
Total	60	100%	20	100%

Of the twenty participants interviewed, thirteen (65%) were serving sentences less than six months, with 35 percent (n=7) of these women serving less than three months in custody, while the same amount (35%, n=7) were sentenced to six months or more. Table 4.6 shows that a slightly higher representation of those serving less than three months in custody were recruited for participation in this study with a slightly lower percentage of those with longer in custody compared to the target population figure for the prison.

4.2.9 Previous imprisonment

In view of the fact that the data for this analysis were acquired from P-NOMIS (Prison National Offender Management Information System), data for the prisoners' history of previous imprisonment cannot be retrieved prior to the introduction of P-NOMIS in June 2009. Therefore, this analysis will record previous times in custody in the four years prior to the date of analysis (specifically, from 30th August 2009). Of the 60 women imprisoned at New Hall on the date of analysis, sixteen (less than 27%) had no prison sentences on record post-August 2009, prior to their current sentence. Therefore, nearly three quarters (73%, n=44) had a history of previous imprisonment, with these 44 prisoners average number of previous times in prison per prisoner being four (averaging at one a year). All twenty women recruited into the study had previously been imprisoned repeatedly (a request of the study). Collectively they had been sent to prison on 92 previous occasions since August 2009, averaging at five times each over the four year period. However, recruitment into this study intentionally confined the sample to repeat offenders who had been sentenced to custody on two or more previous occasions, with the last imprisonment

being no more than twelve months prior, which explains why the sample represents a set of offenders that have a higher number of previous convictions than the average short-term adult prisoner at New Hall.

4.2.10 Children

Of the 60 short-term adult prisoners at New Hall, 51 were mothers. Collectively these 51 women had 142 descendants, averaging three children per prisoner. Of the twenty women involved in the study, eighteen were mothers collectively having 49 children, averaging three children per prisoner. Of those 49 descendants, only ten percent (n=5) were cared for by their fathers and 27 percent (n=13) were cared for by other relatives. The remaining 67 percent (n=32) of the women's children in the sample had entered state care prior to or upon their mothers imprisonment; 31 percent (n=15) had entered foster care, while more than a third (35%, n=17) had been adopted, with three of them subsequently leaving care and now living independently in adulthood. More than three quarters of the children were not in contact with their imprisoned mothers (78%, n=38), while 22 percent (n=11) had some contact with their mothers, although some were restricted to written communication or occasional telephone contact. All eighteen of the mothers in the study reported not having received a visit from their children on their current sentence.

4.2.11 Drug and alcohol use

Of the 60 adult short-term prisoners at New Hall, only four (less than 7%) reported having no issues with drugs or alcohol upon entry to prison, and only two (3%) reported being non-smokers. This is not to say these women did not have a history of drug or alcohol use; only that they denied having a need for support or treatment for substance misuse on reception to New Hall on their current sentence. Data on historic substance misuse were not obtainable. All twenty women in the study had issues with drugs and alcohol. Only two of the participants reported having never been dependent on heroin, but both did disclose having mental addictions to stimulants and prescribed medication, and a history of occasional recreational use of crack cocaine. All twenty participants in the study reported being smokers.

4.2.12 A 'Typical Case'

Based on the statistical composition of the women, a representative short-term adult prisoner at HMP New Hall at the time of the study could be described as follows:

A female prisoner convicted for 'theft from a shop' with a sentence of eighteen weeks, for which she would be required to spend up to nine weeks in custody before being automatically released. The woman would be aged 35 years of age, of no religion, White British from a Yorkshire town and the mother of three children. She would have a history of repeat offending and over the previous four years have been imprisoned four times, receiving varying length sentences. The woman would have a history of substance misuse and alcohol issues and be a tobacco smoker.

In the same way, a representative woman from my study sample could be described as follows:

A female prisoner sentenced to eight weeks in custody for which she would serve four weeks in custody for shoplifting. The woman would be 33 years old, of no religion, White British, from West Yorkshire. She would have three children, all of which were in care and out of contact with her and their father. The woman would have a history of repeat offending with five prison convictions in the last four years for which she received a short-term sentence on each occasion. She would have an ongoing issue with heroin use and be a tobacco smoker.

These two samples thus share many commonalities in relation to social and regional background, offence type and issues with drug and alcohol abuse. However, the description of a typical woman from my sample group exhibits a range of more extensive needs; at two years younger, she would have been received to custody on one more occasion than the typical short-term repeat offender at New Hall, with a history of receiving shorter sentences. As previously revealed, the study by design refined the sample to include only those women who had been sentenced to custody on two or more previous occasions, with the last imprisonment being no more than twelve months prior, since the focus was on women who repeatedly experienced short-term imprisonment. However, the prison population analysis did not exclude the sixteen women who had no records of previously being imprisoned in the last

four years prior to the date of analysis. Therefore, it would be expected that there be a disparity in the number of previous times in custody when comparing these two case samples. What this analysis does demonstrate is that the women recruited as part of this study's sample largely correspond with those of the general population of adult short-term prisoners at New Hall.

4.3 Case study

4.3.1 Introduction

This case study presents the narrative of a woman considered representative of the twenty female prisoners who were interviewed as part of this study. To ensure anonymity she is referred to by the pseudonym: Nadia. Although Nadia represents the 41-45 year age bracket whilst 85 percent of the women in the sample were under 40, she was elected as a representative case study from the sample group as she represents the other sample characteristics and beneficially articulated in generous detail her experiences which to a great extent signify those typically encountered by the women involved in this study. Her story was able to be conveyed thoroughly and with accuracy based on her own reports disclosed in interview, with dates and demographic information obtained or corroborated through accessing her prison records. However, some insignificant personal details have been intentionally misrepresented to ensure her identity remains concealed.

4.3.2 Nadia

Nadia was born in the late sixties and raised primarily by her mother in an area of West Yorkshire with her sister. Nadia experienced what could be described as a 'troubled' upbringing; she explained herself as having come from "criminal blood" and recalled being sexually abused from the age of eight onwards.

Nadia had her first two children whilst a teenager and her third in her early twenties; each child to a different father. At the age of twenty, Nadia married the father of her third child and described this man as "the biggest crook that ever walked our town". Nadia disclosed that she was completely aware of her husband's criminal activities throughout the marriage, which involved the illegal importation and distribution of

drugs, but admits that she “turned a blind eye to it all because there was just pots and pots and pots of money.”

Despite leaving school with some qualifications, Nadia did not seek employment and survived financially from the proceeds of her husband’s illegal conduct. Nadia described her marriage as “always up and down” but she lived comfortably until “things started to go downhill” in her mid-twenties when she began using drugs with her husband and developed a drug addiction.

Following this, Nadia spent her first spell in prison after being convicted for ‘non-payment of rates’, until her family “paid her out” two weeks into her sentence. Nadia did not return to prison until she was remanded in custody for three weeks in her early thirties for offences relating to her husband’s criminal activity, but was found not guilty at court and released. Her husband was convicted and sentenced which resulted in their separation and eventual divorce.

With Nadia’s temporary absence from the home coinciding with her husband’s imprisonment, her eldest child, who was at the time a young teenager “kind of took over looking after the house and all that” with support from wider family.

The following few years saw Nadia’s drug use get progressively worse until she returned to custody for a ‘theft from a shop’ offence and she has since been in and out of custody on similar charges. Nadia could recall being imprisoned in excess of twenty times since developing an opioid dependence and her life in between prison spells has been somewhat ‘chaotic’. When asked to describe the lifestyle she led, Nadia responded as follows:

“Chaotic. Right. Let’s go back. If I go into the middle of absolute chaos with me, where the times –the craziest part of it, erm is when I was living in [Sheffield]. I ran away from [Wakefield]. I phoned my mum up and told her to come and pick [the children] up. I were raging at this time, using. I think I only weighed about eight stone at the most, seven and half, eight stone. I wasn’t looking after [the children] properly. I were only coming home when I wanted to... and I went off to [Sheffield] to be a working girl and my day consisted of getting up in a morning –well, did I ever go to sleep? Here there and everywhere. I’ve slept in portacabins waiting for punters to go past in the morning, you know, especially in summer like because the postmen used to come past and all that and I’d wait for them and hound them and oh God [[covering face with hands]] and then I’d go into town, pinch an outfit, go to

MacDonald's, get changed, go into Boots and put my makeup on and then go up the road and shoplift in between it all and I were just [[sigh]] from day to day that went on for eight month, living on the streets like that. Back and forth using crack heroin cocaine, crack heroin cocaine and then got caught for using false names, you know, perverting the course of justice because I wasn't known by [South Yorkshire] Police, and I was wanted by [West Yorkshire] Police then. I gave my friends [names]... and their addresses and that and then I came to jail and I got ten month at Crown Court for that and then I were just -I can't -I mean -I was homeless, I was in a right state."

Nadia continued living her hectic lifestyle in the community in between serving a number of short-term custodial sentences until she was informed by medical staff upon entry to New Hall prison that she was pregnant. Nadia explained:

"...that [chaos] went on for ages until I came back to jail and found out I were having [a baby]. I didn't even know who [the baby]'s dad were. I had to wait until [it] were born to see what colour [it] were. Get on that. That's how madness my life was. Mad! Crackers!"

At this point Nadia was in her late thirties and was heavily dependent on heroin, with only eight weeks until she was due to be released back into the community with no accommodation or support since having had no recent communication with her family and her lack of knowledge as to who fathered the baby. Nadia described her initial fears of having the child as follows:

"I'd been in absolute madness because of the drug use and I wanted a termination done. I just thought oh my God, [it's] gonna be born with an arm hanging off [it's] head, [it's] gonna be deformed, all the drugs I'd done...I thought there's no way I can have this baby. So they took me to an outside hospital and ahhh oh my God, she said you're twenty-eight weeks gone... I had absolutely no idea and then because of all my drug use I had to go back and think who could the dad be and all that... I had to wait literally until he was born to see if he was brown or white."

Nadia was released from New Hall prison in the third trimester of her pregnancy with no fixed abode and turned to her daughter for support. Nadia explained:

"I had absolutely nowhere to go and social services were involved at this point because the prison had contacted them and said she's absolutely all over the place. I was. I'd never had any involvement with social services; I didn't know what the hell. All I'd heard was horror stories. They were gonna take this baby off me and that's it, I've lost this child and I wasn't talking to my family and I thought 'shit, what am I gonna do here'. Now my eldest girl... had a flat at the

time so I went straight to her, kind of played on her heart-strings a little bit really. I shouldn't have done what I did but I did. I just said 'look, fucking hell they're gonna take this baby off me' ...and she said 'I'll take [the baby]'. So I lived with her... but I remember that lasting for about four days and I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it to [my daughter] and off I went and used while I was pregnant. You know it still haunts me to this day that I did that but I did and I didn't go to any appointments."

Nadia relapsed whilst she was pregnant with her fourth child and returned to a chaotic way of life, living on the streets in her home town and shoplifting to finance her drug habit. Nadia expressed how problems escalated further once she had the baby as follows:

"So [the baby] is now nine days overdue and erm I've decided to go to hospital to have a check up and see if [it's] alright. Well to be fair, what I did was, the midwife had been to see [my daughter]... if I'm being truthful, I bumped into [my daughter] and I was coming down from a multi-story car park but I was very tiny pregnant...she went 'are you still pregnant?' and I went 'no', she went 'liar'. This is a conversation between me and my daughter, she went 'they're looking for you mum', she went 'that's a baby, that's one of me in there', she went 'what are you doing?' and I thought right, so I went to the hospital and erm from there I was in two days and I'd had [the baby]...[[crying]]...I had to fight then. I had a right fight on my hands with social services...I wanted to take [the baby] home but I didn't have a home."

Nadia depicted her experience of watching her baby on the special baby care unit in hospital as "horrific". Nadia had been stabilised on methadone to relieve her withdrawal symptoms and claims she then accessed "every service that could possibly be accessed" in order to try and secure custody of her baby. Nadia "called [a number of service providers] all for meetings at the hospital and all sorts" in order to get support in attaining housing. In doing so, Nadia managed to secure a two bedroom maisonette with backing from social services. The court initially issued an 'Interim Care Order' and the baby lived with her sister until she had "got this house all set up and working", before being moved onto a 'Supervision Order' entailing intense supervision from Children's Services until the baby turned eighteen months old. Nadia described her struggle with the whole experience: "I was dying inside all the way through this...I was dying because I was coming off my methadone at a hundred miles an hour". Nadia feared she would lose custody of her baby if she were still reliant on methadone, but on reflection felt although she should have spoken up

about her struggles. Instead, she described herself as having “fallen apart” before taking the baby to her sister, proclaiming: “I’m falling apart, I’m using, I’m not up to it... and then I started coming to jail again, in and out, in and out, in and out”.

Nadia told of her broken relationship with her sister. Nadia became emotional in interview speaking about how her sister had vowed to care for her baby for the short term whilst Nadia “sorted her head out”, but instead “she didn’t...when I got sent to jail, she tried to adopt him. I’ve never spoke to her from that day to this, erm but they didn’t let her adopt [the child]”. Nadia explained that her sister was given a ‘Special Guardianship Order’ for her child and has since prohibited Nadia from seeing the child. On reflection Nadia recognises her mistakes and states:

“[my sister] won’t give me [contact], but having said that, [[loud sigh]] I have gone to solicitors pissed out my head and all drugged up saying I want my [child] and all that, get a letter sent to her, who does she think she is, but actually she’s doing a bloody good job by [the child]...but anyway, so yeah I was just in and out and I swore the day I lost [my child] I would never ever come off drugs, ever, ever, but I don’t think like that now.”

After handing over her baby to her sister, Nadia returned to [Sheffield] where she resumed work as a prostitute. Nadia described being the victim of violent sexual attacks during her time as a sex worker: “oh God, the abuse I got off men was unreal; I’ve been raped, I’ve been beaten, I’ve been tied up in a house. You wouldn’t believe the stuff that you could go through”. Nadia exposed various incidents of sexual abuse she endured over the years from men. Nadia’s dependency remained heavy as she consumed further drugs to block out the distress suffered from her work in the sex industry. She explains:

“because of the work we was doing, you needed more drugs to do that, because I couldn’t do that straight headed, absolutely not. It makes me cringe to think about it now...Then you use drugs to block it out. It’s just that circle of insanity.”

Nadia describes her life as being ‘chaotic’ on and off, for almost a decade due to her continued drug use and homelessness. Nadia repeatedly left New Hall with no fixed abode, returning to drugs, shoplifting and prostitution until she temporarily resolved her accommodation issues. Nadia attained two nights’ accommodation immediately upon leaving custody through ‘Shelter’ housing services, which meant she abstained

from instantly returning to drugs. This occasion saw Nadia join a community project which involved attending a drug recovery programme that kept her off drugs and out of prison for two years. Despite being clean from drugs, Nadia had met a new partner shortly after leaving prison who she described as ‘a drinker’ and Nadia became reliant on alcohol during the period she was drug-free. The community project helped Nadia attain temporary accommodation where she lived with her partner. Nadia spent her days in the community working alongside other recovering drug addicts and “was helping working girls” which she depicts positively as giving her “self-worth”. Despite her positive engagement with the project, Nadia admits she resumed committing acts of theft for financial gain. The offending behaviour escalated and Nadia was sentenced at Crown Court to eighteen months for robbery; the first time she had received a prison sentence exceeding twelve months and therefore the first time she was to receive probation supervision upon release from prison. Nadia was released from New Hall aged forty-three with nine months of compulsory engagement with probation.

Nadia interacted well with probation services; she developed a positive relationship with her probation officer and returned to her encouraging work with the community organisation. After successfully completing her probation period Nadia remained free of opiate drugs but admittedly misused prescribed medication occasionally and acknowledged diazepam was her “biggest problem”. Whilst on probation Nadia was in receipt of benefits and claimed she “had ninety-eight pound a fortnight to live on. That was it.” Nadia once again returned to shoplifting and was re-imprisoned only a few months later. Nadia identified that she had “a problem with shoplifting full stop, whether I’m using drugs or not”. Nadia claimed that in the past the shoplifting was predominantly to fund her drug dependency, but more recently she attributed this behaviour to boredom and self-indulgence. Nadia explained:

“I make lots of money shoplifting and I like nice things. I’ve got a beautiful home. I’ve got lots of nice clothes... I have nice things. I like nice things... It sounds really childlike and I hate saying this sometimes, I hate to admit it but everything is erm, it has to be instant for me because that’s the kind of life I’ve been used to since I met [my ex-husband]... we had everything, so to go out and work and save up and do the norm like my family do, is absolute alien to me. I don’t know how to do it, but I’d like to do it... my probation officer, she said she saw it coming because I’d started coming in and moaning about what

I was wearing and that my hair needed doing... I can see her saying to me now, saying 'it'll be alright, it'll come with time [Nadia], things are working out' and I was saying 'no, I need it doing NOW, I can't stand it anymore' blah blah blah and then off I went."

Since successfully satisfying her probation period, she had been back in custody six times prior to the sentence she was serving at the time she was interviewed, all for shop theft and on each sentence had spent less than ten weeks in custody at New Hall. Nadia had luckily managed to keep tenure of her residence due to being in custody for only short periods.

In the twelve months prior to Nadia's interview, she had been imprisoned five times with her sentence lengths averaging at just over seven weeks, but despite serving only short sentences, Nadia had spent almost seven months of the year in custody with her average time in the community between sentences being approximately four weeks.

When Nadia was recruited into the study she was part way through serving a twenty-two week sentence for 'theft from a shop' after being released on electronic tag less than a month earlier. Nadia was re-imprisoned the day after the removal of her tag. In interview, Nadia maintained that the last time she was released before returning on her current sentence was different from the other more recent times since she did not return to her usual residence. Nadia explained she had once more "fallen out" with her children:

"they didn't come and visit me, the kids and they didn't bring me clothes up and they didn't send me money, and this is me being selfish and childlike... the first day I got out I thought, I knew they'd be waiting at home for me...I thought, do you know what, I'm not going. I'm not going home. I'll teach them a lesson for leaving me without my clothes and money for eight week so erm I went and scored and then went up to see them and they were devastated."

Despite eventually returning to her family, Nadia continued to use heroin and crack for the following few days and realised she was "going through the motions" towards developing a dependency again. Nadia depicts her subsequent actions which led to re-imprisonment as follows:

"I phoned the doctor... I didn't want methadone and I phoned them up and I just said 'oh can I have a prescription of diazepam for two weeks' and er

zopiclone diazepam is my problem and I know that and I did all this without thinking. So they gave me diazepam, from there I'm not really sure what happened....I know that they came and took my tagging box away. I didn't breach my tag. It was my daughter that called the police on me but she said that I erm, I went to Asda in a vest top with curry stains on it with tracksuit bottoms on with paint on cos I'd started painting the bedroom. I can't remember none of this. Went to Asda and filled a shopping trolley up and walked home with it... and [my daughter] was mortified but I must have been talking crap and then I fell on the floor so they phoned an ambulance and then the police come... that was eleven o'clock at night and I was back in New Hall by half past twelve the next day, I can't even remember being questioned or anything. Nothing. I can't remember."

Nadia described her recent concerns for her eldest child who had been hospitalised attributable to mental health problems she suffered after being in a violent domestic relationship and consequently losing custody of her child. Nadia's daughter had since been in trouble with the law and was due to be sentenced at Crown Court for a string of offences. Nadia confessed that she had contemplated intentionally causing her own re-imprisonment to concur with her daughter's impending sentence in order to "be there to protect her", but stated she since recognised the foolishness of such action.

Nadia reported getting on well with most staff and prisoners at New Hall and admitted "prison doesn't bother me because I've got structure, I've got routine". Whilst Nadia had been in custody she had worked in various capacities and completed a number of educational and skills based short courses. At the time of the interview, Nadia was working in a sewing workshop but was hopeful of being redeployed to another work area. When asked what Nadia felt she needed, if anything, to prevent her reoffending upon release, she said she believed she needed to access counselling services to address the underlying issues for why she continually misused substances:

"as hard as it is... there are loads of things I've got to look at, from being eight years old and it scares me to death and when my support worker said you're gonna have to go and have a look [Nadia] and sort it out and I thought there's absolutely no chance that I am gonna look at any of that again but I think I have to and deal with the emotions of it, and I think that's what they should be doing in jail... [find] a way of coping, because that's all it is, it's a coping mechanism, is drugs and drink."

In interview Nadia shared that upon her release from New Hall, she hoped to return to the community organisation once again to get support with staying clean of drugs and alcohol as she felt this was “what works best” for her. Nadia recognised that this time would be different as she would not be on an order and would have to self-motivate to maintain voluntary engagement. She claimed the probation order was what “pushed me through the door first off yeah and towards the end I stopped interacting... but the mistakes that I made, I will learn from”.

When asked about her hopes for the more distant future Nadia proclaimed that she did not like to look too far ahead as it made her “feel overwhelmed” but would one day like to attend college.

4.4 Summary

Nadia’s biography, although saddening, effectively highlights many of the issues and concerns experienced by women repeatedly serving short-term sentences at New Hall and highlights the chaos associated with the repeated failed attempts to successfully resettle and avoid returning to custody after release. These chaotic lifestyles evidently intensify existing problems and generate further crisis and destruction; making the women all the more vulnerable. Nadia’s reflections illustrate the risk and danger these women confront in violent relationships, with drug dependencies, mental health issues, involved in the sex industry, living homeless, and so forth, but also, the wider damage this causes. The narrative emphasises the vast collateral damage suffered by their children, families and their victims, further pressing the need for effective support to aid the women in escaping entrapment from a repeat imprisonment cycle. The following chapter explores how women experience imprisonment at New Hall and what the prison’s regime and services offer the residents, and particularly, its short-term prisoner population, to reduce future reoffending of women like Nadia.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Regime

5.1 Introduction

Since no two prisons are the same in their population, provision, administration, staffing and environment, there is significance in exploring the aspects of HMP New Hall which impinge on the prisoner's experience of custody at this establishment. As the current study is focused on the experiences of the women repeatedly imprisoned for short periods of time, this examination will comprise an ongoing consideration of if, how, in what ways and why the short-term repeat prisoners experience life at New Hall differently from the rest of the prison population. This examination will be based on the observations made and information obtained from staff and prisoners during the observational period of the research and will include coverage of: how women experience the early days in custody considering the reception process; their first night and induction back into the prison system; the women's accommodation; general living conditions and residential facilities; and structured routine. The analysis will also consider what provisions are available to prisoners at New Hall, including: learning, training and employment opportunities; psychological and cognitive behavioural therapy; needs assessments and sentence management and planning; resettlement support for housing, substance misuse treatment, financial support, family connections and so forth; library services; physical exercise facilities; pastoral support and emotional support. The chapter will present details of the internal communications systems at New Hall used to access these services and facilities, and provisions for communicating with the outside world, for example: telephone, visits and letters. Lastly, the chapter will present a view of how these amenities and procedures are utilised, accessed and experienced differently (or not accessed at all) by the short-term prisoner population at New Hall and for what reasons.

5.2 Administration

In April 2009, Askham Grange prison (open) and New Hall prison were 'clustered' with the aim of making better use of resources. The intentions were to: ensure that

more women who are eligible to access open conditions would have a better chance of accessing a specialist resettlement regime to improve performance at New Hall; and to deliver efficiency savings of £260,000 at Askham Grange and £620,000 at New Hall in the first financial year of cluster through reducing management and administration costs (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2009). Thereafter, much of the SMT (Senior Management Team) for these establishments worked cross-site including the Governing Governor.

The Ministry of Justice Performance Rating for New Hall prison each year throughout the research (2012-2014) and was at level three, which is considered 'good' performance (this is on a scale from one (serious concerns) to four (exceptional)). This figure is calculated by the Ministry of Justice taking into account 34 criteria such as overcrowding, purposeful activities and so forth (NOMS, 2012, 2013a, 2014). It was reported the average cost per prisoner place at New Hall stood at approximately £49,579 in 2012-13, a reduction on previously reported figures (£53,969 in 2011-2012, £61,821 in 2010-2011) (MoJ, 2011, 2012c, 2013f). A more detailed discussion on the use and impact of key performance indicators, targets and performance ratings is presented in chapter eight.

5.3 A view of the prison

On arrival to HMP New Hall, the establishment name is displayed alongside its motto: 'Inspiring Change – Building Futures' is boldly displayed for the women entering custody to see, together with the following HMPS mission statement:

“Her Majesty's Prison Service serves the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts. Its duty is to look after them with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release.”

New Hall prison is situated in a remote area of Flockton, West Yorkshire, located between Huddersfield and Wakefield. Enclosed by fields and farmland, New Hall occupies approximately 65 acres of land. The site was obtained by the Prison Commissioners in 1933 when it was transformed from a Military Camp to an open prison within the male estate (IMB, 2013). In 1987 it began operating in its current capacity; a secure local prison for women. Visually, HMP New Hall reinforces many of the stereotypical features of a closed British prison on approach, for instance: high

metal perimeter fencing topped with thick barbed wire, heavy metallic gates guarded by security cameras.

5.4 Early days in custody

5.4.1 Reception

Typically women are received at HMP New Hall directly from court, but occasionally as an inter-prison transfer or from a hospital. After exiting the transfer vehicle and entering the reception building, all women received from court are interviewed by a Senior Officer (SO) who gathers detail from the women with regards to their understanding of where they are and what happened to them at court, establishes the whereabouts and care of any children or pets, determines the women's general well-being and identifies any immediate medical needs including any concerns relating to a history of drug or alcohol misuse, and determines if the woman has a history of self-harm or violence in order to complete a cell sharing risk assessment. Dependant on circumstances, some women are permitted a short phone-call in reception under the supervision of an officer, for example, to organise immediate childcare.

The reception process comprises the women being photographed and issued with prison identification. All women are scanned by a metal detector, and unlike procedures in the male estate; female prisoners are no longer subject to a strip search upon arrival to custody unless intelligence or reasonable suspicion indicates that an item is being concealed on the woman that might be revealed by a search. All women are subject to a 'Level A' rub-down, except those who are inter-prison transfers, in which case they will only undergo a 'Level B' rub-down; all searches are conducted by female members of staff. Following the rub-down women are routinely invited to sit in the 'BOSS chair' (Body Orifice Security Scanner), which is a scanning system designed to detect small metallic objects such as a mobile phone or a weapon secreted within the body of the woman. Prisoners' in-possession property is searched by a female officer and then either issued to the prisoner or placed into storage; this information is then detailed on a prisoner's 'property card'.

Once reception staff have completed their inquiries and security processes, the women undergo a full medical examination carried out by a nurse to identify any

immediate physical or mental health needs, at which point women can be issued with, for example, synthetic opioids such as methadone for opiate dependency, or chlordiazepoxide, otherwise known as librium for an alcohol addiction. For most prisoners, medical staff will also assess long-term needs for treatment and develop support plans to be implemented. However, many of the women serving short-term sentences are not in custody long enough to implement a long-term treatment plan. Care plans are implemented for women who enter New Hall pregnant or who are confirmed as pregnant upon their reception. These care plans are developed by a team of midwifery and healthcare staff. Dependant on the time of arrival to New Hall, some women are then given an opportunity to shower.

Short-term prisoners spoke of this reception process as being routine since experiencing the practice several times a year and despite its intrusive and tedious nature, women claim being ‘unfazed’ by the procedures. Many of the women disclosed that they intentionally attempt to accelerate the reception process by promptly complying in ‘telling staff what they need to hear’ and ‘signing whatever they want signing’. The large majority of short-term repeat prisoners enter custody whilst still under the effect of drugs or alcohol and after having usually spent long periods in police custody, in court proceedings and in transfer vehicles, by which point they are suffering withdrawal and are eager or desperate to receive clinical treatment for their symptoms. Many women confessed assuring staff upon reception that they had understood all that had taken place through their entry to custody when in fact they were in no appropriate state to comprehend the court proceedings due to alcohol or drug use but had concealed their lack of understanding throughout events in order to prevent slowing the process down. The case study of Nadia presented in the previous chapter included brief discussion of her experience of re-imprisonment for her most recent offence, and she stated:

“[the arrest] was at eleven o’clock at night and I was back in New Hall by half past twelve the next day, I can’t even remember being questioned or anything. Nothing. I can’t remember. It’s bad isn’t it?”

Nadia described having to find out in a letter from her solicitor what happened in court since having no clear recollection of the events due to being under the strong influence of diazepam.

New arrivals were provided with an information booklet entitled 'Guide to your first days in custody', however, upon examination of this material, much of it appeared out-of-date, it was poorly produced making parts of it unreadable, and available in only English and in written form. Many prisoners admitted disregarding written information they received upon entry to New Hall and relying on obtaining information by alternative means such as other prisoners and the 'insiders'; a team of peer support workers (see section 5.9 'Emotional Support'). The reception process can take up to one hour to complete, at which point the prisoner will be escorted to the first night centre.

5.4.2 First night

Women receive an introduction to the first night centre, followed by an interview with a first night centre officer, although some women report being interviewed the day following their arrival. This interview is conducted in private and repeats many of the inquiries made on reception, but understandably, many of the women are at that time more likely to report a number of issues, for instance: debt, emotional issues, learning difficulties and so forth, since having their immediate needs addressed, typically their substance withdrawal needs and childcare arrangements. Women are then given an opportunity to shower and use the telephone to make arrangements at home with regards to their absence.

Prisoners are issued with a booklet entitled 'Information for new residents', which is available in several different languages, and prisoners are asked to sign paperwork acknowledging receipt of this material. The information pertains to the prison regime, wing rules, procedures for communication with the outside world (including: mail, email and visits), money, facilities, emotional support systems, violence reduction policy, internal communication systems (namely, applications), the incentive and earned privileges (IEP) policy, complaints system and adjudication procedures. Nonetheless, as with the material provided on reception, I observed that this was poorly produced and much of the information was more than twelve months out of date.

If the women arrive at the centre on week days Monday to Thursday, they are typically locked in from 18:15 until the following morning, however if they attend

the first night centre on a Friday or at the weekend, they will be locked in at 17:00. Some prisoners reported being offered materials such as pencils and colouring books for occupying themselves whilst in their cells on the first night centre.

Women receive a wakeup call from staff at 07:00 and are to be dressed ready for unlock at 07:30 where they will meet a nurse who will issue whatever, if any, medication they require, before attending the refectory for a cooked breakfast. Women will then be visited and interviewed by a benefits officer regarding any claims they may have been in receipt of and organise notification of changes in circumstances to the relevant benefit office. A person from chaplaincy will then visit the prisoner, followed by someone from probation or the Offender Management Unit (OMU). OMU will consider any continuing needs the prisoner might have and make referrals to necessary departments, such as the mental health unit or to substance misuse treatment staff.

A hot lunch is provided for women before being locked in at 13:45 if they have not received any public visitors. Prisoners will be allowed to shower, access a hairdryer, electrical hair styling items and an iron, use the telephone and meet people on the wing if they wish. They receive an evening meal at 16:30 which consist of a cold sandwich delivered to their cell, following which they will be allowed further time to shower, do laundry, etc. before being locked in for the night at 18:15 if on a week day Monday to Thursday, or as early as 17:00 if it is a Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

After the women have spent at least one night on the 'First Night Centre' and the healthcare team are content that the prisoner is prepared to progress to the next stage of their admission process, they will be moved to a new unit where they may be required to engage in an 'Induction Course'. Some women with a history of substance misuse require further time on the first night centre whilst they are stabilised on their medication, especially those who are not able to convey their drug intake quantities prior to custody; alleviating the withdrawal symptoms safely on these occasions entails this transition period taking longer. Many of the women with a history of substance misuse who repeatedly return to New Hall simply resume their script.

5.4.3 Induction

All women who had completed the full induction process in the twelve months prior were exempt from undergoing this route and simply moved from the first night centre to a suitable residential wing based on information provided in interview with their first night centre officer. Due to many of the short-term prisoners consistently being re-imprisoned within twelve months of their last imprisonment, many reported having gone in and out of New Hall several times without having to repeat the induction process, and failed to receive notification of the regularly updated policies and procedures.

Those prisoners who do engage in a three or four day 'Induction Course' begin with a classroom session covering specifics of the prison regime, services, rules, etc. followed by a series of presentations from staff members or representatives from other departments within the prison such as the gymnasium, library and IMB (Independent Monitoring Board). Foreign National residents are visited by a Diversity Officer to discuss any individual needs they may have at this stage. The subsequent few days involve engagement in the 'Introduction to the Training and Employment Services' (ITES) course delivered by Manchester College.

ITES includes a visit to education where the prisoners generally undertake literacy and numeracy assessments and receive information about the education, training and employment options that New Hall offers and receive a tour of the establishment including its residential units and workplaces. On the fourth day of induction, prisoners who have not already done so will complete the British Safety Council Health and Safety Level one certificate.

5.5 Accommodation

5.5.1 'Houses'

Residential wings at New Hall are given more pleasant references as an alternative to wing letters, all of which are species of tree: Oak, Willow, Poplar, Larch, Sycamore, Holly and Maple. Willow, Oak and Poplar are the three main adult residential units or 'houses'; each having the capacity to accommodate over 100 women. Most of the accommodation is single cell although Willow, Oak and Poplar do also contain

double occupancy rooms. Dormitories that were for many years in use on Willow House have since been removed.

Oak House (F-wing) occupies the majority of those prisoners who are receiving medication for a drug dependency. Oak is divided into two spurs, identified as Oak one (stage one or stabilisation period of drug treatment) and Oak two (stage two or maintenance/ stable treatment period) and contains an enhanced drug treatment facility on the wings. The majority of the short-term adult prisoners at New Hall reside on Oak House due to a large majority requiring clinical treatment for an opioid dependency.

Willow divides into three units (A, B and C wing), with C-wing comprising the first night centre, recently renamed 'Apple Tree House'. As mentioned previously, this is where prisoners initially reside until they have completed the induction process and have been assessed for transfer to a suitable and available location in the prison.

Poplar House (E-wing) also divides into two units; Poplar one accommodates the life sentenced prisoners and those on indeterminate sentences for public protection, whilst Poplar two occupies a mixed population of sentenced and remand adult and young offenders, some of which are short-term prisoners who are not receiving treatment for a drug dependency.

Larch House occupies up to 40 low-risk prisoners who benefit from semi-open conditions, including keys to their own cell. This accommodation is generally occupied by long-term prisoners who have demonstrated good behaviour over long periods of time.

Sycamore House is what is officially the 'Care and Separation Unit' referred to more commonly within the jail as 'The Segregation Unit' or 'The Seg'. Sycamore House accommodates those who are placed there for their own protection as well as those for reason of 'Good Order or Discipline' (GOOD) or those ordered to what was previously known as Cellular Confinement (CC), but under new policy (November 2013) officially termed 'IEP sanctions'. Since the implementation of 'IEP sanctions', Sycamore House is more frequently in use; this has resulted in the unit becoming persistently fully occupied. Sycamore House contains the prison's only 'safe cell'

which has a glass window panel in the door, no furniture and an observation window for staff to monitor prisoners who are at serious risk of self-harm or suicide.

Sycamore House makes up one half of the 'Care in Custody Integrated Services' (CCIS) model at New Hall; the other half being Holly House, which is the inpatient hospital, officially entitled the 'Care and Assessment' Unit, but more commonly known at New Hall as the 'Mental Health' unit. Although at the time of the research approximately a third of the population self-reported common mental health problems, the unit houses only those with complex mental health needs, which accounts for about ten percent of the population. A number of short-term prisoners are allocated to this wing for support and treatment but are unable to receive the continuous care and support they need due to their limited sentence period; repetitive release and reimprisonment can result in inconsistent medical treatment which reportedly exacerbates their mental health conditions.

Maple House is New Hall's 'Mother and Baby Unit' and holds up to nine mothers and ten babies up to eighteen months old. Maple House and support from external agency 'Action for Children' (AFC) provide an environment promoting parental responsibility for mothers at New Hall. The unit contains large, well-furnished rooms with adjoining toilets and wash facilities. AFC currently provides a crèche facility for mothers at New Hall to access whilst they are attending work or educational facilities within the establishment. AFC also allows children at New Hall to engage in community activities with crèche staff when mothers are on release on temporary licence (ROTL), and women are permitted to remain on Maple House when their children are with a co-parent in the community. AFC also provides emotional support for women on the unit due to be separated from their children before the completion of their sentence. Although a large proportion of women at New Hall are mothers, spaces are limited. Admission criteria are based on National Guidelines (see PSI 54/2011, section two; HM Prison Service, 2011), with admission boards being held once a fortnight (although emergency boards have been known to convene at New Hall intermittently when required) which review women's suitability for admission.

In addition to the residential divisions outlined above, until recently New Hall occupied a detached unit within the establishment named 'Rivendell' which was

exclusively for juveniles (aged 15-17 years) under Detention and Training Order (DTO) sentences. Over the past few years the prison population in England and Wales saw a decrease in the number of female juveniles entering custody, and therefore, Rivendell was converted to create additional space for adults on PREW (Project Recovery Empowering Women); a drug rehabilitation and recovery facility aiming to provide intense support for women through a detoxification process. New Hall's reception criteria has changed accordingly and now only accepts women with a minimum age of eighteen.

PREW was abandoned at the end of 2013, and the space was being transformed to a 'Complex Needs Treatment Centre', referred to by staff as a 'PD unit' (personality disorder unit) since Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (GMW) secured a contract to deliver clinical services within this area which commenced service in 2014.

5.5.2 General living conditions and facilities

Prison cells, more commonly referred to as 'pads' by prisoners, varied in size. Some small cells were occupied by two women which left them with very limited space and privacy. Preferences over single or shared cells differed amongst women.

During the time I spent on the wings, I noticed how well maintained the women's rooms were. The prison wings were preserved by a team of wing cleaners, but women had access to cleaning materials to keep their own rooms clean and orderly. Wing officers reported very infrequently having issues with women regarding matters of cleanliness and hygiene in relation to the conditions of their cells as the large majority were exceptionally proud of its appearance. When arriving unannounced at prisoner's cell doors, I recall women excusing any trivial sight of untidiness, for example, a pile of clean laundry waiting to be ironed. Walls were often decorated with photographs, letters, coloured pictures, hand-made paper decorations, and certificates, in addition to shelves and window sills being arranged with toiletries and cosmetic products. I learned that many women retain their empty cosmetic containers, and although I never questioned their motives for doing this, we could speculate that these items increase the apparent collection of personal effects,

and help them build a more pleasant looking 'home'. Women are also permitted to use their own bedding which many, particularly the long-term prisoners, opt to do.

Women are issued with a kettle as part of the cell fittings and can obtain basic plastic cutlery and crockery to store in their rooms. Tea and coffee packages are issued within their lunch allowance. New Hall's catering division has a budget of approximately £2 per day per prisoner. The prison operates a self-select menu over a four week cycle, and the menu accommodates preferences for halal, healthy eating, vegetarians and vegans. In addition to specialist diets to meet religious, cultural and medical needs, special provisions are made for pregnant women. Very few women criticised the catering services, with the exception of the restricted time-frames in which women were able to dine, particularly lunch being served at 11:30am.

Women at New Hall have access to a 'canteen' or shopping service through DHL Booker who offer prisoners an opportunity to purchase grocery and personal items including tobacco. Order forms with available items and their cost are provided to residents every Tuesday with a print-out of the available financial balance in their prison account and their weekly spend allowance.

Money can reach their prison account from friends or family, sent in ordinarily via postal orders or cheques made payable to Her Majesty's Prison Service. However, weekly allowances for the transfer of money from this private cash account to spending credit depends on prison status, explicitly, whether sentenced or unsentenced, and also contingent on assigned IEP band; this amount can range from £4 a week to £51 a week. Women also receive a weekly wage for taking part in education and work. Again, this wage depends on prison status, but ranges from £4 a week to £10.50 a week. Women are provided with their essential wash materials such as a bar of soap; however anything beyond the basic materials (such as branded shower cream) must be purchased through this 'canteen' system. Order forms are collected from prisoners and items are delivered to prison wings on Saturday mornings.

Telephone credit and reading material are purchased from staff on the wings. On top of the ordinary canteen system, women can also purchase products from 'Avon', who supply cosmetic products through a catalogue ordering system, and 'Very'

catalogue who advertise women's fashion clothing, both delivered to the establishment on a regular basis. These services are especially useful for those who do not have any relatives or friends who can support them in providing these effects. Women are permitted to wear their own clothes and prison clothing is only provided where a work uniform is prerequisite (for example, protective clothing for work in kitchens, gardens or for cleaning). Women are entitled to possess twelve tops, eight bottoms, two jackets or coats, five pairs of shoes, and a reasonable amount of underwear and nightwear at any one time. On top of these 'essentials', a facilities list details other items they are permitted to possess (such as scarves and hats). Anything not permitted will go into the prisoners storage until release. Women can have their clothes handed in by friends and relatives during a visit up to seven days after their reception. Formerly, women could have clothes sent in through the post but this has recently been prohibited. Many women arrive at New Hall with only the clothes they are wearing; many have lived homeless, dependant on drugs and working as prostitutes. Where clothes are deemed inappropriate (for example, where excessively damaged, insanitary or exposing), a set of alternative attire is provided from a depository of unwanted prisoner clothes.

Many women described, after entering prison malnourished due to drug use and homelessness, quickly gaining weight once resuming a diet consisting of regular meals and their drug use halting. At such a point, garments reportedly become quickly too small and it was often necessary that women acquired new clothes and donated their old ones to the depository or placed these into storage. This was often problematic for those who did not have relatives or friends who were able to provide new clothes or finance new clothing, and the women would have to save up wages over a period in order to purchase what they required. Limited clothing often meant that women had to do laundry more frequently which they complained took up the duration of their limited out of cell time.

Women can request to have their laundry washed and dried by prisoners employed to work on the wing, excluding underwear, socks and trainers. The women are required to complete and attach a laundry slip to their laundry bag detailing the number of items inside (maximum of seven), including the make, size and colour of the items. Women have access to laundry facilities to wash their own underwear and socks, and

main laundry load if they wish, however, as mentioned; this is to be done during their allocated association time.

Some women are able to rent a fourteen inch colour television set for the cost of £1 a week (contingent on their IEP status). Larger televisions are freely available on the wings for women to watch during association periods. Other entertainment equipment can be obtained by some prisoners at their own expense using catalogue ordering systems, such as music players and CD's, DVD players and DVD's, games consoles and games, however as previously mentioned, possession of these in-cell items will be subject to the prisoners behaviour and their IEP status.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme

The incentives and earned privileges (IEP) policy operates on four levels; basic, entry, standard and enhanced (HM Prison Service, 2013b). Each prisoner enters custody on 'entry' level which lasts for fourteen days, after which they will automatically move to 'standard' providing they have met all the requirements of the introduction course; alternatively they will be downgraded to 'basic' and will have to repeat the fourteen days on 'entry' level again before progression to a 'standard' rating. The large majority of short-term prisoners do not shift from standard status; they are simply not in custody long enough to earn promotion or be downgraded a ranking. 'Enhanced' level requires a minimum of three months demonstration of being fully committed to their rehabilitation, seeking to reduce their reoffending, and generally behaving consistently well.

Behaviour is monitored by staff and notes, positive or negative, pertaining to a prisoner's IEP level are logged in their file. The women are notified of any logs made to their file. An accumulation of three negative comments may result in the prisoner being downgraded a level, but correspondingly a collection of three positive comments logged may result in the prisoner being put forward for an upgrade. Review boards are held weekly and consist of a Senior Officer (SO) and two other members of staff.

Differences in terms of privileges are that, in addition to personal items discussed previously, women on 'Enhanced' level are entitled to, for example: family day

visits, extra visits, different pay rates for attending work, access to extra private finances, maximum time out of cell. Women on 'basic' level are not permitted to possess an in-cell television for example.

5.7 Routine/ Unlock times

A core day in the prison on week days Monday to Thursday proceeds as follows:

07:00 Start medication dispensing process

Those residents with a prison prescription (predominately Oak House residents) will be unlocked two or three persons at a time to go to receive their medication from the medical dispensing hatch on the wing. This process is closely supervised by wing staff to evade trading and takes approximately an hour and a half depending on the prison capacity and prisoners cooperation.

08:15 Breakfast

Cooked breakfast is served in the eatery or 'mess' on prison wings, with the exception of those prisoners on Oak House who are issued with a breakfast pack (for example: a packet of cereal and fruit) the evening before due to the lengthy drug dispensing process.

08:45 Unlock

Those women attending work, education, programmes or other appointments (such as: medical appointments or legal visits) will be unlocked to attend. They will be subject to a 'rub-down' on exiting prison wing and scanned with a handheld metal detector. There will be a short movement period where they travel unescorted to their allocated workplace along pathways supervised by operational support grade (OSG) staff, carrying their prison ID at all times.

10:15 Outside exercise

Unallocated and wing based women are permitted access to the exercise court, more commonly referred to as 'the yard' which is approximately fifteen metres by 30 metres in size. Although many women take up the opportunity to access this space, women were not observed utilising the

space for cardiovascular exercise, but instead as an opportunity to socialise with women from other wings.

11:15 Cease exercise and return to wings

11:30 Return to wings

Prisoners cease their morning period at work or education and return to their wings. Again, women will be searched upon leaving the place of work or education and scanned with a handheld metal detector and this movement will take place during the strict 'movement period' under supervision of OSG's.

11:40 Lunch

Residents have a cooked meal for lunch in the refectory.

12:15 Lock-up and roll check

All prisoners are locked up for a period over lunch whilst central office conducts 'roll check' which involves a process of accounting for all prisoners and confirming their locations.

13:35 Unlock

Following the same process as at 08:45, women will be unlocked to attend work, education, programmes or other appointments (Tuesday – Thursday, this may include a public visit which will cease at 16:00).

17:15 Chapel, Library, Gym or Wing association

Prisoners cease employment and education and move to the chapel, library, gym or return to the wing for association. Prisoners can use their time on the wing to shower, socialise, use electric hair styling devices, use the prison telephones, use washing machine, iron clothes and so forth.

18:20 Lock-up and roll check

All residents are locked in and roll check is conducted. Prisoners report using the time in-cell to do homework, write letters to relatives or friends, watch television, clean, and read. Lock-up times differ for those on Oak House; they regularly get locked in earlier in order to begin the medication dispensing process.

Friday

A core day on a Friday follows a similar routine in the morning, however it differs in that when prisoners are unlocked in the afternoon, they do not attend work but instead begin their association period on the wing that would usually commence following work on the other week days. Prisoners are allocated this association time in order to organise and complete their canteen request forms. Prisoners are then issued their tea/coffee packages and are locked in at 16:30. Roll check is conducted at 17:15 and those requiring medication in Oak House are unlocked in pairs from 17:30 until everyone has received their prescribed medication. This process has been known to take until 19:00.

Weekend

- 08:00 Start medication dispensing process
- 09:30 Chapel (Sunday only)
- 10:30 Unlock for association (on unit)
- 11:30 Lunch
- 12:15 Lock-up and roll check
- 13:45 Unlock for wing association, gym and domestic visits
- 15:00 Outside exercise
- 16:00 Cease exercise and return to wings
- 17:15 Start medication dispensing process (Oak House)

Although this regime is carefully organised, all these times are subject to change due to operational needs and regularly do so, for example, to allow for staff occupational health opportunities, staff training days, insufficient staffing levels and so on.

5.8 Departments

5.8.1 Learning and Skills

New Hall offers a range of full-time and part-time educational courses, as well as full-time prison-based work, some of which allows for accredited qualifications to be gained alongside. Many women at New Hall opt for full-time work in the prison as opposed to educational routes. Additionally, some prisoners who have spent long periods in custody at New Hall have exhausted all the educational courses on offer,

and short-termers are restricted in their options for study due to their limited time and have no choice but to take up full-time work. A full-time posting (approximately 25 hours of work a week) is obligatory for all sentenced prisoners; those who refuse will be dealt with via the adjudication system as previously mentioned. Unconvicted prisoners, although strongly encouraged by staff at New Hall, are permitted to decline work and educational services; however they therefore forfeit the opportunity to receive earnings and are subject to longer lock-in periods.

Women receive a weekly wage for their employment or engagement with education or programmes. This weekly sum is the same for all of those in education and employment but dependent upon the prisoner's IEP level, as follows: enhanced £10.50, standard £8.50 and basic £4.00.

Many of the women I encountered found work and education to be the most favourable and constructive aspect of their sentence. Women commended these opportunities as they were able to acquire new skills or qualifications, and it allowed them to socialise and keep busy during their prison term. Weekends were generally not preferred by prisoners since the regime allowed too much rest time and did not provide sufficient activities, or what the women often termed 'distractions' and prisoners would complain of boredom.

A number of full-time courses are delivered at New Hall by Manchester College. These include NVQ in Business Admin, NVQ in Hairdressing, Food Safety and Cookery (a two week course), Information Technology level one and two, level one Award in Contact Centre Operation (call centre training course), as well as literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to the range of educational courses offered, there is a careers information and advice service accessible to prisoners, offering assistance with career guidance, job searching, writing CVs and interview practice. New Hall offers a variety of working opportunities for women including: workshops, land based activities, kitchens, gymnasiums, cleaning and domestic services, library and 'works' department⁴.

At the time of the research, there were four workshops in operation at New Hall; the largest operational workshop (workshop five) was known as the 'assembly'

⁴ The 'works' department assumes responsibility for the maintenance of the prison, and employs women to undertake duties such as painting and decorating.

workshop and occupied approximately 40 women including many short-term prisoners. The work available in this unit varied depending on what contracts the prison managed to secure in the private sector for the prisoners. During my visits, this work varied from packaging toilet paper, boxing latex gloves, and assembling emergency first aid kits. Many projects ran simultaneously and women were divided into work teams and appointed duties.

Workshops one and two are sewing studios where women work on operational lines making items for the prison service, predominantly manufacturing male underwear items for shipping to local men's prisons. Workshops one and two collectively employ up to 30 women and offer full training and opportunities to gain a qualification in 'Performing Manufacturing Operations NVQ level two' whilst working. The enterprise manager occasionally procures additional working contracts for women in the sewing workshops; one contract secured during my observational period involved re-stitching ragdolls that had ruptured. The sewing workshops also manufactured a collection of draw-string laundry and cosmetic bags, tobacco pouches and so forth, which went on sale to staff and residents with the proceeds going to charity.

The fourth operational workshop is the Max Spielmann studio which is a photographic training academy which launched at New Hall in June 2011. This rejects opportunities for short-term prisoners who are uncommonly in the prison long enough to reach enhanced status and complete the training period. The academy offers a small number of prisoners, normally progressing towards the end of their sentences, an opportunity to develop skills in photography developing and printing with the vision to procure paid employment in one of the community retail stores post-release. Prisoners are able to gain qualifications in Customer Service as part of their training. Understandably, this opportunity attracts interest from many women, however opportunities are limited and therefore allocation to this entity is subject to enhanced IEP status.

With many of the employment posts, the number of positions is limited and a long-term commitment is required for completion of the obtainable certification, and therefore generally the short-term prisoners were allocated posts in workshops despite submitting requests for other positions such as 'works', gymnasium, kitchens

or gardens. Only a small number of short-term prisoners were able to attain a land-based post in waste management and recycling or in the gardens. These positions become especially popular in the summer months due to their outdoor setting. During the observational period, the gardens department made a great number of noticeable changes to the appearance of New Hall for visitors by fitting a number of park benches and landscaping much of the grounds. Short-term prisoners would however miss out on opportunities beyond work experience and longer sentenced prisoners are more likely to gain qualifications in Level one Horticultural Skills and Level one Award and Certificate in Introduction to the Facilities Industry.

Prisoners employed by the catering department follow a different regime to other prisoners at New Hall in order to prepare food to suit the routine mealtimes. The catering department comprises the staff mess hall and visitor's snack bar, in addition to the wing serveries for prisoners. The kitchen employs a large number of women who prepare and serve meals for staff, prisoners and visitors. To gain employment within the catering department, prisoners must have already completed a two week Food Safety and Cookery course delivered by Manchester College through the education department. Again, short-term prisoners employed to work in the kitchen are often denied the opportunity to receive further training for NVQ levels one and two in catering whilst in post unlike the longer sentenced prisoners.

The gymnasium employs a small number of women to work in the staff and prisoner gymnasiums. Opportunities to engage in full-time courses and gain accreditation are available again for those who have adequate time left on their sentence to comfortably complete courses, including: first aid, sports leadership award, and NVQ Sport and Recreation. Cleaners are employed throughout the prison to work in staff offices, wings, workshops etc. and site allocation is dependent on risk assessments. Cleaners are able to attain a BICSc (British Institute of Cleaning Science) certificate of accreditation. This was a very popular course and had low entry level requirements and was a relatively short duration completion period. A small team of women serving long sentences held posts in the 'works' department. Women were employed to carryout general labouring positions, and developed skills in particular trades, such as plastering, painting and decorating. I observed women working on the wings who were tasked with the redecoration of cells between occupants when necessitated.

5.8.2 Offender Management Unit (OMU)

The Offender Management Unit (OMU) is responsible for sentence management and planning. In addition to its focal aim to protect the public, it is also tasked with reducing the risk of reoffending. An assessment instrument known as the 'Offender Assessment System' (OASys) is utilised to assess, manage and reduce these risks (HM Prison Service, 2003). However, it is not mandatory to have an OASys completed for short-term prisoners, despite their risk of reoffending being much higher than the population of women serving sentences of twelve months or more, and therefore their needs and risk evaluations are founded on the basic screening process carried out during the prisoner's stay on the first night centre. The basic screening for all women assesses need under each of the resettlement pathways; education, employment, drug and alcohol misuse, mental and physical health, attitudes and self-control, institutionalisation and life-skills, housing, financial support and debt, and family networks (HM Prison Service, 2015). Offender managers will make referrals to relevant agencies in response to needs identified in the basic custody screening. This basic screening process, whilst addressing the prisoners present needs, does not form the basis of a sentence plan for those women on remand or those serving short-term sentences and no follow up is conducted by OMU post-referral.

5.8.3 Psychology and Programmes

With regards to the prisoner's thinking, attitudes and behaviour, New Hall offers a range of offending behaviour programmes or courses. The cognitive behavioural programmes offered from this department were frequently changing. As with many of the opportunities available to prisoners, it was problematic for short-term prisoners to undertake these courses if their sentences were especially short. Allocation to a programme was initiated through referral from the Offender Management Unit following their OASys assessment, but since short-term prisoners' needs are not measured this way, it was difficult for programme facilitators to identify their suitability for the course.

At the time of the research, the prison provided only one accredited programme: the 'Thinking Skills Programme' (TSP) (MoJ, 2010e). An eligibility criterion to this programme was strict and altered during the course of my observational period to

exclude those convicted of acquisitive crimes. This alteration resulted in the programme facilitators struggling to fill courses and continually running with the minimum required participants, which proved problematic for the prison to meet targets when candidates withdrew. It was noticeable that a number of women who had previously undertaken the course, and had since been reconvicted were enrolled in the course a second time round.

The prison also offered the 'A>Z' course which is a non-accredited programme focused on motivation and goal setting. This was a short course allowing completion within six full days, allowing access for short-term prisoners. However, during the period of the fieldwork (exceeding eighteen months) only one A>Z course was delivered with six prisoners enrolled; five of whom had sentences of over twelve months.

Some of the short-term prisoners were able to engage in the offered 'Power to Change' course delivered by a team of prison staff and Athena Project (a domestic violence service) workers (IMB, 2014). This course was designed to support women who have suffered sexual or domestic abuse and seemingly had a large pool of eligible candidates available for recruitment. The course ran over twelve half-day sessions; however despite the short duration of this course and the number of suitable short-term prisoners who could potentially benefit from this opportunity, as with all of the available programmes, there were lengthy delays between each course delivery due to the amount of administrative work involved in the recruitment processes and prisoner evaluation reports following completion.

5.8.4 Resettlement services/ 'Drop- in' centre

New Hall relies heavily on support from external agencies to ensure women receive the support they need in custody and through the gate relating to: housing; drugs and alcohol; children and families; finance, benefit and debt, and sex workers. These third sector resettlement services are based collectively within one unit labelled Acorn House. Despite being referred to as 'the drop-in centre', ironically there is no occasion to physically 'drop-in' at all; these services are accessed via appointment requests only. The agencies based within this unit work on a wholly voluntary basis and their level of dedication to New Hall will often depend on their funding budgets,

external workloads, staffing levels and so forth and therefore there are often periods during which these services become temporarily unavailable. Many of these agencies habitually schedule visits to the establishment every fortnight or on a monthly basis; consequently they may not be accessible to prisoners serving exceptionally short sentences, depending on whether they coincide at the right time in the woman's sentence. Considering the high number of women serving short sentences, prisoners may put an application into the system to be contacted by a service provider, but often complete their sentence term before the agency has been able to respond.

Housing support agencies utilised included Shelter, which provided accommodation advice and could also advise on legal matters. Shelter had workers based within the prison who provided advice on housing issues and made referrals to other community organisation or housing providers, for example: Stoneham Bass, who provide accommodation to support bail or HDC (home detention curfew) applications; Target Housing, who provide housing advice and accommodation to prisoners from the South Yorkshire and Hull area; Minerva, for women from Hull area and Leeds Housing Federation who provide housing services for prisoners from Leeds.

For drug and alcohol support, beside the drug treatment they receive in custody from the prison healthcare team and Spectrum Community Health CIC (trading name of Spectrum Community Health), Turning Point are also utilised to help support women with substance misuse issues post-release working in partnership with Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) workers.

Third sector agencies offering family support to women at New Hall include: Action for Children (AFC), After Adoption (supporting women via groups and one-to-one sessions), Yorkshire Family Mediation, Together Women Project, Evolve, Family Legal Advice and Free Legal Aid Assessment (provided by Dixon and Meakin Solicitors), and Lincolnshire Action Trust. The chaplaincy volunteers also offer emotional and practical support to women in relation to family concerns.

Issues relating to Finance, Benefit and Debt are managed by a representative from Job Centre Plus who is based in the establishment. Additionally, a short-course entitled 'Ready Steady Work' delivered by the prison education department comprises a 'becoming financially capable' module, which aims to help women

develop better money management skills. New Hall does not offer anything directly to support those women involved in sex work, however it does have links with the following agencies to which it can make referrals or signpost women: Genesis and Jessica (Leeds based), Streetreach (Doncaster based), Jericho Road (Nottingham based), Lighthouse (Hull based), Sweeties (Kirklees based), SWOPP - Sheffield Working Women's Opportunities Project (Sheffield based), and Working Women (Bradford based).

5.8.5 Library

The library offers a wide range of resources and facilities with a quiet study space, and computers with access to a virtual campus which can be used for job-hunting and creating CVs. Library staff have a computer with internet access and are able to download information for prisoners to support learning courses. The stock includes fiction and non-fiction material, books in fourteen different languages (including translation books and dictionaries), large print material for visually impaired readers, a music CD loan service, talking books, legal material and access to Prison Service Instructions (PSIs). There is also a selection of newspapers and magazines, including foreign newspapers. New Hall library also runs an initiative called 'Storybook Mums'. This project allows prisoners to record themselves reading a children's storybook which library staff then burn to a CD and post to their child/grandchild's residence along with a copy of the book.

5.8.6 Physical Education

The physical education programme coordinates a range of team games (for example: volleyball and badminton) as well as fitness classes delivered by prisoners undertaking their Sports Leadership Awards. These activities took place on a weekly basis in the establishment's sports hall and appeared largely popular. Women with self-esteem issues and concerns with their weight are able to enrol onto a healthy living programme. As well as being encouraged to regularly access the gymnasium, women have access to a healthy living nurse who provided extra support to those with physical and psychological health problems and those undergoing

detoxification. Occasional antenatal and postnatal exercise classes were delivered by physical education staff.

5.8.7 Chaplaincy

The faith team offers pastoral support and spiritual encouragement for everyone at New Hall; both staff and residents alike. Residents on Holly House (Care and Assessment Unit), Sycamore House (Care and Separation Unit) and Apple Tree House (first night centre) are visited daily by the duty chaplain. All residents, of whatever faith, have regular access to the Chaplaincy.

5.9 Emotional support

In addition to the emotional support offered from the chaplaincy team, there are a number of other sources of emotional care. Upon entry to New Hall, women are able to access a peer support scheme entitled 'insiders'. Insiders are specifically selected and trained prisoners, who are available to provide basic information and reassurance to new receptions shortly after arrival to New Hall. The idea behind the scheme is that insiders are able to better sympathise with the women and more easily develop trust. Insiders are long-term prisoners who have demonstrated good behaviour and a willingness to help others. Those that utilise this service are largely first time offenders who require support adjusting to the systems and regime.

Many of the women turn to Samaritans for emotional support. Samaritans is a confidential support service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week which offers emotional support to individuals, who may be feeling anxious, depressed, stressed or worried. Samaritans can be contacted by prisoners by means of telephone or letter; most women make contact via telephone. Specially fitted blue telephones are available on wings which women can use to contact Samaritans free of charge. When women are locked in they are able to contact Samaritans by requesting from staff access to a cordless phone, installed exclusively for contacting the Samaritans. This facility was popular and many women reported benefitting from use of this service. A further peer support scheme set up within New Hall is the 'listener scheme'. Listeners are selected and trained by Samaritans to give emotional support

to other prisoners. At the time of the fieldwork there were twelve trained listeners at the establishment who were in much demand.

There is also a personal officer scheme whereby prisoners are allocated a personal officer upon arrival to New Hall. The officer will ordinarily introduce themselves within the first week of the prisoner's stay at New Hall. Women can submit an application to meet with their personal officer to discuss in confidence any concerns they may have. Many short-term prisoners with whom I spoke reported never having any contact with their personal officer post introduction and instead sought support from a trusted officer on their residential wing. Presumably the scheme is more beneficial to those serving longer sentences which would allow a rapport to be built between the woman and her personal officer. This officer can be male or female. Women are not consulted on their assigned personal officer and there is no system in place to enable those women who repeatedly enter custody to be purposely appointed the same personal officer for continuity purposes.

Any concerns or anxieties the women may have about prison life can be shared in confidence with a member of the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board) whose role is to monitor the day-to-day life of the prison and ensure that proper standards of care and decency are maintained. The IMB can help women manage issues that have failed to be resolved through the prison's internal channels.

5.10 Internal communication system

General applications, more commonly referred to at New Hall as 'apps', are forms used by prisoners when requesting services such as Healthcare appointments, resettlement support services in Acorn House, visits from personal officers, IMB representatives and so forth. General applications are processed on a daily basis, and according to notes on the application form, prisoners should receive a response to the application informing the prisoner of what action is being taken; however, this did not appear to happen in practice. Many prisoners complained of not receiving a response to their applications until being summoned to an appointment without prior notice (for instance: to healthcare or Acorn House). It was common practice for applications to go missing and women would often report submitting several application request forms before receiving a response. This practice was particularly

frustrating for women with limited time available to access the provisions they needed and they would often fail to utilise the offered services due to the failure of the internal communication system.

Whilst in custody women are able to make official complaints regarding matters they are dissatisfied with. Response times vary from three to ten week-days depending on what the complaint involves and who the recipient was. Complaints forms were observed as easily accessible around the establishment, along with information about the complaints process. Complaints are categorised as follows: ordinary complaints (white form), confidential complaints which are sealed and delivered to the Governor or to the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (pink forms), and complaints forms used to appeal against an adjudication (blue form). Completed complaints forms are placed in a locked complaints post box found on every wing.

5.11 Communication with the outside world

New Hall operates a telephone account secured by a unique PIN code. Shortly after arrival to the establishment, women are issued a PIN code for accessing the phones. Women are permitted up to ten personal phone numbers and five legal or professional agency contacts on their PIN accounts, which will be verified by staff before being added to the system. Applications for telephone credit were completed on weekends and processed by cashiers on Mondays. The unique PIN code system ensures prisoners' accounts can only be operated by themselves and controls any unsanctioned contact. Conversations which take place using prison PIN phones are recorded and may be monitored by prison staff. Use of the phones is subject to prisoners consenting to this regulation.

New Hall operates a Visiting Order (VO) and booking system for visits. Convicted and sentenced prisoners are required to apply for visits through a VO which will be sent out to the friend or relative via the prison mail room. Women on remand do not require a VO and are not limited in the number of visitors they can have. However, visitors will need to book a visit via the booking line and when arriving at the visitors centre they will be required to complete a remand VO. Domestic visits are permitted Tuesday to Thursday, Saturday and Sundays 14:00-16:00. Legal and special visits, such as visits from solicitors, probation officers, family services and

other professional agencies, take place Monday to Thursday 9:00-11:30. All visits are subject to availability and it is a mandatory requirement that visitors book a minimum of 24 hours in advance; visitors are refused entry if they fail to pre-book or produce valid identification. Visits take place in a visits hall, which is an open environment with opposite facing fabric seats divided by a small round table. All visits are conducted under close observation of prison officers. Prisoners and visitors including children are subject to a rub-down and metal detector scanning on entry and exit from the visit.

New Hall has a full postal service available. Prisoners may send out post as and when they wish to do so. Stamps, paper and envelopes can be bought from the canteen service or women can have them sent in through the post. Friends and relatives are able to contact prisoners via letter as often as they wish. Letters delivered to the prison Monday to Saturday are usually delivered to the wing on the same afternoon. Prisoners are entitled to at least one weekly letter which is sent out second class post at New Hall's expense, with the weekly letter allowance varying depending on age and status. Friends and relatives are also able to send letters by email to prisoners at the cost of 40 pence. The emails are printed by prison staff and delivered to prisoners. All mail, except legally privileged or to a confidential access organisation is subject to monitoring and may be opened to check for illicit enclosures. The censoring of mail is in accordance with legal and security requirements as per PSI 24/2012 (HM Prison Service, 2012b).

5.12 Summary

This chapter has presented details of the regime and structure at New Hall and provided an overview of the services and their providers, and levels of access to provisions for prisoners serving both short and long-term sentences. The chapter has effectively given a sense to what life at New Hall is like, with a focus especially on those who experience reception to and release from prison multiple times a year.

The chapter revealed that many of the processes endured in prison, such as the reception and induction process, which are not only enormously time-consuming for staff, are for the most part, repetitive and unproductive for short-term prisoners who experience these lengthy procedures multiple times a year, and thus become deaf to

much of the information and instruction they receive. Additionally, the chapter highlighted concerns about the lack of assessment carried out for the short-term prisoner population whose needs are identified only through use of a basic screening tool upon reception to prison. Offender management staff take no responsibility for the population of women serving sentences of less than twelve months, and consequently the short-termers experience a lack of supervision and guidance. Rather than working towards a sentence plan informed by a full needs review, the short-term sentenced women are left to make their own assessment of need and seek access to support services at New Hall in the limited time available to them. The difficulties of accessing resources was highlighted throughout this chapter, with many of the services being inaccessible to short-term prisoners due to excessively long waiting lists or ineligibility for engagement due to insufficient time in custody available to effectively benefit from the service, for example: successfully completing a training course, qualification, cognitive behavioural programme, and so forth. These restrictions further limited the options for how women spent their time in custody and as a result, short-term prisoners often found themselves in a position of employment in production workshops, whilst many of their critical needs, such as housing and psychological therapy, remained unaddressed.

In summary, these points indicate that many aspects of prison life are particularly difficult for those repeatedly imprisoned for short lengths of time, specifically since the extensive range of support services and treatment programmes offered at New Hall are largely inaccessible to the short-term prisoner population. The desperation for support exhibited by the women highlights that lack of engagement with services was not a result of a shortage in prisoner motivation, but that much of the women's predicaments in accessing the support they required were due to failures in the prison system. These systemic failures are explored in greater depth in chapter eight.

PART THREE

UP AND DOWN; IN AND OUT; BACK AND FORTH; WHY DID THEY COME BACK?

Part three of this thesis comprises three findings chapters, addressing in turn; structural issues, personal issues and systemic issues. The first two of these chapters present data from the interviews undertaken with twenty imprisoned women at HMP New Hall who had repeatedly served short-term prison sentences, detailing the problems these women faced upon release which led to their reimprisonment. The final chapter in this part of the thesis presents findings relating to wider structural issues and barriers these women faced which made the challenges of rehabilitation that much more difficult. Collectively, these three chapters reveal why the short-term female prisoner population at New Hall are repeatedly reimprisoned so quickly after release.

CHAPTER SIX

Structural Issues

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data from the interviews with twenty women undertaken while they were imprisoned at HMP New Hall. The interviews explored the difficulties they had previously experienced when released following earlier periods of incarceration. The women spoke freely and openly about their experiences, and this chapter documents how the women themselves viewed the significant problems they encountered in the community and the relationships between these experiences and the offending behaviour which led to their re-imprisonment. Female offenders are not a homogenous group but many share similar issues which contribute to their offending behaviour. The findings are presented under the thematic headings identified from the data analysis. This chapter focuses on the women's descriptions of the structural issues they faced in the community prior to their re-imprisonment, and includes discussion of: their problems with accommodation and homelessness; issues relating to education, training and employment; and financial difficulties. Problems with accommodation and homelessness emerged as the most prominent and concerning matter throughout this research. The other problems discussed here (unemployment and financial issues) were viewed by the women as somewhat secondary to the issues with housing. During interviews, conversations concerning other problems would often revert back to discussions of housing needs. For that reason, a large part of this chapter is dedicated to discussion on accommodation issues and how homelessness or unstable accommodation created a barrier to addressing other problems such as unemployment and financial hardship.

6.2 Accommodation: 'Here, There and Everywhere'

Successive Governments have loudly pledged its commitment to reducing reoffending rates, particularly among short-sentence prisoners, and sees the provision of suitable accommodation as a necessary condition for the reduction of reoffending (Home Office, 2004b). Accommodation was identified as one of the seven Pathways to Reducing Reoffending documented by the Reducing Reoffending

National Action Plan in 2004 (Home Office, 2004b). The recognition of accommodation as one of the Pathways to reduce reoffending initiated the shift towards partnership working with housing-focused third sector agencies. At HMP New Hall, the housing support charity ‘Shelter’, were contracted in June 2004 to provide a service offering prisoners practical advice on housing options and linking prisoners with local authorities to assist them in securing housing on release.

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) has established a target to ensure that 81.3 percent of offenders are in settled or suitable accommodation at the end of their sentence. In 2010-11, it was reported that this target was achieved on a national scale with 86.7 percent of offenders said to be in such accommodation (MoJ, 2011). New Hall has consistently produced figures in line with the national findings, indicating that it can reliably exceed these housing targets by acquiring settled or suitable accommodation for women leaving New Hall. Despite the reported figures, lack of stable accommodation proved to be the most repeatedly detailed problem amongst the short-term prisoner population at HMP New Hall. What became clear through focus groups with representatives from external agency employees and directly employed prison staff, was that there were concerns and discrepancies around what New Hall deemed as ‘stable’ and ‘suitable’ accommodation for the purpose of meeting targets and what was actually experienced. For example, one prison employee explained:

“A lot of the housing, you know, we do, we hit 80 percent plus every, every month, we do hit our targets and supersede our targets, however a lot of the housing we send people to isn’t very appropriate, I’ll be honest with you. It’s housing that tends to be in poor areas, poor crime areas, poor social economic areas, again, which then goes towards their risk factors which brings them straight back in again.”

A number of the women in interview had reported previously leaving New Hall with a prison issued letter declaring them homeless that caused their local council to provide temporary accommodation in the form of two nights stay in a bed and breakfast. The prison would typically record this type of stay as having successfully secured the women with accommodation, positively contributing towards the prisons housing targets. In interview, women who described their experiences of this situation reported being given only two days to attempt to arrange their own alternative accommodation before they were evicted from the bed and breakfast and

would return to having no accommodation. It is difficult to see how this type of accommodation can be considered ‘stable’.

All twenty women interviewed as part of the study reported experiences of homelessness at some point prior to their re-imprisonment. At the time of interviewing, many of the women were expecting to leave custody with no fixed abode, whilst those who had successfully secured housing in preparation for discharge, had only temporary accommodation arrangements. For women who had housing through the council prior to imprisonment, some were at risk of eviction due to rent arrears since housing benefit can only be paid for up to thirteen weeks during the period a tenant is in custody before the council may seek to repossess the property (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2014).

Table 6.1 presents the housing circumstances of the twenty women in the sample. This information is based on the women’s explanations of their accommodation arrangements for their release at the time of their interview.

Table 6.1: Table displaying housing arrangements for the twenty women in the sample

	Homeless	Council housing (serving <13 weeks)	Council housing (>13 weeks and at risk of eviction)	Reside with family member	Other temporary accommodation (6 months or less)
Number of women (% of whole sample)	11 (55%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)

Of the twenty women interviewed, only one had accommodation with a relative; this denotes temporarily lodging with her uncle. One woman had a joint tenancy with her partner, whilst the other eighteen women were single occupants, eleven of whom were to be homeless and in search of housing. These eleven women all described homelessness as their key concern and the main contributing factor or reason for their offending. Ali, for example, explained:

“It’s all because I’m homeless... I keep saying I don’t care what it is or where it is, I just need a place to live. I wouldn’t keep coming back to jail otherwise. I mean, I don’t use drugs anymore, I don’t drink anymore, it’s just a case of being homeless. That’s why I keep coming in and out... If you speak to most short-termers in here, people that are in and out, it’s always housing, always,

because they come back to jail because it's the only place to live. That is the bottom line of it, that's how sad it is."

Admittedly, the women's explanations for repeated offending were not exclusively related to homelessness, but many of the other motives and influences stemmed from, or went unaddressed due to their lack of stable accommodation. As Karen declared, "it's not just the homelessness but that's what it all boils down to". Access to stable housing is vital in enabling these women when leaving custody an opportunity to access support for addressing other issues, which in turn may reduce the risk of their reoffending. According to Home Affairs Committee (2005:149) "whilst for men leaving prison the first priority is generally employment, for women it is accommodation, which provides the base for family life". Many of the women described having multiple needs pertaining to their mental and physical health, unemployment, separation from their children, and so on, that were unaddressed due to their lack of accommodation. Accommodation can offer the stability that is required in allowing women to address the issues pertaining to their offending behaviour by accessing available services such as mental health provision, drug treatment, education or employment and so forth. Ministry of Justice (2015c:31) acknowledged:

"Getting offenders into accommodation is the foundation for successful rehabilitation, resettlement and risk management. It can provide the anchor for a previously chaotic life and act as a springboard for other crucial steps, such as getting and keeping a job, and accessing health care or drug treatment."

The idea of housing being a 'foundation' links in with 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'; a psychological model which describes the human motivation and depicts a sequence of human needs on a five-tiered hierarchy, in order of their importance (Maslow, 1943). The model presents the priority of human needs as physiological; the things we require to survive, including: shelter and sleep (along with, oxygen, food, water and so on). On top of physiological needs, 'basic need' extends to include security and safety such as security of body and of property. Maslow argued that humans must meet these basic needs in order to meet psychological needs (including: 'social needs' such as love and belongingness; and 'self-esteem needs', for example: confidence and self-respect), in order to meet 'higher' needs (such as: self-actualisation). This notion reflects the idea that secure housing for these short-

term imprisoned women is the base of their hierarchy of needs, and satisfying the need for shelter, sleep, safety and security that stable accommodation would provide would allow the women to then pursue 'higher' needs such as realising a purpose, experiencing achievement and success, and being able to contribute to society. Therefore, it could be argued that, the unmet physiological and psychological needs of these women is the main contributory factor to their offending behaviour and in order for them to lead useful and law abiding lives, first their basic needs must be met in order for self-fulfilment needs to be achieved. Respectively, the women in interview described their homelessness as lacking a 'foundation' or 'base' on which they can rebuild their lives. Poppy felt "everything else would fall into place" once suitable accommodation was secured. Many of the women talked of their aspirations of gaining education, training and/or employment; being 'clean' from illicit substances and disassociation from their drug using companions or partners; and many had hopes of being able to reconnect or rebuild relationships with their children and relatives, all of which they saw being contingent on firstly acquiring a home. Ali, for example, talked of her inability to seek employment and be a mother to her son due to her housing status:

"I mean even like a job, I can't get a job while I'm homeless neither, I've got loads of qualifications, I'd LOVE to get a job cos I know that's the next step of my life and it's like, my son he's thirteen now, I can't have nowt to do with him because how can I be a mum when I'm homeless."

Ali had multiple physical health conditions and expected to be unable to get medical treatment from the National Health Service upon release until she had secured suitable and stable residence for the recovery phase of her required treatment. She explained:

"It's just gonna be impossible, it really is and I can't have none of my operations and that until I get somewhere to live because where am I gonna recover?... I've got [a number of medical conditions that require treatment], I can't have that done, I can't have it done here neither, so it's just getting worse. I need treatment for my Hep C. My liver is knackered. It's just getting worse. My chest, I keep getting chest infections. I'm 30 years old, it's not good."

Ali had repeatedly served extremely short sentences; she had received four custodial sentences in the previous three months with the longest period in prison being six weeks, and the longest period spent in the community being 23 days. She had

therefore been unable to seek suitable medical treatment whilst in prison. Due to her lack of housing and her poor health conditions, Ali quickly returns to custody in order to avoid sleeping on the streets. She argued this repeated imprisonment routine was exacerbating her existing ill health. Despite being clean from drugs and alcohol for over three years, Ali has been unable to secure accommodation. She claimed:

“It’s fucking sad it is [[crying]]...If I got a little place, I know I can build my life, I really would. I keep saying to them, I don’t care what it is, just something...it’s my little space to build my life from that... I don’t even care now, even a bedsit, a room would do now, anything, because I just can’t keep doing it, can’t keep doing it on the streets, it’s not me, I’m not tough enough.”

Many women described the strain and suffering endured whilst sleeping on the streets. A number of women expressed the dangers and risks they were routinely forced to bear, placing themselves in weak and vulnerable positions and detailed appalling traumatic incidents they had suffered through their homelessness, including being physically and sexually abused and raped. For instance, Daisy recounted her experience as follows:

“I’ve been on the streets that long, a lot of bad things have happened to me when I’ve just been laid asleep, so I won’t, I refuse to just lay asleep on the streets now and this is why I keep coming back to prison, because I’ve had a lot of bad, sexual things have happened to me and I’ve not known about them before, it was [the] Hospital who –they found me in the streets unconscious, they’d done swabs from down below and they’ve told me that something has happened to me. Still to this day I have no memory of what’s happened to me and hopefully I never will. I don’t want to remember...I’ll never sleep on the street again.”

Many of the women described feeling defenceless, vulnerable and exposed on the streets and the struggle of getting out of that position once in it. Women described their alternative options to sleeping on the streets as either staying with ‘associates’ who were typically groups of drug users, staying with men who were not their partners, or returning to prison. The latter was recurrently depicted as the most favourable option, but in both other instances, the woman described being expected to ‘offer something’ in return for their lodging; drug users typically demanded a drug supply, whilst men often insisted on sexual activity in return. As Anna described:

“I mean, some of my friends say –well drug using friends say ‘well you can stay at mine’ but at the end of the day they always want something off you... if

it's a male friend he'll probably want sex that night, or drugs. I can't tell you I've got a decent friend who would let me stay for nothing or would even wait until I've got my benefits sorted to give them keep. They always want me for something so they're not really my friends are they?"

Many women described drug-users' properties as being unsafe residences; prisoners talked of having other unknown drug users regularly turning up at the property, with drug dealing and prostitution sometimes taking place. Daisy reported having her possessions removed from her person whilst asleep at a drug-users property:

"I'm having to go back there and sleep on their sofas. And then my shoes are getting nicked and my coats getting nicked and I've got nothing to go with. So when I do go to prison I'm wearing police pumps and stuff like that, you know, and police clothing."

Poppy talked of the security she would have if she had her own property:

"The thing is you can shut your door when you've got your own flat or your own room, you can shut your door and lock it and nobody has to come in, so then you feel safer and you can keep away from it all."

A number of the women used the phrase "here, there and everywhere" when probed about where they had been residing. All twenty women in the sample reported a history of drug use; many with an opioid dependency, although several reported being able to remain drug-free, or keep to a 'script' (a prescription of synthetic opioids to relieve withdrawal symptoms), whilst in secure accommodation in the community, but relapsed on every occasion they found themselves homeless. Chantelle, for example, said:

"I've never had stable housing before apart from [prison] so I've always got out of prison and had to stay here, there and everywhere, and with other users and then because I'm around them I've ended up using. I've had to end up – because I've had nowhere to stay, had to buy their drugs as well as my own so I've had to earn twice as much money."

This statement not only highlights the issue of how the arrangement of temporary lodging with known drug users on release significantly reduces their chances of successful drug rehabilitation but these women emphasise the point that they are expected to provide 'rent' to the property tenants in the form of illicit substances. This requires the women to commit further criminal offences and consequently increases the chances of their capture when offending for drugs or purchasing drugs.

As noted above, a number of women described undertaking sex work, or simply staying with men who were not their partners, as a means of procuring accommodation. In a number of instances, women reported receiving no financial payment in return for their sex work, but were rewarded in the form of shelter. Sofia described resuming her work as a prostitute, not to feed a drug habit, but as an aid to obtaining somewhere to stay: “I was living with ex-punters... I was selling my body and stuff. It’s horrible but I wouldn’t do that if I had my own accommodation.”

Daisy talked of how she and other women leaving New Hall stayed with “old men” as a way of procuring somewhere to stay. She describes her previous experience as follows:

“We are either living with men –old men, that we don’t want to be and that we know that these men are looking at us like paedophiles, is how we word it. But we have to be there otherwise we’d be on the streets and that’s what I couldn’t do... I said, I can’t do it, I cannot lay in bed at the side of him anymore and know he’s happy for me to be there because he’s happy because I’m a young girl. We never had sex. He’s too old. He’s past that but it’s the point of the matter that I know he’s happy for me to be there because he’s looking at me. And he’s looking at me in a wrong way... I had no underwear. I was wearing [his] boxer shorts... he wanted me to walk around the house like that, in his clothes, which was quite sad... when I went out the house I was scared because I thought someone was gonna be beating me up for living with an old man, or someone was gonna beat the old man up... That were the only way I could get a roof over my head... So like I say, I just reoffended and come back to prison.”

Returning to custody was therefore favoured by many of the women in the sample over the alternate options they described. For example, Ruth argued that it was better in prison “if you’ve got nowhere to live and that, you get a bed and three meals a day and that”. Many of the women described the benefits or gains of prison as providing them with stability, respite, shelter, food and wash facilities, as well as keeping them clean from illicit substances. Occasionally during discussions with the women, they would make reference to their re-imprisonment as ‘returning home’. Daisy explains “it’s a shame to say this is my home, but it is. This is my home”.

What I observed during the fieldwork period of this study was the upkeep and presentation of the prison cells by the women. When visiting women’s rooms they would often apologise for what they described as ‘a mess’, but what I considered to

be clean and well maintained space. An interview with Jasmine was conducted in her cell, partway through the interview she stood and began reorganising her belongings whilst repeatedly apologising for her room being “such a state”. She explained: “it’s because nobody ever comes to see me and then when they do it’s when my room’s upside down”. It was not until I convinced her of my own room being in a much untidier state than hers witnessing, that she was able to relax and continue the interview. This behaviour was interesting considering the conditions she had described being accustomed to in the community; she depicted a life of sleeping in alleyways and insanitary public toilets, yet in this instance she felt ashamed of me witnessing her unfolded, washed laundry.

As mentioned previously, the prison operates a canteen system whereby ‘non-essential’ or ‘luxury’ items such as cosmetic products could be purchased with weekly earnings. The women’s purchases were noticeably made an exhibition of, and even empty cosmetic product containers and bottles were retained after use in order to continue contributing to the displays. This act of ‘home-making’ corroborates the depiction of prison being ‘a home’ for these women, and helps better understand their preference for their ‘beautified’ cells to a life of homelessness in the community. Wing staff noted how women would often make requests for ‘their’ cell to be earmarked for their anticipated return. Understandably such requests were denied.

Jasmine described her preference for prison over homelessness:

“Well basically I got out, I had nowhere to live, and erm, and so I mean like my only choice was to go and stay with people that I knew and a lot of them, obviously because of my past, was all drug users...So I ended up using... but then because I know it’s not what I really wanted –I mean I come out with all good expectations, you know, wanting to stay clean but it’s always the accommodation thing that lets me down... I thought well the only other thing then is to go back to prison because if I continue doing drugs I’m gonna soon be committing crimes to feed it. Do you know what I mean? And I would rather be back in prison than living like that, so then I got myself arrested to come back here.”

When asked how she got herself sent back to prison, she said:

“I thought, what can I do now to get arrested? Anything. Do you know what I mean? Just wanted to get away so it was like, no shops were open cos

otherwise I'd have walked into a shop and just pinched something and got myself caught, so these police coppers –I was stood there for a bit thinking and these coppers went past me and I've started giving them all that [[abusive hand action]]. I thought, public order init, get arrested for public order.”

All twenty of the women in the sample admitted in interview that they commit offences purely for the benefit of being able to return to custody for accommodation. Women disclosed intentionally getting themselves caught offending or intentionally breaching a community order, such as an anti-social behaviour order or restraining order, with the intention of being re-imprisoned; the primary reason being they were desperate for somewhere to stay. I discovered through interviews with prison and probation employees that this act of deliberate self-imprisonment was not a secret kept from officers. Prison employees discussed the openness of the women on the matter and staff members expressed understanding of such actions, proclaiming: “can't blame them, I'd do the same” (prison officer).

Many of the women emphasised the fact they were not particular about the nature of the accommodation they acquired; many stressed their desperation by stating they would take “anything”. A number of women who were in need of housing upon release claimed that they were prepared to relocate to another part of the country if stable accommodation could be secured more easily in other areas than their home towns or cities. For example, Daisy said: “I said I would go anywhere, anywhere, out of [my home town]. Now I've lost my mum I've got no ties in [my home town] so I said I would go anywhere”.

Staff members associated with housing-services at New Hall described there being a disproportionate number of women from areas reported to have poor social housing and particular difficulties housing women from these regions. For example:

“generally we have a disproportionate amount of offenders here from Hull, if you look at the demographics of our catchment area, a disproportionate amount of ours come from West Yorkshire and a lot of those are under twelve months and I think a lot of that is because we don't have housing providers, we don't have all the support services we have for say Leeds and Sheffield.” (Staff member)

Although it was acknowledged in interviews with prison staff that there was a need for better links with housing organisations throughout the country, they claimed this was not viable within their current funding budget.

Many women tried to turn to Shelter. However, women for whom the efficacy of Shelter support is likely to be restricted are those who are not from New Hall's catchment area, which goes as far as to include: Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. Those women at New Hall who do not have a 'local connection' with one of these areas (22% of short-term prisoners at New Hall at the time of the research fell within this grouping) face particular difficulties in acquiring housing since housing providers in prison have poor links with community organisations in different regions. Unlike the Prison Service, whose remit is national, Shelter operates at a local level. While women can be moved to a suitable category of prison far from their home area, local authorities manage homelessness only in their local area. Consequently, Shelter is further limited in what it could actually do. Prison Reform Trust (2014a) highlights that this is a particular issue for imprisoned women, since there are fewer female establishments which are more geographically dispersed across England than men's prisons; it is more likely for women to be imprisoned a greater distance from their home area.

The Social Exclusion Unit (2002:140) found that "women are less likely than men to leave prison with accommodation arranged". In support of this finding, staff at New Hall who had experience working within both the male and female estate, made claims in interview that they found it much harder to house women than men, for example:

"In terms of accommodation generally, there's –there is a stigma within the general population about female offenders anyway... they seemed to be viewed a lot worse than male offenders do. It's certainly my experience of working in the male estate; it's easier to house a male offender than it is to house a female." (Staff member)

A number of prisoners commented on the difficulties of finding supported housing and hostel accommodation in the community available to women. Scarlett, for example, stated: "it's like there's just nowt out there for women for after prison... There's hardly any hostels that take women, it's all for men". Many women

commented on how their male relatives and male partners had been more easily housed in supported housing and hostels in the community.

Prison employees and workers described the challenges in trying to house someone away from their home area and where they have better local connections since “residence in a district while serving a prison sentence there does not establish a local connection” (DCLG, 2006:10), despite recognising that returning to their old behavioural patterns, particularly if they are unable to get away from criminal associates may thus increase the risk of reoffending.

Charlie explained how it was especially difficult to acquire suitable accommodation in her home town since it did not fall within the prison’s catchment area. The prison had a limited number of community housing support agency contacts from her area which limited her opportunities significantly. Despite declaring she was prepared to move to another area of the country, she worried she would not be permitted to relocate due to her Prolific and Priority Offender (PPO) status which prevented her easily moving from her home town. Charlie explained:

“I wouldn’t mind moving to [another town], I wouldn’t mind that but I’ve asked about it but when you’re a PPO you’re not really allowed to leave your area anyway, you know, so they can keep an eye on you. Not allowed to leave your area if you’re a prolific offender cos police need to know where you are and that and if you don’t tell them where you are or move towns you get arrested and breached. You’re committing an offence.”

Some of the women described moving from their home towns as allowing them a “fresh start”. Anna, for example:

“I’ve been told I could be anywhere in the North West but I’m hoping it’s not in [my home town] so that I’m away from all them drug-users and I can like start a fresh. That’s what I’m seeing this as, me starting a fresh.”

Ruth explained how she would also prefer not to return to her hometown in order to avoid previous drug-using companions, resembling the findings of Farall *et al.* (2014) who found those trying to desist would avoid certain people and places. Ruth stated she would like to remain in reasonable travelling distance from her home area to enable her to keep ties with her family and children:

“I never know which town I’m gonna go to because I just don’t belong anywhere; do you know what I mean? So... it doesn’t need to be in my own

town but I do need to be close enough to see my family to be able to show them that I'm doing well... not in my own town, like so that it's just a little bus ride away because... back to my home town I don't think would be ideal because of the people I know, the drugs and everything like that, but close enough so I can see my family."

The interview extract below with Ali shows her willingness to relocate in order to find accommodation.

Lucy	But you're happy to move?
Ali	Anywhere, anywhere, I don't care where it is.
Lucy	You'd happily move anywhere to get accommodation?
Ali	Yep yep yep. Of course I would yeah; I've got nowt, no ties me anywhere.

Like Ali, many of these women who were homeless talked of having 'nothing'; most of those who were mothers had lost custody of, and contact with, their children, most of the women were without a partner and without family and what they term 'real' friends, as well as having no home. Many talk of taking risks and living unsafe or careless lives since having 'nothing to lose'. Rachel described her battles with severe drug use and homelessness for several years, until she managed to secure accommodation with her local council about three and a half years ago. Since then Rachel had spent long periods drug-free, despite a small number of relapses, and her offending has reduced significantly in terms of its regularity and seriousness. Rachel had a history of serving sentences of over twelve months for offences including identity fraud, burglary, and violent offences but claimed she would never commit offences of such seriousness again as she would not risk receiving a sentence exceeding thirteen weeks and risk being evicted from her council owned property. Since acquiring accommodation Rachel returned to prison on only very short sentences (all less than eight weeks) typically for shoplifting when she is "skint" or when she relapses. Rachel explained:

"I don't lose my flat... I'll tell you what, if I thought that I were gonna lose my flat when I got out, if I were gonna come back to jail again, that would seriously make me think... If I had to think about going to that life where I had nowhere to live and all that... Before when I were in and out of prison and all that, I didn't have out in my life that I cared about. Do you know what I mean? But I do care about my home. If I thought I were gonna lose that and have to

go back to that life of having nowhere to live and living with addicts and stuff, I don't think I'd be able to pick a drug up, but so like that's why I wouldn't ever do out worse than shoplifting."

Zoe also had a flat through the council but was serving a sentence exceeding thirteen weeks and risked eviction. She explained how she had got somebody, who she infers is a drug dealer, to pay for her accommodation once her housing benefit stops to prevent her being evicted. However, Zoe admitted that she would have to return to shoplifting as soon as she was released to enable her to repay her debt to him:

"[The council] will pay your rent up to the thirteen weeks, after that, they just take it back, take the flat back... that won't happen to me, even though that's what they're telling me could, that won't happen to me because I already set things in place that if I am kept here longer than thirteen weeks somebody else will pay my rent... so then, eventually when I do get out of prison, I'm in debt to him. So where am I going?... I'm going to go shoplifting."

Charlie who was without stable accommodation spoke of other prisoners she knew who lost their homes whilst imprisoned and argued she would not offend if she had a home as she would have "responsibility" and "something to lose":

"There would be something for me to lose... If they weren't homeless when they come in they might lose it when they're in jail. My mate, she's gonna lose her house cos errrr they only hold it for so long don't they... Yeah but seriously yeah, if I had a house, I wouldn't be here now because it would be something for me to lose. I'd have like a responsibility to keep that house and I wouldn't want to get pissed and that all the time."

Charlie was the only homeless participant who did not have a heroin addiction, although she did use recreational drugs and abused opioid based prescribed medication as well as being an alcoholic. Charlie explained her situation as follows:

"So I only drink and use drugs to block out being homeless and that and when you're pissed and that you don't give a fuck do you. You'd sleep anywhere [[laughter]]. Do you know what I mean? But if I went out sober and I'm homeless I'm like right I'm getting arrested me, I can't be arsed with this."

Ruth argued that after hitting "rock bottom", prison was "the only way out of the hole". Ali also felt that her "only option were to come back [to prison]", whilst Nadia described offending as a way "to survive" when homeless:

“The courts should recognise it, when they’re going in on no fixed abode. Maybe that’s the problem why they’re committing the offences, to survive!”

Judicial decision-making and the significance of personal mitigation in sentencing is a hotly debated topic. Jacobson and Hough (2007:vii) state that “personal mitigation plays an important part in the sentencing decision; it can be the decisive factor in choosing a community penalty in preference to imprisonment”. The research describes how a move towards more individualised sentencing allows the court to take personal mitigating factors such as deprivation and disadvantage into consideration when passing sentence by demonstrating more leniency. This however, assumes that the offender has a preference for a community sentence. The present (and previous) research demonstrates that a short-term, repeatedly imprisoned population of women with multiple needs, including no secure housing, view custody as a less punitive outcome than a life in the community where there is a lack of provision and support. Many of the women in interview described not wanting the courts to offer mitigation in the form of what would ordinarily be considered a more lenient sentence, but felt the sentencer would in fact be demonstrating more mercy by issuing a custodial penalty. This dilemma creates difficulties for those with sentencing responsibilities. With a focus on rehabilitating the offender and lack of community support provisions, and the offender’s repeat offending tendency and a desire for imprisonment, it is difficult to divert them from custody despite their low risk of harm status and overcrowded prisons.

Jasmine discussed her relationship with the Magistrate she saw regularly in court and his familiarity with, and acknowledgement of, her housing situation:

“I explained all this to the judge, he was like ‘Listen [Jasmine], you must have somewhere you can go’ and I just told him the situation and I said ‘yeah if I wanna go back on the drugs or living like a tramp’ and all that and he said ‘well do you know what, respect to you for your honesty’. Do you know what I mean? ‘Being honest’ and all this and then he said ‘so I’m just gonna give you the minimum sentence then’ and he said ‘I hope –I wish you luck and I hope that in these 28 days’ Do you know what I mean? He said ‘that they will find you somewhere.’”

Charlie also talked of her relationship with the Magistrates at her local court and the apparent sympathy and familiarity with her lack of accommodation. Charlie explained:

“I’m like yeah ‘send me to jail’... and they’ve been like ‘I don’t want to’, like loads of times. I get arrested loads before I come back. They don’t want to send me to jail because of my situation cos they like, obviously Judge [Smith] knows a lot about me cos he’s known me since I was like young... Before he told probation they had to get me somewhere to live, you know when I’d gone to court and he said that they had to find me somewhere to live.”

What these statements also demonstrate is that the women were essentially dictating their own outcome. In many cases, the women describe how the magistrate sought their instruction on what outcome they most desire as the following extract illustrates:

Karen	I asked the judge if he’d send me to prison so I could sort my head out and decide what I wanted to do with the pregnancy.
Lucy	So you asked the judge to send you back here?
Karen	Yeah, they didn’t want to, they wanted to give me a few more months added onto my DRR because I were doing well but I was still using now and again so when they stood me down for a report, I asked [my solicitor] to get it adjourned until I’d had my dinner so that I could get a different judge, and it was Judge [Mason] thank god and he properly sat me down and said he thought I were doing the best thing. So, he even asked me how long I wanted. [[laughter]]
Lucy	Did he?
Karen	Yeah
Lucy	And what did you say to him?
Karen	Just sixteen weeks delay and if I get this I can be out soon, and he said he thinks that the best choice.
Lucy	So you came in just to get the help?
Karen	Yeah

In addition to hearing so many women announce that they intentionally caused their own imprisonment, many also described reluctantly being released from custody when they were exiting with no fixed abode. For example Jasmine said: “Do you know, if I had a choice I’d say to them at reception ‘don’t even let me go home’, but obviously they can’t do that. Once your time is up, it’s up... You have to go”.

Daisy shared her thoughts about how beneficial a long custodial sentence might be and threatened to increase the seriousness of the crimes she committed in future. She expressed her desire to receive a life sentence in order to stop the 'revolving door' and felt life in prison might be her only way to secure long-term accommodation. Daisy admitted that she battled with her conscience when considering causing loss of life or serious harm to another individual simply with the objective of receiving a sentence of life in prison. Daisy was extremely tearful and expressively shared her thoughts and feelings of desperation in interview.

"I'll never sleep on the streets again, so I don't care what offences I have to keep committing, but at the minute I'm just doing stupid little stuff just to come in, but if they don't hurry up and find me somewhere to live I'm going to end up doing a murder sentence. Either that or they'll find me dead. I just can't go through it anymore."

Many of the women quizzed the purpose of imprisonment in interview, and acknowledged that prison was not being used as a punishment in many instances but instead as shelter or asylum. Jasmine recognised that imprisonment should not be desired over a life in the community, but whilst housing is not obtainable, women are continuing to favour a life in prison.

"Prison's not seen as punishment anymore. It's normally somewhere you'd avoid, but people want to come to jail. It's like a home for them. It's not right. This is not how it should be. But people do, it's like their home... They know they're better off in here. Do you know, they've got everything they need and its cush yeah... summat needs to be done."

Many of the interviews revealed the great difficulties employees and agency workers at New Hall faced in helping the women secure suitable accommodation in the community. The options for acquiring stable accommodation to be considered include: staying with family/relatives, private/rented sector, supported housing or council housing.

Although living with family might be considered a primary consideration, there was seemingly a great lack of family support for the twenty women I interviewed. Many of the women had poor relationships with parents and other relatives for various reasons, including previous drug use, violent relationships, or being victims of abuse at the hands of their relatives. In most cases, residing with their families was not a

viable option. Although some women expressed the hope of being able to rekindle relationships with family members, they needed to somehow ‘prove’ themselves first; whilst many women felt they had simply exhausted their chances.

“I’m strayed from my parents. I mean on this sentence I’ve started writing to my mum and that but she wouldn’t have me back because of what has happened in the past with using drugs and stuff and police always coming to the door and that” (Anna)

The extract below also illustrates a complex relationship between Ruth and her mother:

Lucy	Do you have a good relationship with your mum then?
Ruth	Like I say, I haven’t been in touch with her for two year right but that’s only through drugs but now I aren’t on drugs, relationships coming back good yeah. But everything takes time doesn’t it? I can’t expect miracles just overnight, but we used to like I say. We’ll see what happens.
Lucy	You couldn’t go and stay with her?
Ruth	No. no. no. We’re not that close yet [[laughter]] I’ve got to prove myself.

Social housing was actively sought by the women at New Hall although tenancy is not typically something that can be organised over a short period of time due to the increasingly long waiting lists. Unfortunately for prisoners, eligibility onto the waiting list cannot be considered whilst in custody. Prison staff discussed during focus groups the issue of prisoners not being able to join waiting lists for housing:

“The problem is with the housing options errr council housing and that, they won’t accept people on lists that are serving a sentence. They have to have been released from prison, then they have to report to -it’s ridiculous. And then they have to report to housing options, which is council housing, they’ve changed the name... It’s frustrating... there is nothing worse than saying to someone -and I take it as a real defeat if we say to someone you have to report to the housing place because 99.9% of them don’t actually turn up for that because they know they are going to be sat in there for three or four hours probably filling in loads of forms, they’ve got a discharge grant in their pocket,

they can probably think of better things to spend it on. It's a ridiculous situation." (Staff member)

The council must establish a number of factors when processing an application for housing from an individual maintaining they are homeless. First, they must ascertain that the individual is truly homeless; confirmation of this would ordinarily be delivered in the form of a letter issued by the prison. Secondly, the council must verify the applicant has a local connection to the area. As mentioned earlier, the need for a local connection should not be overlooked, as the women are unlikely to be considered eligible for accommodation through a local authority in an area other than where they are from. Finally, the candidate must be considered 'unintentionally homeless' and in priority need (Homelessness Act, 2002). Proving unintentional homelessness can also create further barriers for women in securing housing as it can be argued by local authorities that they became intentionally homeless by virtue of committing an offence and being sent to prison. Grannum (2005) reports that it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to get an assessment outcome from local authorities as unintentionally homeless and on reflection, ineligibility outcomes for social housing applications has doubled since 1997. This may be considered an attempt to relieve the pressure on housing providers who would be required to house someone instantly deemed a priority case. If the council was to consider the applicant eligible for housing, the council then has the statutory duty to provide temporary housing until suitable, stable accommodation is made available. Despite the existing needs of the prisoners in the sample, all of the women who had previously sought to attain receipt of the full duty of homelessness had not achieved an assessment score which qualified them as eligible and of priority need. Many of the women described how they were not considered a priority to the local councils since they did not have custody of their children and without dependents "it takes years". Although priority need recognises those with dependent children, mothers were often ineligible for housing since they were in the position of not having custody of their children when applying for housing since their children were placed in another person's care whilst they were in custody (HM Prison Service & Women and Young People's Group, 2006). The predicament that some of the mothers faced was that they were unable to regain custody of their children until they could demonstrate they had suitable housing, but without the children in their custody, they could not be considered a priority need for housing. Additionally, women are

considerably more likely to lose the family home when imprisoned, since a significant number are typically single, which means “there are fewer partners to maintain housing in their absence” (SEU, 2002:104).

According to the Housing Act 1996 which defines the categories for priority need, alongside prioritising pregnant women and those with dependent children, priority need should also be considered for “a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability”. Many of the women might be considered a priority need following diagnosis of a mental health condition for example. However, since the implementation of the Localism Act 2011, the local authorities now hold more discretion over whether individual circumstances warrant a priority status. This change means that authorities now have the capacity to exclude certain applicants from their housing registers, who might be considered eligible in correspondence with the Homeless Act 2002, such as those with a history of anti-social behaviour. This creates great problems for offenders requiring housing since a large majority have histories of what could be perceived as anti-social behaviour which potentially prevents them from accessing social housing. Staff discussed the shortage of social housing and how offenders are not given enough consideration:

“the problem is there is only so much social housing available and there are so many people now trying to get their fingers in the pies. I mean think of the male estate... There are so many people looking for this specific type of social housing. This economic climate I think has caused some of it and that, so it’s very difficult because there are a lot of people, with offenders generally, ‘oh, we don’t want to know offenders’ and that type of stigma and attitude out there... you know the Government supposedly put a lot of money into complex needs housing. WHERE?” (Prison employee)

Housing options for prisoners are not only affected by recent funding cuts to the criminal justice system which has reduced prison-based housing advice and provision, but housing options are considerably affected by reductions in public expenditure. Mullins (2002) highlights that the housing capital programme bore a disproportionate share of the Coalition Government’s deficit reduction programme of £83 Billion over three years, announced in October 2010. The comprehensive spending review for housing saw overall reductions of 60-75 percent, reducing from £8.4 Billion over three years announced by the previous Labour Government (of

which £2.3 Billion had already been committed), to a £4.5 Billion housing programme over a four year period, leaving only £2.2 Billion of new funding.

Since such barriers exist in accessing social housing, the option to seek accommodation in the private sector may be considered as an alternative. However, privately rented accommodation is not easily obtained without a positive reference, financial security bond, and proof of regular income and/or a financial guarantor. Poor credit histories, existing debt and criminal histories also jeopardise the probabilities of securing property privately. Moreover, many landlords will not accept Housing Benefit claimants (SEU, 2002; Shelter, 2008). Staff discussed these issues:

“Yeah we have people who owe money to one housing association or another housing association or they’ve had a chaotic lifestyle and maybe sold the furniture or had parties, drug parties, etc. or had men round for selling sex etc. and that. It’s very hard to get them into these when they get blacklisted. Putting it bluntly, it’s very hard to then find anyone else that’s willing to look at them. Then again we find with a lot of the short-term population this tends to be a fairly common problem. They never keep a tenancy long enough to actually get a good reference from it so therefore other landlords are reluctant to take them”. (Prison employee)

Jessie was the only woman in the sample who had managed to obtain property through private renting; this was due to her managing to rebuild a relationship with her father who obtained a privately rented property on her behalf and financed a six month contract. She explained that once the six months were up, her father expected her to be “on her feet” and financially supporting herself through employment.

Many of the women had been able to access some temporary supported housing or hostels in the past, but many reported their experiences to have been negative. Many women reported the regular use of drugs and alcohol in hostels and described it as being like prison except there is a high risk of relapse. Jessie said:

“When you get out and you’re in a hostel and stuff, it’s still like being in jail and then there’s more people there like who do drugs and who do crime and stuff so then you just fall back into it anyway, so it’s just like setting you up to fail straight away... people need to break away from everything that’s going to get you back on drugs.”

Some community housing organisations who offer shared housing accept both sexes, and place ex-offenders in mixed gender environments. A number of women reported when being placed in shared housing in the community being the only female in a shared property and this was largely disliked by the women. For example, Daisy, who had a long history of domestic violence victimisation as well as suffering violent and sexual abuse throughout her childhood at the hands of male perpetrators, expressed her fears about being placed in a shared house with four male ex-prisoners; she claimed she “didn’t want to live with four men so I abandoned that property after the first four days”. Prison employees and third sector agency employees debated this in a focus group:

Cathy	A lot of women who are successful at gaining accommodation on the out, they’re put in a shared house.
Tracy	Hmm that’s right.
Cathy	But a lot of vulnerable women who are victims of abuse are put in a shared house with eight male ex-offenders.
Tracy	Yes absolutely.
Rob	It’s not appropriate.
Cathy	You’re putting vulnerable women in vulnerable situations.
Tracy	That’s where refuges should be more accountable then shouldn’t they?
Cathy	Yes. Yes.
Rob	Yeah. Definitely.
Cathy	Women chose to abandon the property then

Ruth was placed in supported accommodation upon release but was evicted for having her partner frequently stay at the accommodation with her. Ruth suffered from depression, social anxiety disorder and other mental health conditions and found it very challenging mixing and socialising with people unknown to her. She described her experience of being put in a shared house, with little support, away from her family and children very negatively:

“When I got there, I didn’t realise you aren’t allowed to have your family there. Well you weren’t allowed nobody there really and plus it were miles away so obviously I breached that because all that were too much for me to handle... they were for vulnerable people but they didn’t seem to help you. You see me, I feel like I need a lot of support and yeah it’s alright housing you but then they just leave you... I need to be able to have my family and support around me. Not like bloody miles away”

This aside, spaces in hostels and supported housing organisations are very hard to acquire, especially if you are not eligible to exit prison on a home detention curfew which necessitates fixed accommodation for the duration of your licence period. Jasmine explained how rooms are not ordinarily available immediately from the day one was released due to waiting lists and therefore, even if an application was eventually successful, it was likely one would have been homeless in the meantime resulting in relapse after temporarily lodging with drug users, which would then prevent you from taking up your place with the housing association when it did eventually come available.

“Unless you’ve got somewhere to go as soon as you get out the gate then it’s not gonna happen, cos what you gonna do in the meantime?” (Jasmine)

There is also a danger that if one does succeed in securing a place in a hostel; one does not meet the eligibility criteria for home detention curfew for a different reason. This is the situation described by Anna who felt she had her hopes raised by the notification of conditional acceptance into a hostel contingent on the offender management unit’s risk assessment deeming her fit for home detention curfew:

“I’ve got the address. They said I’ve got an address with [ABC housing]. I’ve been accepted. It’s just whether these will give me my tag. It’s up to the prison really but I can’t see problems in why not and if they say no, to be honest the prison will be setting me up to fail cos I’ll be going out NFA but if I get my tag I’ll be going out with accommodation... with support... That’s what I’m hoping anyway but it’s just a waiting game... But if I don’t get my tag I’ll be going out NFA... back to square one, which is what I really don’t want... I haven’t heard anything and every time I ask OMU I’m told to just wait”.

Like Anna, many women talked of the “waiting game” and the uncertainty of which housing arrangements may or may not be in place upon their release. Similarly, Kerry said: “I put apps [applications to see housing support workers] in but I haven’t

heard anything back so I'm just always waiting, big waiting game". Ali described her experience of repeating the same process and the ongoing uncertainties:

"I'm just sat waiting and it's not a nice feeling, you know what I mean? Not knowing. I mean, every time I go and see Shelter, she seems to do the same thing every single time, you know, fill a form in, 'yeah, I'll get on it, I'll refer you to these, I'll refer you to them', every single time and it's been going on for years".

Scarlett shared her frustrations of having to restart the same application processes each time she was re-imprisoned:

"I don't know whether I'm going to have to do all that application work again, which is what does my head in, I have to do it time and time and time over. They accepted me in September so when I came back, last time in February, why I had to do it all again I'll never know".

Kerry claimed being informed on her current sentence that there was a possibility of obtaining housing for her, but since that discussion, with only a few weeks left on her sentence, no further details were provided and her written correspondence was yet to be answered, leaving her uncertain of whether anything has been secured and if so where she might be going upon release:

"That were two week ago so and I ain't heard nowt. I don't even know what she meant by it, whether they were gonna get me somewhere or what, it just weren't explained".

In most cases, the hindrance is lack of available time before they are release. Firstly, there is a waiting list to see the housing support team at New Hall, having only a small team working on behalf of a large population of women with housing needs and an extremely quick turnover due to the high population of short-term sentenced prisoners at New Hall. As a result, it is especially difficult ensuring all women are seen in the time they are in custody. Once the women have been seen and their needs identified, the completion of community housing application forms can be lengthy, especially considering the high percentage of women who require literacy support in order to comprehend and complete the forms, before potentially entering a further waiting list for a suitability assessment. Once deemed suitable, if still in custody, the prisoner would then join a waiting list for an available space.

Nadia did not get an appointment through to see a housing support officer until the day before she was released, despite entering a number of applications:

“I was homeless, I was in a right state, I remember going to Shelter here and begging them to help me with somewhere to live and she said we can give you two nights in a hotel, oh no a bed and breakfast, she said but there’s nothing else we can do for you and that was it and this was like a day before I was going home so straight back out and that went on for ages.”

Prison staff and workers highlighted reasons for such delays as being lack of provision due to funding restrictions and the frustrations of being completely reliant on third sector agencies offering the services at no cost to the prison service. Many of the external organisation workers have a representative attend intermittently and inconsistently, and so:

“If they’re not in there every day, on a short sentence, you know [[shakes head]]. I’ve seen a girl this morning and she’s pulling her hair out because she’s put app after app after app in but [the external housing agency from her area] come in what? Every? Once every four or five weeks?... and if you’re not within that threshold then you’re in and out then unfortunately. She could be going out to nothing!” (Non-directly employed member of staff)

A HM Prison employee responded with the following comment:

“Yeah that’s right. She’s unfortunate yeah but we’re relying on voluntary sectors and these third sector agencies coming in with no funding. We don’t pay them to come in, so it’s a very difficult one.” (Prison employee)

Many women complained of how the attempted arrangement of accommodation is intentionally delayed by the housing services within New Hall until the final stages of the prisoner’s sentence, and when only serving a small number of weeks, this can mean days before they are released. Community housing support agencies and hostels are only able to inform the prison of the availability of a residence with little or no notice and due to the high demand for accommodation are not able to hold property for long periods; therefore, they will only consider applications from women who are very soon to be released. For example, Ruth expressed her frustration with not being seen until a short time before she was released:

“They can’t do out for you til it’s near to your release date which is like bullshit... They give you that form to fill in then you have to wait until it’s time to be released so all that time you don’t know.... Then you don’t get nothing do

you. You literally don't get no help. The problem is, you don't even have enough time"

When probing prison staff on the matter during a focus group, it was explained as follows:

"the reasons we say come back in two weeks is that we've actually got more chance in actually securing them somewhere within two weeks. We've got an up-to-date property list then on the various areas... Housing providers outside won't keep properties for like six seven weeks empty. They just won't do it. So that's the situation. I don't think it's right, but that is the situation."

Prison staff revealed during interviews that certain groups of offenders, particularly those serving short-term sentences were considerably less likely to receive housing provision on release from prison than other prisoners. Gojkovic *et al.* (2012:15) also reported from their research into the role and impact of third sector agencies in resettlement, that short-sentenced prisoners and prisoners on remand are particularly unlikely to benefit from the partnership work (such as the type of service Shelter offers at New Hall) since "short-sentence prisoners are often released sooner than referrals can be made, or their release dates are unexpectedly pushed forward. Prisoners on remand may not know their date of release and may be released directly from the court with no time to make provision for them. Due to these uncertainties, many housing agencies are reluctant to deal with clients from these two groups".

Karen, talked of her experience of being on remand at New Hall on a previous sentence and described how she was denied help due to being unsentenced and consequently without a release date.

"I'd been on remand for eight months and they wouldn't help me with housing or anything because I wasn't sentenced and then when I got sentenced I'd done most of it on remand so I had like a month left."

Despite the Government's recognition that short-term prisoners are at a higher risk of reoffending, barriers continue to exist making it exceptionally difficult for the short-term imprisoned women to access housing services. This chapter has shown that prisoners of New Hall continually face a number of barriers to suitable housing provision, particularly securing medium and long-term accommodation, resulting in their repeated re-imprisonment. It is granted that addressing housing matters will not entirely eliminate the women's problems and exclusively prevent reoffending, but

homelessness is most certainly a large contributory dynamic along with other issues presented in the following sections of this chapter and the next.

6.3 Education, training and employment

Unemployment has been recognised as a strong predictor of future offending (Home Office, 2001), making education, training and employment one of the ‘pathways’ to reducing reoffending alongside accommodation, identified in the Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan (Home Office, 2004b). Despite this, the Social Exclusion Unit (2002:43) reported that:

“Prisoners are often not given appropriate opportunities to address their education and training needs, both in prison and beyond. Assessment of education and training needs is often inadequate. There may be long waiting lists for courses or suitable courses may not be available”.

Furthermore, it is known that women offenders have more unmet needs in the area of education, training and employment than men (NOMS, 2008). The Social Exclusion Task Force (2009) reported that 32 percent of women offenders had significant problems with regard to work related skills, compared to twenty percent of adult male offenders. More recently reported barriers to accessing education, training and employment in the community, include: the poor conditions of the local and national jobs market, problems searching for jobs while in custody, having a criminal record, delays in receiving certificates for qualifications obtained whilst in custody, and no proof of identity (HM Inspectorate of Prisons *et al.*, 2014). Together with these barriers, it can be argued that female prisoners face additional difficulties in accessing education, training and employment both in custody and beyond, including: low confidence and self-esteem, homelessness, mental health and substance misuse. Furthermore, women are more likely to serve short-term custodial sentences and the barriers to participation in education, training and employment are seemingly magnified in the short-term prison population (SEU, 2002).

Offenders are more likely to be unemployed for longer periods of time compared with the general population (Home Office, 2003), and while 50 percent of male prisoners in England and Wales have been in some form of employment before custody, this figure is only 29 percent for female offenders (Home Office, 2003). All

of the twenty women who were interviewed as part of this study reported being unemployed and not enrolled on any training or educational course in the community when imprisoned at New Hall on their current sentence, although some of the women did report a work history. Despite this all-encompassing unemployment status, the women did portray willingness and enthusiasm towards obtaining employment or education in the community upon release from New Hall. In interview, the women said that the primary reason for desiring education, training or employment in the future, was to gain some stability, structure and to keep themselves busy so as to prevent boredom and their focus moving back to their offending or drug using habits. Jasmine described her voluntary work experience in the community as positively occupying her time by stating: “mainly it’s just something for me to keep my mind busy”. Ruth suffered extensively with anxiety and restlessness, and stated she needed a job, whether it be in a paid capacity or voluntary, for the purpose of keeping herself occupied and described reverting to drug use as soon as she had nothing to absorb her time:

“Even just a voluntary one, owt, I’d do owt, even work in the factories, just keep me busy. My mind needs to be busy all the time, I need to be doing something all the time and if not I’m like –I get bored. That’s when I start using.”

Nadia described feeling ‘redundant’ since her children developed independence and the satisfaction and structure she got when undertaking voluntary work with an organisation in the community intended for offenders:

“You’ve got something to do with your day, you know what you’re doing from the minute you get up to the minute you go to sleep and I like that. I like having something to do. Now my children are grown up... they’ve got their lives, I’m kind of at a loss as to what to do with my days.”

Jasmine talked at length of her engagement with a community organisation which had been set up in her home area, initially to engage hard-to-reach male offenders as part of a social enterprise employment scheme. She felt more projects like this directed at women would be beneficial. She explained:

“A lot of lads come out of jail with all the good expectations to stay clean but they get bored, then they end up going out and bumping into people and then you know how it all happens. You know what I mean. So it was like set something up for the lads so that they’ve got something to focus on and they’ve

something to do... It's got like hundreds of ex-offenders come, do you know coming out and working there and I've worked there before and I really enjoyed it."

Many women reported positive experiences of engagement with similar community based projects. Not only did this type and level of engagement keep them occupied, but women encouragingly commented on such opportunities giving them experience, confidence, and self-worth. Jasmine, for example, said:

"It's voluntary but... I don't care about being voluntary because what I'm getting at is like I'm doing things so I'm keeping myself busy and I'm feeling good about myself... I really enjoyed it. I felt like I was needed."

Many of the women who were interviewed conveyed an interest in undertaking work which involved supporting or mentoring other women, adopting the role of the 'wounded healer' or 'professional ex' (Maruna, 2001), despite these women currently having their own unaddressed needs. A number of women reported wanting to pursue a career that involved supporting vulnerable groups of individuals, such as drug users or sex workers, for example:

"I want to be a drugs worker or something... A drugs worker or a job that helps people... just helping people that are like, like me." (Kerry)

One problem identified with many of the community organisations offering voluntary work and training opportunities, was that they are only accessible to offenders through prison or court referral and therefore women were not able to enrol or self-refer onto the programmes when they felt they may be at risk of relapse or reoffending. This was the predicament Karen faced:

"They do groups and women's mornings and they're doing a hairdressing course and all that lot at the minute so there's a lot of things you can access, but it's all just with [this community organisation] you've got to be offending to be with them, with [some community organisations] you can refer yourself but it's a three month waiting list, that's why I've ended up back in this time... I started using again and I tried to self-refer because my money was running out so I knew I was gonna have to start grafting. I tried to self-refer, it were a three month waiting list, I couldn't wait three months so I'd get ten different charges cos I'd have to start shoplifting again, so I went and got myself caught, got referred to [the community organisation]."

Like many of the women who were interviewed, Phoebe described a desire to access an educational programme for offenders in the community and described feeling less comfortable with attending a college with individuals who are ordinarily not facing the same challenges she would confront, such as her drug issues, in a typical further education institution.

“Education on the outside... you need the courses in here but on the outside for short-termers to access, because when you’re using you need something to take up your time... it’s hard to go out into the world anyway so you’re not quite ready to face going to college until those -especially if you’ve not lived a normal life for a while, around normal people, so it’s kind of better to be where there’s people... a bit like yourself and that.” (Phoebe)

This aspiration was not shared by all the women in the study, for example, Charlie felt differently about attending an education course designed for offenders; she felt she would benefit from disassociation from groups of offenders and a conventional further education institution would allow a ‘fresh start’.

“I wouldn’t mind going to college but not just like everyone’s been like in jail and that because it’s just setting you up to fail. Do you know what I mean? There’s like drug use because you’re gonna be like ‘can you get us any drugs’ and they’ll be like ‘yeah, course I can’ or like there’s influences, do you know what I mean? I need to stay away from those influences... if you go and work somewhere like all ex-prisoners and offenders and that, you’re bound to know them aren’t you.” (Charlie)

Although New Hall prison’s education department offered a variety of educational and vocational training opportunities, there was not always something suited to every individual’s preferences and due to limited time being served by short-term prisoners, their options for education were limited. Karen for example, found the industrial cleaning course offered at New Hall to be of great value since a job in the cleaning industry was what she aspired to in the future, once her other, more immediate needs had been addressed. She explained:

“I’m on that erm BIC, that cleaning course, industrial cleaning, to get my certificate, because that’s what I enjoy doing, cleaning. I love cleaning and ironing. I love ironing, it’s relaxing”.

For those women who wanted to do other things, such as the mentoring, advisory or support natured work previously mentioned, there were no accessible training

facilities to pursue whilst in custody. When asking staff about how the short-term prisoner population spent most of their time at New Hall, one prison officer explained:

“On a day-to-day basis, majority of them are working. Some kind of work, be it in the workshops, contracted services, sewing shops or education. Err I think with a short sentence you have very –it’s very difficult to highlight them for interventions because they’re not really here long enough to be able to do anything like that”.

The large majority of short-term prisoners at New Hall found themselves employed in the assembly or sewing workshops. Many women reported workshop-based work as being unstimulating and described it as something merely to pass time and earn a wage, but not an opportunity they would develop further as a career post-release. Zoe explained:

“Half the women that they put in here -that they put in workshops aren't even interested in what they're doing are they? There's no enthusiasm in them is there because it's a mundane, [tedious], repetitive waste of time... try and make them so that they want to improve themselves when they get out or carry on with something that's worth doing instead of sat in there sewing legs up on boxer shorts day in day out. Where they gonna go with that? I mean I do, I do appreciate that they do education and there is certain things in education if you want educating but what about people that are educated enough that know how to do it but they don't know a way forward.”

In addition to high levels of unemployment, academic underachievement and lack of school attendance have been cited as significant factors contributing to risk of reoffending with only 39 percent of females in prison reported to have some form of qualification, compared to 51 percent of male offenders, and 82 percent of the general population (Home Office, 2001). While prisoners typically have much lower literacy, language and numeracy skills than the general population, female prisoners tend to achieve slightly higher results than male prisoners on numeracy and literacy screening tests (Home Office, 2003). Other research supports these findings, showing that while female offenders may hold fewer qualifications than male offenders (Mair and May, 1997), they are often more literate than men (Howden-Windell and Clark, 1999). Many of the women interviewed described having a disruptive educational background and poor school attendance affected by a troubled home life. Many of the women spoke encouragingly about having since gained

qualifications and accreditation whilst in prison which benefited their aim to gain employment or acceptance to a further education institution.

“I’m doing my English in here because that’s the only thing that’s ever stopped me from going to college, is because I’m embarrassed because I didn’t go to first school. I went to middle school but I couldn’t read or write... didn’t go to primary school cos my mum were always in and out of jail... So I didn’t learn to read or write or out like that. Then I went to middle school when my mum stopped drinking but I couldn’t do it all so I were just naughty and fighting and then I didn’t go to upper school. So only thing that –it’s not that I’m stupid, I’m just uneducated. So I’m doing my English in here because Maths I’m quite good at Maths, if it gets explained to me I can do it. Do you know what I mean? But English [[loudly exhaled]]. I couldn’t read when did come to prison in ninety-seven. I couldn’t even read.” (Rachel)

The level at which the women were able to study these disciplines ranged from Entry Level 1 to Level 2⁵. Most of the women that were interviewed as part of this study had previously completed to the level they wanted to achieve, and had subsequently been placed in workshops. Jessie shared her desire for an expanded education department offering further study and more subject variety:

“You get to level two in Maths and English but there’s nowt else but that’s it, there’s no other education, there ain’t no art or anything like that. It’s just boring really. I’d rather they have a bigger education and wider choice and like subjects. Everyone says that though.”

Although many of the women at New Hall were able to develop literacy, numeracy and information technology skills required for employment, staff exhibited concerns that many of the women did not possess the necessary social skills and independence required for employment. Correspondingly, Corston (2007) argued for a greater emphasis to be placed on personal and social development (or life skills) and this was echoed by a number of the women during interviews carried out as part of this study. Research commissioned by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) which explored education opportunities for women in prison also recommended that “learning and skills provision should provide women with the tools they need to take control of their lives” (Dixon and Jones, 2013:7). This

⁵ The National Qualifications Framework is split into nine levels, from entry level qualifications that recognise basic knowledge and skills to level 8 which includes doctorates. Level 1 qualifications would include GCSEs at grades D–G; and Level 2 GCSEs at grades A*–C.

included encouraging women in prison to develop life skills and capabilities in civic participation. A number of women in interview made suggestions that education around personal issues, such as drug use, relationships, money management and independent living, should be offered instead of workshop positions. Nadia, for example, shared her viewpoint:

“Specifically for short-term...I’d make it, instead of going to work, that you had to go to education around addiction. That’s exactly what should be happening here. They should be bringing people in that have done programmes... like 12 step programme perhaps, might not work for everyone, SMART programme and abstinence programme and I think it should be education around drug use. That’s what should be happening... I think it should be compulsory because work is, and what is work doing to you? Just doing absolutely nothing. Sewing for £8.50 a week!”

Although this type of learning and some of these personal development skills can be acquired through attendance of offending behaviour programmes such as the ‘Thinking Skills Programme’ (TSP), facilitators of these programmes explained the difficulties of delivering such programmes to women on such short-sentences, for example:

“In terms of referrals and things that comes from OMU but like others have said, it’s restricted for time. If there is enough time we’ll get them on –erm on a programme, ideally TSP which is our only accredited one than we run. That’s what they’d be headhunted for first... but if they’re in for six weeks, no chance. Which a lot of girls are aren’t they. They wouldn’t even be picked up or sent down to us.”

Similarly, representatives from third sector agencies who deliver programmes they described as “designed to build self-confidence and self-esteem”, stated:

“if somebody only has a very short sentence they slip through our net, so in terms of kinds of intervention and people going out and breaking that cycle, it’s really difficult because they’re not in here long enough. You know, so we’ve kind of condensed the course down to eight weeks because we can get more women on and run more programmes without diluting the programme”.

One of the main barriers to accessing cognitive behavioural programmes and other educational and vocational provision whilst at New Hall was limited time available when serving a short-term sentence; something that has been repeatedly recognised as problematic with accessing many of the desired services, such as housing support,

therapeutic treatment and so forth. A report from the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2005:79) recommended that:

“Special intensive courses in basic education and drug treatment be designed which can be completed by short-term prisoners whilst in custody. Building on these, short-term prisoners should have the opportunity to commence longer-term education, vocational and treatment programmes in prison which are directly linked with programmes available in the local community. This will allow them to continue the programmes after release”.

Corston (2007) also recommended utilizing more short courses to act as a way of encouraging women to engage in learning. Lack of interest for engagement was not an issue with the women in this study since they displayed great enthusiasm for seeking employment, education or training opportunities; however they were often faced with greater barriers which prevented achievement of this. Having a criminal record, for example, proved problematic for some women in successfully attaining education or employment. Zoe for example, who did not require a prescription upon release for drug addiction, nor was homeless, affirmed: “if I could get a job, I’d get a job, but jobs aren’t easy when you’ve got a criminal record”. Zoe initially served a ten year prison sentence for the importation of class A drugs and since being released from her long-term sentence she was unable to procure employment and turned to shoplifting which had led to Zoe repeatedly serving short-term sentences at New Hall. Due to the seriousness of her original offence, disclosure of her record to a potential employer would always be required since her conviction will never be ‘spent’. However, Zoe reported deliberately concealing her convictions in order to contract employment in the past. She explained:

“But even to get that job I had to lie and say I didn’t have any criminal convictions and then the first opportunity that I could get in the office where I knew my file was kept and everyone else’s, I got my file out and filled it in after... So I’m still having to be dishonest to get a job... I got another job. I did the same thing, didn’t tell them I’d got any criminal convictions... I worked there for quite a long time, about five months, and then they said ‘oh [Zoe] we don’t seem to have got a CRB check for you’ and I says ‘oh I don’t know why, I filled form in’, but I didn’t, I’d binned it because I knew what were gonna come back... and he said well because the work is with vulnerable people we have to have this CRB check but erm unfortunately I had to leave and then I’ve got no dishonesty then on my record it were just importation of drugs. So I had to leave that job so that’s when I backed up with [my friend, Ronald] and

ended up going shoplifting... I did also go for several other jobs that I did declare my convictions and even [employers] which I'd already worked for while I were at Askham Grange so I couldn't see why [they] wouldn't take me when I'd worked for them already for fourteen month while I were in prison... They didn't tell me that it was because of that because they can't discriminate can they but I do think it were because of that... whenever I were working I was alright but as soon as I stopped working I had too much time on my hands and then I started mixing with unsightly characters, started smoking and bit of crack again and started shoplifting" (Zoe)

When Zoe was asked in interview about her plans for release after her current sentence, she responded as follows:

"I'll go back to drugs. I won't get a job, I've give that up as a –I've given up – I've given it up it's a none starter... I can't get a job, I can't get out else, I'll end up going back out shoplifting and that's –I'm just being honest with you, it'll be a matter of time till I get caught and come back. I mean I could sit here and say to you, oh yeah I'm gonna go out there and get a job and everything is gonna be rosy, it's not!"

A further common obstacle to gaining employment or education was drug and alcohol addiction. All twenty women who were interviewed as part of this study had a history of drug use; many had additional problems with alcohol. Without the women overcoming their addiction or managing their dependency with medication, retaining a job or student status was unfeasible. Rachel described her experience of trying to work whilst suffering withdrawal from heroin, declaring: "I went [to work] for first morning and I had to leave at dinner time cos I were throwing up in toilet". A number of women also described the difficulties in retaining employment or a position as a student while in receipt of medication for an addiction since the daily need to collect prescriptions can jeopardise or limit their availability for work or study, in addition to problems incurred from synthetic opiate drug side effects.

The main barrier to attaining employment or education upon release, as previously reported, was lack of accommodation. Ali stated, "How can I have a job homeless, it's just gonna be impossible". Others expressed their frustrations over homelessness causing obstruction to their educational or professional progression, for example:

"I've got a college course set up to be a nail technician in September, but that's going to be no good if I've got nowhere to live. I'm not going to college looking a scruff... I had an open day –there were an open day at the college

and I had no clothes to go to this open day at the college in. No clothes, no hairbrush, no nothing, no underwear and I'm thinking 'what am I gonna wear, what am I gonna put on to go and look around this college with these college students that I'm going to be on this course with'. I didn't go because I didn't look the part... I think positive feelings and just hope 'Shelter' is going to get me somewhere so I can start walking about and showing people I'm not just this –I ain't just come off smack and crack to be this pissed up junkie on end of the street... Then I can start doing college and do all the plans what I've done"
(Daisy)

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE, 2013) reported that while “learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison... there may be a number of steps that would support women before they can engage with more formal education and training” (Dixon and Jones, 2013:6). In this research, staff often shared thoughts that the current government’s focus on employability was not always appropriate or helpful for many women, but especially in relation to the short-term repeatedly imprisoned population, many of whom were homeless. The Prison Reform Trust (2004:17) stated: “There is a real danger that education in prisons is becoming too narrowly focused on achieving the basic skills targets and not on the needs of individual prisoners”. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2002) reported that: “Again and again in education inspections we point to the need to construct education and training plans around individual needs assessments” (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2002, cited in Prison Reform Trust, 2004:17). Discussions with staff revealed that recent developments in how the women’s careers are managed using individual ‘action plans’ seemingly improved the women’s prospects for work, but again these initiatives were less useful for those women serving short-term sentences. Such a strong focus on developing employability skills for this population of women was described by one member of staff as “senseless” since many of the short-termers would return to the community without stable accommodation. In agreement, many of the women contended that their time in prison was not best spent when there was so much focus on getting them into work, and felt they had more crucial issues that needed addressing as a priority, predominantly acquiring stable housing. Rachel, for example, shared her frustration with New Hall’s regime:

“Like they’re putting lasses on these ‘back to work’ courses and all that. What the fuck. Half of them, they’ve got no intentions of getting a job because they

haven't even got anywhere to live! What are they doing? Do you know what I mean? Yeah let's put you on this back to work course that's nine week long, you know, we know you've got nowhere to live but it'll come in handy in the future. What. What. Why will it? Because they'll be back in here doing it again! Do you know what I mean? Why don't they have them filling housing forms out, getting them all put on housing council lists and stuff like that. What –where's the thinking behind that... It's a joke."

On the basis of performance against KPTs (key performance targets), New Hall's ETE (education, training and employment) achievement record is highly successful. However, it has been reported that a focus on meeting key performance targets does not necessarily mean the needs of the population are being met (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2002; Prison Reform Trust, 2004). It is argued here that for the population of women in this study, the focus in prison on education and 'training' (which commonly referred to working in assembly workshops or sewing factories), should not have been at the expense of providing opportunities for these women to access support for more significant issues, such as securing suitable housing. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, in relation to 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs' (Maslow, 1943) the need for shelter and safety must be satisfied before opportunities for employment should be sought. Issues around prison performance ratings and targets dictating how the women live out their sentences, and the appropriateness of the sequencing and prioritising of activities, treatment and service delivery, will be explored in more depth in the following chapter.

6.4 Finance, benefits and debt

It is reported that prisoners are significantly more likely to have a history of poverty and social exclusion than the general population (MoJ, 2012b); 48 percent of prisoners have a history of debt (Prison Reform Trust, 2014b) and prisoners' families are particularly vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007). There are also reports indicating that female offenders may have more significant financial difficulties than male offenders, with Mair and May (1997) reporting findings from their study indicating that 41 percent of women compared with 25 percent of men said that their offending was financially motivated. Hedderman (2004:235) notes "most female offending is acquisitive. It may therefore seem rather obvious to note that their offending is associated with experiencing

financial difficulties”. Other significant differences have been found between male and female prisoner’s situations in relation to finance and debt, such as: more women reported their debt worsening whilst imprisoned, women were more likely to worry whilst in prison about their housing debts, fewer women had bank accounts, and fewer men reported having issues with money management (Bath and Edgar, 2010). Despite this, the Bath and Edgar (2010) reported that less than one in five of the women interviewed in their study had been offered financial advice while in prison, and by analysing HM Inspectorate of Prisons reports on five women’s prisons in England (including HMP New Hall), Bath and Edgar found that more than half (53%) of the women surveyed did not know if, or how, they could access financial advice or support in prison. Financial instability has also been linked to repeat offending among women offenders. Morris *et al.* (1995) found that from a cohort of 200 females leaving prison in England, almost half of those who had reoffended were facing financial difficulty compared to a quarter of those who were not known to have reoffended.

All twenty women who were interviewed for the purpose of this research reported having issues with personal finance and claimed their offending behaviour was mostly financially motivated. Previous research on mothers in custody found that 38 percent attributed their offending to “a need to support their children”, with single mothers being more likely to cite a lack of money as the cause of their offending than those who were married (Caddle and Crisp, 1997, cited in Prison Reform Trust, 2014b:2). More recently, Gelsthorpe (2004:12) similarly suggested that increases in women’s crime may be due to reasons of poverty and economic marginalisation, as women continue to be primarily responsible for childcare, stating: “it is possible to see that many [women] are vulnerable to financial difficulties and to the stresses and strains that go along with child care responsibilities”. However, despite eighteen of the twenty women in the study being mothers, none attributed their financial difficulties to childcare responsibilities unlike the previously published reports mentioned here. Instead, many of the women reported problems with finance and debt to be caused or exacerbated by the considerable sums of money they spent on their drug addictions. Of those few women who had disclosed in interview their expenditure on drugs; outgoings were reported ranging from £50 a day (Sofia) to, as a minimum, £300 a day (Rachel). In addition to funding their own addiction, many

of the women described having been pressured into financing (ex-)partner's addictions. Findings from the 'Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction' (SPCR) survey indicate that nearly half (48%) of female prisoners questioned, reported having committed offences to support someone else's drug addiction, compared to 22 percent of male prisoners (Light *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, a WomenCentre survey of 44 women found that almost half (44%) of the respondents had partners steal from them (Duffy and Jones, 2011).

For those women in the present study who were in rented accommodation prior to imprisonment, the extreme expenditure on illicit substances and alcohol often caused them to default on housing payments to the local authority and domestic utility charges, creating arrears and debt they were unable to settle up, often resulting in assignment onto housing blacklists. Poppy for example, described her quandary with accommodation arrears:

"I'm four hundred and sixty something pounds in arrears with my rent, so Shelter have informed me today that if I'm here for thirteen weeks [my benefits] will pay my rent which that takes me past my tag time so even if my tag is three or four weeks late, my rent will still be paid but then they informed me that because I'm in arrears with my rent and the council have already took me to court for my rent arrears and I have to pay twelve pound fifty a week, if that twelve pound fifty is not paid, the council can still evict me even within the thirteen weeks. So that's like another fucking problem. But how do they expect you to find twelve pound fifty when I get eight fifty wages a week?"

Since none of the twenty women from the sample had employment in the community prior to the sentence they were serving at the time of the interview, state welfare was sought by some women. According to the Fawcett Society (2005) who conducted a gender analysis of the UK benefits and tax credits system, women are more likely to be dependent on benefit income, including housing benefit. Therefore unsurprisingly, women have been found to be disproportionately affected by recent austerity measures and welfare reforms (New Economic Foundation, 2013) which took effect from April 2013, such as the implementation of the 'benefit cap'⁶. The Department for Work and Pensions (2012) reported that "60% of customers who are likely to have their benefit reduced by the cap will be single females but only around 10%

⁶ In April 2013, a restriction was introduced to limit the total amount of certain benefits people can claim if they are of working-age (16-64), even if their full entitlement would otherwise be higher (HM Government, 2015).

will be single men”. Furthermore, the ‘under-occupancy charge’ (also known as the ‘bedroom tax’)⁷ which was implemented alongside the benefit cap, arguably pressures women into getting lodgers, “putting them in potentially dangerous situations – this is compounded as many housing providers/ initiatives make it impossible for people to rent out rooms” (Prison Reform Trust, 2014b:3). Despite many women needing social security, the women in this study reported a range of difficulties associated with the collection of such assistances. Some of the women described the process of making financial welfare claims as complex and shaming consequently deterring those women with previous negative experiences from filing a claim for financial entitlements. For example, Daisy described her reluctance to make a claim due to her finding the process confusing, uncomfortable and humiliating:

“No benefits. No. Nothing... because I can’t –I weren’t really going places on my own; I suffer with mental depression. I just can’t do it. My head just goes. They ask me too many questions that I don’t know the answers to. You know, I were on high rate disability because I got pancreatitis and I get in a temper because they use all these big words and I don’t know what they mean and it’s sometimes embarrassing to admit that I’ve been a drug user and I’ve been an alcoholic and I’ve lived on the street and I’ve got nothing [[tearful]].”

A further dilemma women reported was the lack of knowledge as to where they would be residing post-release and therefore, they were unable to make an appointment with their local authority office for making an application to claim financial support. Ali, for example said: “I’ll sign on wherever I’m going to but this is another thing, I never know which town I’m gonna go to because I just don’t belong anywhere”.

Many women complained of the problems and consequences of having a lengthy delay in setting up and receiving an initial welfare payment when they first exit custody. When probed in interview about their main source of income when living in the community, all but Anna said shoplifting. Anna detailed using prostitution as a source of income whilst waiting for her benefits claim to be processed: “when I first got out it takes like three, four weeks for benefits to come through so I went back to

⁷ “The bedroom tax restricts the amount of housing benefit that council and housing association tenants can claim. If you are a working-age council or housing association tenant, the council limits your housing benefit claim if it decides you have 'spare' bedrooms” (Shelter, 2015:online).

selling my body.” Most women who had claimed benefits in the past, made it known that they had returned to theft while waiting for financial support from the local authorities. The interview extract below with Chantelle demonstrates this issue:

Lucy	What do you do for money when you're on the out?
Chantelle	Rob
Lucy	So shoplifting? What about benefits?
Chantelle	Yeah but they take like nine weeks to get a payment, your first payment, so what you gonna do for them first nine weeks?
Lucy	So do you wait nine weeks and then get benefits?
Chantelle	Backdated yeah
Lucy	Ok
Chantelle	You can only get three loans a year from them

Many women also complained of state welfare support not being enough to ‘survive’ on and admitted committing acts of theft on top of claiming benefits. The women admitted that the reason for this was due to their expensive habits. A number of the women described having serious issues with managing their money effectively due to never having to budget for anything and being accustomed to thieving what they want, when they need it, just as Nadia described in her life-account presented in chapter 4 (page 16). Similarly, a number of women described developing ‘expensive taste’ and not appreciating the value of money. Rachel for example stated:

“I’ve always had quite expensive taste but that’s my mum’s fault because she were a shoplifter when I were a kid so we always had the best clothes. We never had a wash in a morning and stunk of piss but we all had Levi’s and Kickers on.”

Rachel went on to claim she did not shoplift when drug-free but then retracted her statement when she was asked how she paid for necessities such as food:

“I don’t really do food shopping. I don’t do food shopping [[laughter]]... even when I’m clean I don’t pay for my shopping anyway because I go to Asda and pinch clothes, take them back to the next Asda, get the gift card and do shopping with that. So I don’t pay. I know it’s still illegal but I don’t even count that, I don’t even think about that as flippin’ stealing. I know it is but you just get into habits of stuff don’t you. Do you know what I mean? It’s really weird how you value your money because I wouldn’t think twice about

spending three hundred pound on heroin and crack but to think of spending sixty quid in Asda on food would break my heart.”

This excerpt from Rachel reinforces the statements made earlier in the chapter about the need to educate imprisoned women, not only around basic numeracy and literacy skills, but with a focus on helping women develop life-skills such as money management and other capabilities in civic participation. Such education would encourage independence and responsibility, providing stronger benefits for supporting a positive future for these women. The fact that these women recognise, reflect on, and articulate their flaws and need for support in managing their personal finances, highlights the significant need for increased personal finance and debt advice in prison.

6.5 Conclusion

It is clear that there are significant structural issues contributing to the repeat offending of the short-term imprisoned women interviewed. If we are to focus on reducing reoffending for this population of offenders who appear trapped in a cycle of repeatedly serving short sentences, it is essential that we understand their experiences and the context of their lives.

It has been recognised that stable housing forms the “foundation for successful rehabilitation, resettlement and risk management. It can provide the anchor for a previously chaotic life and act as a springboard for other crucial steps, such as getting and keeping a job” (MoJ, 2015c:31). Although the benefits of education and training for women in prison are recognised to increase prospects of employment in the future, evidence in this study shows that there may be a number of steps that would support the short-term prisoner population before they can engage with more formal education and training. These steps would involve addressing the main concerns recognised through an appropriate needs and risk assessment, likely to include factors such as: homelessness, debt, mental and physical health issues, drug and alcohol addiction, and so forth.

What is apparent is how these structural issues are powerfully interlinked; women reported not being able to settle their debt issues without being able to generate an income through employment or obtain skills in how to better manage their personal

finance. Yet, without stable accommodation they were not able to become employed or engage in education or training, and their financial issues were creating a barrier to the successful acquisition of suitable long-term accommodation. This left the women entrapped in a vicious and chaotic circle, viewing crime and imprisonment as a viable escape.

What we have come to understand from this study is how critical suitable, stable housing is in attempts to prevent reoffending and support women in leading law abiding lives upon release from custody. Women's problems with accommodation and other needs are highly interrelated and therefore cannot be dealt with in isolation, highlighting the need for adopting a holistic approach to support for the women with a greater focus on prioritising the most crucial of women's needs, not prioritising the most weighty prison performance target.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Personal Issues

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data from interviews with twenty women undertaken while they were imprisoned at HMP New Hall. The interviews explored the difficulties they had previously experienced when released following earlier periods of imprisonment. The women spoke freely and openly about their experiences. This chapter documents how the women themselves viewed the significant problems they had encountered in the community and the relationships between those experiences and the offending behaviour which led to their re-imprisonment. The findings are presented under the thematic headings identified from the data analysis. This chapter focuses on the women's accounts of the personal issues they faced in the community prior to their re-imprisonment, and includes: drugs and alcohol; children and family; relationships, domestic violence and abuse; sex work; and mental health.

It should be noted that although more space has been dedicated to discussion of certain issues such as drugs and alcohol, this does not signify that issues such as family ties, abuse, relationships and so on are of less significance or importance. In interview, it was generally more comfortable for the women to discuss (and indeed for me to be more inquisitive about) issues such as drug treatment services, rather than traumatic incidents of sexual abuse and sex work, for example, which may account for why they were explored in less depth, in at least some cases.

7.2 Drug and alcohol abuse

Substance misuse has been identified as one of the main factors related to offending. According to the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA, 2009:3) "treating people with drug addictions has significant benefits in terms of reducing crime". Effective action to tackle drug use and addiction through radical change to the drug support services was one of the major reforms the coalition government proposed as part of its agenda to transform the justice system. The introduction of a 'rehabilitation revolution', previously mentioned in chapter one, included plans to reform drug treatment services in England and Wales. Drug treatment reform plans

set out in the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Business Plan 2012-15 (MoJ, 2012d:2) proposed to create a system that “supports greater involvement of the private and voluntary sectors in the rehabilitation of offenders, including use of payment by results, to cut reoffending”. As part of the commitment to rehabilitate offenders and ensure they are able to make a positive contribution to society, the plan set out by NOMS proposed making support for people to recover fully from dependence on drugs and alcohol a priority. Commissioning of substance misuse treatment services for prisoners in England became the responsibility of the NHS Commissioning Board from April 2013, while responsibility in the community lies with local authorities. The 2013 ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ paper which offered a summary of evidence on reducing reoffending demonstrated that effective prison-based approaches to address substance misuse and reduce reoffending post-release include: abstinence-focused approaches such as twelve-step, substitute therapy such as methadone treatment, and psycho-social interventions such as cognitive behavioural programmes (MoJ, 2013d, 2013e). It also demonstrated that these prison-based interventions are most effective in their impact on reducing reoffending when followed up with community interventions or support post-release. The Ministry of Justice acknowledged that reoffending factors apply more or less equally to men and women, nonetheless:

“The ways these needs have developed, their relative importance and the most effective ways of intervening may differ. It is also possible that there are a number of criminogenic needs that are specific to women or more usually found in women. For instance, there is some evidence that hard (class A) drug use is more of a problem for women offenders” (MoJ, 2013d:18).

It is estimated that 60-70 percent of women who enter prison have drug problems (Hay *et al.*, 2006). According to the NTA (2009:11) “Women present a series of unique challenges to the drug treatment regimes in the criminal justice system”. Women in the present study were encouraged to discuss any history of alcohol and drug use; relationships, if any, between alcohol and drug use and their offending behaviour; or the behaviours and circumstances associated with their offending behaviour and experiences of substance misuse treatment in prison and the community. As presented in chapter four, a snap-shot analysis of New Hall’s short-term population demonstrated that of the 60 adult short-term prisoners, over 93

percent reported having substance misuse issues upon entry to New Hall on their current sentence. All twenty women in the study disclosed issues with drugs. Only two of the participants reported having never been physically dependent on heroin, yet both disclosed having addictions to opioid based prescribed medication and psychological addictions to either: alcohol or stimulants, including: amphetamines, ecstasy and mephedrone, and both reported recreational use of crack cocaine and heroin.

As revealed in chapter four, of the 60 short-term prisoners at New Hall at the time of conducting an analysis of the prison population, only one woman was serving a sentence for a drug related offence. Nonetheless, a number of the women had drug related offences (possession and distribution) on their record alongside their main index offence (predominantly theft from a shop intended to finance their addictions), and a number of women had previously served sentences for drug related offences including the importation of drugs and production of drugs.

When citing the reasons for their offending behaviour, all twenty women felt that drug use was part of the cause. Rachel for example, explained:

“Every time I’ve been to prison it’s because of drug use. I don’t come to jail when I’m not on drugs, ever. On my criminal record, there’s big spaces on my criminal record where –two year, where there’s no prison, three year where there’s no prison because I’ve stayed clean and then as soon as I relapsed, that’s when prison comes because even though I might still offend when I don’t take drugs, not to the same extent obviously, but you know when I’ve got to because I need to survive type thing, not like going out and doing it every day as a job like I would when I’m using, but when they give me community orders and stuff like that, I can fulfil them and take advantage of what they have to offer. But when I relapse your life gets chaotic and you can’t fulfil the probation what they want you to do and then they send you to prison.”

In interview, participants were asked about any drug treatment they were receiving at New Hall. Problematic drug users requiring clinical intervention were allocated to either a detoxification programme or a maintenance programme. Detoxification was offered for alcoholism in the form of a librium treatment programme, benzodiazepines for diazepam misuse, and either methadone (synthetic opioid) or buprenorphine (semi-synthetic opioid, usually in the formulation subutex or suboxone), for opiate users. Those with an opioid dependency could also be

maintained on a prescription of either methadone or buprenorphine. The options available to women at New Hall who required drug interventions were varied with each person being managed on a case by case basis. Although detoxification was usually the desired outcome, it had to be done so in a way which also encompasses the safety and well-being of the women through slow reduction of their dosage over a long period of time. The Department of Health (2006) highlighted an increasing awareness within the prison service of a correlation between drug withdrawal and self-destructive behaviours. Women serving less than twelve months in custody, particularly those who are received into custody on a sentence up to 26 weeks, were generally deemed unsuitable for enrolment onto a detoxification programme and were instead maintained on a synthetic or semi-synthetic opioid replacement.

With regards to drug treatment for pregnant women who were considered at higher risk, regardless of sentence length, they were strongly recommended to be maintained for both their safety and the baby's. They could refuse maintenance and chose to undertake detoxification, although the reduction would be as small as possible and the women would have access to additional doses when necessitated.

Of the eighteen women who reported having heroin addictions, seventeen were in receipt of a prescription of methadone with a range from 10ml to 120ml to eradicate their physical withdrawal symptoms; however the Department of Health (2006:16) claims that as a safeguard for the patient "the standard maximum recommended maintenance dose of methadone prescribed in prison is 40mg per day". Sofia claimed that medical staff would provide additional doses of methadone if the women exhibited signs of discomfort but felt this was to avoid any grievances:

"They put you on methadone if you're over on F wing or give you any amount that you want, as you are, that's how it works. And you know if you have a kick off, they'll bump it up for you, that's all prison does for you, it keeps you off the streets for a while and put you on any amount of methadone or medication that you want cos they don't want any complaints."

Of the seventeen women on methadone, sixteen were maintaining their prescription dosage at New Hall (that is, stabilised on their prescribed amount, without experiencing detoxification), whilst one woman was slowly reducing her dosage at a rate of 5ml every week with the hope of exiting prison having completed a detoxification. The one woman who was not in receipt of a prescription despite

claiming she was a heroin addict reported completing a detoxification on a previous sentence, and in spite of having used heroin upon her previous release from New Hall, she had not been out of prison long enough and used a sufficient amount to redevelop a strong physical dependency requiring pharmaceutical treatment. The interview extract below illustrates her circumstance:

Lucy	So at the moment you're not receiving any drug treatment? But the last time you went out, you used [drugs]?
Nadia	Yep, only for a short while, I was only out for three week. I think out of the three weeks that I used... so that's 21 days isn't it? three week, let's say I used about eight times
Lucy	That's heroin?
Nadia	That's heroin and crack but I wasn't even enjoying it and I was kind of -I was only using like a bag every two days, I wasn't using crack actually, I only used crack once... but it was the diazepam for the last few years, the reason I've come back to jail is with using diazepam

All of the women in receipt of methadone shared a strong dislike of methadone treatment. The large majority commented on their community prescription of subutex being a much preferred substitute due to its blockade effect with opiates. For example, Scarlett explained:

"I don't want to be on methadone because it's bad for you. You think you're normal and then when you come off it you can't believe how subdued you've been and that you haven't even noticed and stuff like that. Do you know what I mean? It's a horrible drug and coming off it is really painful. It's worse than any drug I've ever took... when you get out and you want to get on subutex cos that's got a blocker in it so that's like a prevention in itself so you can't use heroin when you're taking that cos it blocks it, it doesn't work and that has helped me stay clean in the past because when I've been on subutex when I've got out of prison it's like, even when I've had a shit day and where I'd have normally used on methadone because you can, I've thought well even though I want to go get a bag but there's no point because it's a waste of money

because I can't feel it. So a few times that's saved me, you know, just that safety back up."

Medical staff explained that since many of the women were dependent on such high doses of opioids, they were often better suited to methadone treatment which has no 'ceiling effect'⁸. Methadone is a full agonist which activates the opioid receptors in the brain fully (resulting in the full opioid effect similar to heroin) rather than a partial agonist like buprenorphine which does not activate the opioid receptors to the same extent as methadone and therefore resulting in effects to a lesser degree. Buprenorphine reaches its ceiling effect at a moderate dosage, and therefore its effects cannot be amplified with an increased dose, as can, and often is the practice with methadone patients at New Hall. This information was either not explained to, or not understood by, prisoners who often felt they were given methadone in spite of requesting buprenorphine treatment, for reasons such as: disparity in the expense of the drugs (specifically, it was thought that methadone must be more economical), to make the medication distribution process easier for nurses, or due to medical staff simply being vindictive. For example, Rachel shared her thoughts and frustrations:

"Nobody gets put on subutex anymore, but it would be better for short-termers...they're saying they're not giving subutex because of trading but it happens even with methadone. It's cheaper to give us all methadone, that's what it's all about. Subutex is too expensive... We're talking about people's lives here...they're trying to save the government money on what prescriptions they give you."

Despite the majority of the women with an opioid dependency being maintained on methadone, many expressed a great desire to undertake detoxification whilst in custody but due to the short length of their sentence they were unable to access such therapy. Staff acknowledged that "[the prisoners] can get their methadone every single day for as long as they are in here with no push to get them off". In another focus group, a prison officer complained: "as long as they are stable that seems to be acceptable". When questioning medical staff about the reasons for this lack of encouragement to undergo substance detoxification, the following response was offered:

⁸ The term is defined as "the phenomenon in which a drug reaches a maximum effect, so that increasing the drug dosage does not increase its effectiveness" (Baker, 2004: 40).

“Those under twelve month... there is very little time to work with them to look towards a detox plan and that which –I mean we do try and encourage them to go through detox but if someone is only in for six weeks, two months, three months etcetera, we haven’t got time to do it so it’s a case of again the onus is put on the longer serving sentences to try and detox them.”

This employee’s explanation was interjected by a wing officer who said:

“But then you know we’ve got lifers here on maintenance doses of methadone, which I think is –is ridiculous to be honest with you! But even if we get them off that, the drugs we know are readily available because there’s not enough staff now to monitor them taking their meds, or monitor drugs coming in or whatever else because they’ve just wiped the staff out.”

The common problems with prisoners trading subutex in prison (due to its tablet form and easy concealment), was an additional explanation for why methadone (liquid form) was the prison’s preferred method of treatment. The trading of drugs, predominantly of prescription medication, was a serious ongoing problem at New Hall. Scarlett described the effects of using subutex as follows:

“It’s like having heroin if you’re clean, if you’ve got no opiates in your system, do you know what I mean? But you can’t have any opiates in you. So women who are completely clean sniff subutex in jail... it’s like a coping method yeah, not cos they’re addicted. I know people who’ve come in to jail who’ve never took drugs who’ve gone out addicts. It’s really sad init.”

There were many reports from staff and prisoners about the number of women coming into New Hall drug-free and leaving prison with an addiction due to accessing another prisoner’s prescription drugs. Although none of the women in this study developed their dependency in prison, a number of them did disclose having previously been involved in trading prescribed medication. Charlie who was not receiving a prescription for buprenorphine indicated using subutex whilst at New Hall illustrated in the following extract:

Charlie	I use it for the buzz. Not to stop me taking drugs
Lucy	So you weren’t prescribed subutex?
Charlie	[[shakes head]]
Lucy	No okay. Did you use that in the community?
Charlie	Erm.. yes [[shakes head and winks]] (indicating ‘no’ as the true answer)

Unlike most of the participants in the study, Charlie showed no motivation to discontinue misusing substances due to her ongoing difficulties with finding housing; she claimed she could not stand to imagine a life being drug-free and sober on the streets and would make no attempt to cease using drugs and alcohol until she had acquired stable accommodation. With little hope of finding housing for Charlie before she was shortly due for release, when asked in interview what the first thing she would do upon exit from New Hall, she responded “get smashed [(intoxicated)]”. Zoe also admitted “I’ll go back to drugs” when questioned about her plans for release. Zoe and Charlie were the only two women who demonstrated little motivation towards halting their drug and alcohol using activities; these were also the same two women who had not (yet) developed a physical dependency to heroin. Since leaving foster care aged sixteen, Charlie had been unable to secure housing and reported using drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with the pains of homelessness. When asked if she had ever had a period of being clean of alcohol and drugs, she stated: “only when I was little [and] when I’ve been in jail”. The rest of the women in the sample reported varying lengths of staying clean in the community previously and described daily life to be considerably different during the drug-free periods of their lives. When asking Karen how she would spend her days in the community when drug-free she said: “doing some constructive stuff but when you’re using, the main thing is go grafting because that’s your only choice, you’ve not had your drugs so you’re rattling.” Phoebe described the lengthy process involved in maintaining a drug-supply and claimed the annoyance and frustration of having to repeat this process on a daily basis:

“It takes up a lot of your time, it takes a lot of time to get the money, it takes a lot of time to wait for dealers and it takes a lot of time to then smoke it, you know so when you’re clean, you’ve got a lot of time on your hands.”

Rachel similarly claimed the aspect of drug taking she disliked the most was the control the addiction had over her life and her actions:

“I just don’t like the lifestyle of having to go shoplifting everyday... I just don’t like the fact that when I’m using, I’ve got to do it... It’s the fact that the choice is taken away from me and the drugs control my life... That’s what I can’t stand.”

The large majority of the women who had histories of heroin addiction, reported no longer feeling the same impact or taking pleasure in using drugs and claimed the thrill had passed; they since saw their dependence as an irritant and a necessity. Lisa for example stated: "I'm not gonna go back out and use again, I'm not. It doesn't bother me no more; it was just something I had to do then". Although some of the women acknowledged the difficulties of undergoing recovery, especially when facing problems with their accommodation, the large majority still expressed a great desire for receiving therapy. A number of the women described the purpose or benefits of imprisonment being the prospect of receiving drug treatment. Karen, for example stated:

"The whole point of people coming to jail, a lot of them, is so they can get clean, it's a break, when you're bang at it, it's a break, it's a chance to get yourself sorted and it gives you a fighting chance when you get out."

The main issue subsequent to detoxification for women was the lack of support following release; without having a need for clinical treatment, women often could not access the psychological treatment they needed for their addiction. Those women going out detoxified had experienced no support with the mental addiction to drugs and would often relapse, with a greater risk of overdose due to their then low tolerance levels. The loss of tolerance to the toxic effects of opiates following detoxification is a common precipitating factor. The Home Office (2003) claimed drug users were at greatly increased risk of death during the first week of release from prison with the predominant cause of these deaths being drug overdose. The NTA (2009) highlighted that although drug users are especially vulnerable to death from overdose on release from prison, the risk for women is much greater than for men. Farrell and Marsden (2005) stated male prisoners are 29 times more likely to die within a week of release than the general male population, while women are 69 times more likely than the general female population.

A number of women reported relapsing with the intention of being able to produce a positive drug-test outcome that would make them eligible for enrolment onto a drug support programme in the community. Prison staff openly acknowledged this problem in interview:

"It's an abomination if we can get someone clean in there but to access the services out there they are going to have to go and use, that seems to me an

absolutely ridiculous situation and unfortunately we are going to get people that are going to [overdose] and we know that's happened in the past. We shouldn't be in that situation."

Maya described a similar predicament. Whilst in the community, although she was not experiencing any physical withdrawal symptoms, she was feeling apprehensive about staying clean and felt at strong risk of relapse. Despite her fears, she was unable to self-refer to her local drug treatment facility due to being physically clean from drugs and under no court imposed order. A second local drug support service that did accept self-referrals also could not be immediately accessed due to a lengthy waiting list and like many women she reported intentionally causing her own re-imprisonment in order to access the support she required. She explained:

"With [community support agency 1] you've got to be offending to be with them, with [community support agency 2] you can refer yourself but it's a three month waiting list, that's why I've ended up back in this time... I started using again and tried to self-refer because my money was running out so I knew I was gonna have to start grafting. I tried to self-refer, it were a three month waiting list, I couldn't wait three month so... I went and got myself caught."

Rachel discussed her experience of engagement with the drug rehabilitation and recovery programme 'PREW' (Project Recovery Empowering Women) at New Hall (introduced in chapter five). The 'PREW' initiative isolated a small number of women at a time from the regular prison regime and supported the women through an intense detoxification programme. Rachel reported being advised by 'PREW' workers to use drugs upon release from prison for the purpose of producing a positive drug test so as to access further community drug treatment. She described her experience as follows:

"Right so, yeah [PREW] is the detox house... where they get you off your methadone but if you're going home and I want to go PREW... So to go on PREW you have got to be down to 20ml. Now I'd never been on it, well it didn't exist before so obviously I've come to prison this time and thought flipping heck they're doing something. Do you know what I mean? Yeah I'll want to go on and see what it's all about. So you get down to 20ml and then you go up there and they take you down, you know, to nought but you're in a bit more comfort I think which sounds like a good idea... but on PREW if you get off your methadone and you're going home and you're clean, they tell you to go out and use so you can get on subutex because you've got to have a

positive opiate in your system before they'll give you it. Are they insane? Honestly are they? Telling somebody who is clean off of opiates to go out and use heroin. They might as well say, do you want to hang yourself because the amount of people that might go home and kill themselves because their tolerance is so low.. and they're telling them to go out and use so that they can get on subutex”.

Other women who had accessed PREW and the therapeutic treatment it offered also described their experiences negatively. They described the treatment model being significantly different to the more positive experiences they had encountered in community support centres and treatment facilities. Nadia argued that PREW merely “ticked a box” for New Hall, allowing it to maintain its claim to offer psychological interventions for drug addicts. She stated:

“The prison service will say ‘well look what New Hall’s doing, we’ve got a PREW and we’ve got a rehab unit’ Have you ever been up? Oh my god, go up there, ask girls up there what they think. It’s bad. It’s just bad... it was all around the here and now and breathing and things like that, you are not going to get girls from prison sitting and breathing and ‘feel the moment’ and your legs on the chair and eat a sweet and you had to do all that [[demonstrating relaxation techniques]] and wrap a sweet in a sensation and what the HELL has that got to do with addiction? It was all that kind of mentality, oh it were crackers! Crackers! Honestly. I couldn’t, oh god no. All it is doing is keeping girls, getting them off their methadone for figures and keeping them clean for a short while until they put them back into the main prison and then you’re lost. It’s just about figures up there.”

Offering substitute therapy but neglecting to address psychological dependence was the most commonly reported concern from both staff and prisoners. Although the prison was vigilant in the delivery of clinical treatment to ensure women did not suffer any physical withdrawal, there was very little offered to short-term prisoners to deal with their mental addictions, therefore rejecting any abstinence-focused approaches (for example, the twelve-step programme) and problems underlying their substance abuse despite drug use commonly being reported as a form of self-medication.

Women who had an addiction to stimulant drugs were offered symptomatic relief by the nurses for withdrawal symptoms but there were no clinical programmes specifically relating to this drug group. For stimulant users, although the main emphasis of treatment would typically be through psychosocial intervention – since

there is no effective substitute agent to provide a pharmacological approach – psychological therapy was inaccessible due to the shortage of services to meet demand. The short length of sentences left this population of prisoners neglected as the limited provision available was dedicated to those in custody long enough to fully benefit from the facilities.

Similarly, there was little offered for alcoholism. Upon entry to New Hall, those women with an alcohol addiction would undergo a librium detoxification (over an approximate seven day period), but no further support was offered for alcoholics by means of psychological therapy despite the considerable population demonstrating such a need. A large number of women reported having previous and existing issues with alcohol in addition to their drug use and that these addictions were highly interlinked. It was not unusual to hear women claim they turned to alcohol during previous attempts to become drug-free, while many abused both drugs and alcohol concurrently. The reported reasons for drug and alcohol use were often intertwined for many women in this study. Given this, it is suggested that it is not the form of addiction that is the primary issue to be addressed for these women, but the reasons behind their addiction. The fact that these women with severe histories of drug-use turned to alcohol when attempting to abstain from drugs demonstrates that inability for many of these women to completely move away from substance use and appears to be linked to an inability to cope with negative emotions. Women reported that when these feelings surface, they are unable to cope without then being able to block it out with substance use. Rachel, for example explained:

“[Heroin] makes me forget about all the shit, that’s why I take drugs, because I haven’t had the most brilliant of life when I were a kid and stuff and I don’t like to sit and think about all that shit and think oh my god I’m gonna be on my own for the rest of my life. Fucking hell I messed up with my kid. Do you know what I mean? All that stuff and all that guilt and all that, I can’t handle that. That’s why I take drugs, to forget about it all.”

When these women spoke about times when they had stopped using drugs, they described how adverse life events or negative experiences acted as triggers for them beginning using drugs again, most commonly homelessness or separation from their children and many of the women had histories of trauma, abuse and neglect. Ruth explained how her children went into care due to incidents of domestic violence

between her and her partner in the family home, and it was then that her drug use escalated into a profound dependency:

“[I] wasn’t on heroin and met my kids dad yeah and then we moved in together, he’s involved in crime and that and I started dabbling and that. I had my first baby, then I had my own house, stayed there for a year, had my second baby, then they both got took, well voluntary gone and then that’s when I’ve gone boom straight to being a full blown smack head and nowhere to live and just lost everything and started coming back to jail.”

When discussing their histories of drug abuse, many women explained how their drug abuse was a mechanism for coping and dealing with these past and present issues. Although a number of women spoke specifically about the direct relationship between their drugs and their failure to cope with their experiences and could verbalise their awareness of this link, their ability to identify this relationship did not mean that they were not likely to repeat these patterns of behaviour as they had done repeatedly in the past. For many of the women, these learnt cycles of behaviour had become ingrained. Nadia for example:

“I use diazepam now because it’s strong strength of blocking things out, it doesn’t matter what I use yeah, I’m still an addict so forget about what I use, I’ll use anything... The drink and the drugs is not my problem, I could put them down if the emotional things would go away but they don’t so then I pick them back up as a way of coping because that’s all it is it’s a coping mechanism is drugs and drink.”

Many women reported that their initial drug use was related to a specific intimate partner relationship, where drugs were a feature of that relationship. Poor relationship choices that exacerbate their existing problems, and involvement in drugs, fit this pattern of destructive cycles. A number of women in this sample discussed previous relationships and drug misuse patterns such as this, and how they used crime to fund their drug use. While the relationship was not necessarily the cause of the women’s drug use, it did at least appear to exacerbate their problems.

When questioning staff and prisoners on what they felt was needed in the way of effectively addressing substance misuse problems, there was much consensus in their attitudes and viewpoints. In agreement with staff interviewed, many prisoners argued for, in addition to the existing pharmaceutical treatment, compulsory education for prisoners around drug use; Maya for example stated:

“I’d make it instead of going to work, that you had to go to education around addiction. That’s exactly what should be happening here. They should be bringing people in that have done programmes and not like TSP, like twelve step programme perhaps, might not work for everyone, SMART programme and abstinence programme and I think it should be education around drug use. That’s what should be happening... lets go back to basics, the reason why you use, yeah what it’s about.”

Rachel argued for an abstinence-focused approach and shared her frustrations of feeling like more could be done to help drug users:

“There’s no recovery in here. There isn’t. I’ve asked if we can have some kind of recovery... work through some kind of flippin’ programme when we’re in here instead of being locked behind us doors all the time... if they had something that dealt with your addiction problem and the reason why you’re an addict and treat it as a disease and flippin’ you know, they’re just locking you up, putting you on a script and kicking you out.”

It was also strongly argued that counselling and psychosocial intervention to address the reasons why they misuse substances and develop coping strategies were much needed. Although at New Hall there is a non-accredited cognitive behavioural programme (SDP; Short Duration Programme) which is a structured four week intervention that is designed to look at substance awareness, harm minimisation, coping mechanisms, the cycle of change and relapse prevention, this programme is brief, availability is limited and it fails to deal with the female-specific issues on a more in-depth basis. Emotional reactions to the challenging and negative histories of many women, such as homelessness and the pains of separation from their children, are likely to be something that they will continue to face throughout their lives. Learning robust coping mechanisms that avoid the negative maladaptive patterns previously used to block out these emotions is likely to help such women stay drug-free.

7.3 Children and family

The Home Office (1997) reported that two-thirds of women prisoners were mothers with an average of three children each. Of the twenty women that were interviewed as part of this study, eighteen were mothers (90%). These eighteen women collectively mothered 49 children, averaging three children each. The Home Office

(1997) also reported that for 85 percent of imprisoned mothers, prison was the first time they had been separated from their children for any significant length of time. Although it has been reported that at least a fifth of mothers in prison are lone parents before entering prison (SEU, 2002), in this study, only one child (under eighteen months old at the time of the interview) had been in the care of the mother (Lisa) directly before her entering prison, at which point the baby had been placed in the care of the father's relatives. In this study, as mentioned previously, due to the sample selection specifically targeting women with a history of repeatedly serving short sentences, most of the women had already lost custody of their children. Many women admitted to poor parenting and having their children removed from their care due to their drug using habits or as a result of domestic violence in the home. Suchman and Luther (2000) acknowledge the wide range of deficits in addicted women's parenting including; neglect, physical and emotional abuse, excessive control and punishment, inconsistent discipline and lack of emotional involvement, in contrast with the parenting of non-addicted mothers. Some women reported regular periods of separation from their children in the past while, in some cases, they had once been the primary carer.

Previous research has shown long-term detrimental effects on children due to the imprisonment of their parents (Murray *et al.*, 2012). The effects of parental imprisonment were discussed in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Convention on the Rights of the Child (2007:124):

“The imprisonment of parents, particularly of mothers of dependent young children, is deeply problematic, because the child is being punished along with the parent. While it is argued that the punishment of offenders always has repercussions on innocent relatives, where young children are concerned the effects can be particularly catastrophic to the children.”

The HM Chief Inspector of Prison's thematic review of conditions for and treatment of imprisoned women in England and Wales (1997) found that the imprisonment of women caused profound disruption to the lives of their children, with only five percent of imprisoned women's children remaining in the family home whilst their mother was in custody. A later study evidenced that 25 percent of imprisoned mothers reported their partner was caring for the children whilst she was in custody, compared to 92 percent of imprisoned men (Home Office, 2004a). Of the women's

49 children in this study, only two (who were siblings) were cared for by their father whilst fifteen were cared for by other relatives (including aunts and grandparents). The remaining 32 children had entered local authority care prior to (or upon) their mother's imprisonment; fifteen had entered foster care and seventeen had been adopted. Five of the children who were over the age of eighteen had subsequently left foster care or the family home; four lived independently in the community (two at university); the other was in prison. A recent Howard League report (2014) stated 66 percent of women in prison were mothers of children under the age of eighteen, with an estimated annual figure of nearly 18,000 children being separated from their mothers due to imprisonment. It has been reported that a significantly higher proportion of the children of women prisoners are put into local authority care than male prisoners' children and maternal imprisonment generally causes more disruption for children than paternal imprisonment "and may lead to greater risk for insecure attachment and psychopathology" (Epstein, 2014:2). It has also been suggested that the increasing number of children entering local authority care every year is linked to the increase of the population of women being sentenced to custody (Kesteven, 2002). For a parent, the knowledge that a child is dealing with disruption and anguish can only add to the emotional burden of prison.

As previously mentioned, due to the small number of women's prisons in England, many women are imprisoned a long distance from their families (more so than the situation often for male prisoners). This is exacerbated for women from Wales due to there being no female establishment there, and therefore women must serve their sentence in England. The geographical dispersal of women's prisons in England often makes it exceptionally difficult for women to maintain family ties, despite evidence indicating that maintaining contact with children and family can have a positive impact on reducing reoffending (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; May *et al.*, 2008; Prison and Probation Ombudsman, 2014) More than three quarters (78%, n=38) of the children were not in contact with their imprisoned mothers in this study. While the other eleven had some contact with their mothers, some were limited to written communication only, or occasional telephone contact. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) found that only half of the women who were in contact with their children prior to imprisonment had received a visit since going to prison (SEU, 2002). Further research indicates that the likelihood of reoffending is 39 percent

higher for prisoners who had not received prison visits compared to those who had (May *et al.*, 2008). None of the mothers in this study had received a visit from their children on their current sentence; the main reason expressed was the inconvenience of visiting for family members due to the isolated location of New Hall and lack of transport links generating excessive financial costs for travelling to the establishment. Although family members could apply for financial support in order to reach the prison, the costs had to be subsidised by the families and would later be reimbursed by the prison service, which prevented or deterred relatives and friends from visiting. Lisa explains the impediments:

Lisa	I think they should do more like, I mean I ain't seen my partner or fetched my baby up, obviously he doesn't drive, it's hard do you know
Lucy	You live in [South Yorkshire] did you say?
Lisa	Yeah, I know it's only a couple of trains but [my partner's] head is all over without me, he just panics about everything and I just think there should be more help for people like that to fetch your kids up to see you and help with like, I know you get help with travel expenses but that's paying for your fares and then claiming for it back and it's just that much messing about that there should be more like support
Lucy	So have you had any visits so far?
Lisa	No I've not seen my littlen
Lucy	Because of that? Because of the difficulties in getting here?
Lisa	Yeah yeah

Like Lisa, a number of the women expressed that they would like to see their children more, but the short length of their sentence and the practicalities of visiting made it “not worth it”. In addition to this, a report on the inspection of HMP New Hall (HMIP, 2012:18) highlighted the difficulty of the visitors booking procedure, stating “it was difficult to book visits by telephone or email and a service to book them in the visitors centre was little publicised.”

Of the 32 children who had entered local authority care upon or prior to their mother's imprisonment, none had regular physical contact with their mothers. However a small number of the women who had given their children up for adoption were limited to 'letterbox' contact (the exchanging of letters through an after-adoption agency). Despite a number of the children being in the care of relatives, this did not necessarily mean the mother maintained contact with her children. Of the fifteen children who were residing with a non-parent relative when the mother was imprisoned, six children were living with the parents or siblings of their father, and only one of them had contact with the mother in view of the fact that she was still in a relationship with the child's father. The other nine children were living with a family member from the mother's side of the family; seven of whom were in contact with the mother. This excludes Chantelle who had two children in the care of her mother, but due to her mother implementing a restraining order against her, resultant of previous incidents of abuse and harassment, she was denied any contact with her two children.

Zoe was the mother of the only children from the sample who were raised by their father; one was in full-time employment, whilst the other was studying at university. Zoe had divorced the father of her children and had full custody of both children before she was imprisoned for the first time. Zoe acknowledged she was fortunate to have her ex-husband to support and care for their children. She stated:

“When I came out of prison...I had a good relationship still with the dad cos he brought them to see me in prison and everything and I were very lucky that he did that because [our relationship] were a bit messy before I went to jail... I even went and had Christmas dinner with my ex-husband and his wife and my kids and their kids last year you know, so...my kids have never been a problem but it doesn't work in everyone's situation that, a lot of them get took off them and that's so sad”.

With regards to other family members, almost three quarters (70%) of the women had no support from either of their parents or wider family. A number of the women had parents who were deceased, many women were not in contact with their parents due to developing bad relationships through their troubles with drug use and involvement with the criminal justice system, and some women had been separated from their parents during their childhood as a result of entering local authority care

or being raised by other relatives. Many of the women reported being victims of abuse at the hands of their parents or other relatives. None of the women in the sample had the support of both parents and those women who were in contact with one parent reported that the relationships were often distant, sporadic and complex. For example, Anna explained:

“I’m strayed from my parents. I mean on this sentence I’ve started writing to my mum and that but she wouldn’t have me back because of what has happened in the past with using drugs and stuff.”

The Ministry of Justice (2013d, 2013e) recognised the importance of keeping female prisoners as close to their children as possible in order to help them break the pernicious cycle of re-offending and reported a new approach to managing female prisoners which aimed to develop the custodial estate so that women are closer to home and maintain links with their families. During focus groups with staff, the importance of family as a protective factor for women was strongly asserted. For example, one prison officer pointed out:

“The protective factors for women are very different from men, yet the KPT targets we have are generic... the protective factors for women is more family and the support network there. There’s no KPT for us, no target for us to meet that, however that’s where we need to be looking to stop them coming back inside again.”

When asked in interview who they saw as a positive influence in their lives, two women identified their father, two their mother, one an uncle, two recognised their partner as a positive influence, one woman described her community drug support worker as her most positive influence, while twelve women reported having nobody who they felt would have a positive impact on their lives, for example:

“No one. It’s just me. It’s just me. That’s the hardest part about it. There’s no one really that I can just call in for a coffee with and just say look I’ve had a shit day... There’s no one” (Maya)

Although family connections did appear to be an important factor for some women involved in the study, for example, Ruth who stated “I need to be able to have my family and support around me. Not like bloody miles away”, unfortunately, this was not the case for the large majority of the women. Most of the women reported considerably negative experiences during childhood and family members were often

a negative influence on their lives, often being drug-users, offenders and in a number of cases, their abusers.

7.4 Relationships, domestic violence and abuse

Many of the factors influencing women's offending behaviour such as substance misuse were reportedly impacted by a significant male in their lives, particularly an intimate male partner. Despite not being a primary focus for this research, intimate partner relationships did appear to be a significant theme in this data, which supports previous literature indicating that women have high levels of need in the area of relationships (Palmer *et al.*, 2010). The relationships described by the women in the study were characterised by abuse and manipulation which formed a pattern in many of the women's lives and they reported moving from one negative relationship to another. The abuse experienced by some of the women involved not only violence but controlling and psychological torment which impacted significantly on their confidence and self-esteem.

It is also important to note that despite these significant histories of violent relationships, most women's stories were positive in that they could report having now detached themselves from previous violent relationships, although they did not report having moved on to new positive intimate relationships which recognisably have the potential to contribute to reducing reoffending (Beer *et al.*, 2007).

Of the twenty women in the study, three reported being in an ongoing relationship. All three partners were male and had a history of repeat offending and long-term substance misuse. Jessie described being in a long-standing relationship with her partner who was serving a long-term prison sentence for robbery. Phoebe described her partner as a prolific car thief and drug user who was routinely in and out of jail. Despite claiming her partner was her most positive influence in life, she disclosed his encouragement for her involvement in sex work in order to fund their drug addictions, often procuring her 'clients' to increase their income. Lisa also described her partner as a positive influence; nonetheless she disclosed that the prison had denied her application for release on home detention curfew (HDC) to the home address she shared with her partner due to previous incidents of domestic violence, although she insisted these events were "a thing of the past". Lisa argued that her

partner and new baby would be the factor that would prevent her returning to offending upon release, stating:

“I know I’ll be fine when I get out, I know obviously before I obviously used to just end up bumping into somebody in town and going with them for a couple of weeks and then going with somebody else but obviously I’ve got my own partner, baby, do you know what I mean, I’ve got everything, there’s no reason for me to get back into it all.”

Despite making these claims in interview, Lisa did return to prison only a short time after she had been released following this sentence for shoplifting.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons reported in their most recent report of New Hall prison (2012) that thirty-eight percent of women had experienced sexual abuse or rape and forty-six percent had experienced physical abuse. Of the twenty women interviewed, three quarters (n=15) reported having previously been in violent domestic relationships with ex-partners, which in several cases had provided grounds for the removal of their children from the family home, and contributed to or exacerbated their drug use amongst other issues. Jasmine described her experience of serious domestic violence leading to her homelessness:

“I had a partner right. I had a partner for ten years... so obviously there wasn’t an issue because... I had my own house and all that. But he was beating me. He cut me up, like stabbed me [[revealing stab wound scars]] and cut me up and everything so –and he actually went to prison for it, he’s out now. Do you know what I mean? But, like, while he was in prison I had the house but then he came out and he continued all that so I had to get a restriction order on him, so it meant I had to leave the house but they didn’t even help me with that you know I thought they were gonna put me in a refuge or something like that. Do you know what I mean? Because I was a victim of like violence but no they didn’t so obviously because I had to leave my home because he –because he -it was –he was like the main attendant. Do you know on the tenancy and all that.”

The women in the study were not directly asked in interview to reveal information of any history of abuse, however women disclosed such details during discussions about their substance misuse where they described drug use as a coping mechanism to block out memories of abuse and deal with the trauma, and a reason for why they felt they needed to be able to access therapeutic services whilst at New Hall. Of the twenty women interviewed, nine disclosed experiences of sexual abuse. In terms of

childhood sexual abuse, six women disclosed being the victims of physical or sexual abuse and rape in childhood, all of which were at the hands of male relatives (including: fathers (n=3), grandfathers (n=2) and a step-father (n=1)). These figures are very much aligned with those reported by the Prison Reform Trust (2014c) who state that 46 percent of women in prison report having suffered a history of domestic abuse, and 53 percent of women in prison reported having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child. Although not all females who are victims of abuse will go on to offend (Salisbury and Van Voorhis, 2009), the findings here support previous research that suggests many more women in prison have histories of significant abuse, neglect and trauma than those in the general population (HMCIP, 1997). Furthermore, as female children are more likely to be abused by someone close to them, the frequency and time period over which the abuse occurs are likely to be greater, and this has been clearly linked to emotional and mental health issues and substance use (Salisbury and Van Voorhis, 2009). Although we cannot identify abuse as a risk factor for future offending, we can argue that for the women in the sample, histories of abuse in childhood have led to other issues such as substance misuse which is a much clearer causative factor in their offending behaviour. What this demonstrates is that abusive experiences in childhood continue having a significant effect on these women into adulthood. Seven women reported experiencing sexual abuse in adulthood, six from an intimate partner, two women reported being raped whilst working as sex workers and one reported being raped while living on the streets by an unknown attacker.

Services available at New Hall to support victims of domestic violence and abuse were offered from external agencies and charities, including 'Bradford Rape Crisis' who were able to offer one-to-one counselling. However, this service was available to only a small number of women with a manageable caseload of less than twenty women in a population of 371 women, the waiting list to access the service exceeded two months and it was generally denied for those serving exceptionally short sentences. The 'Athena Project' (a third-sector domestic violence service) managed and delivered a programme called 'Power to Change' which was designed to support victims of sexual and domestic abuse. Eligibility criteria for access to this programme did not exclude short-term prisoners since the standard course duration

consisted of twelve half-day sessions; however these courses were run intermittently. Staff described the issues in interview:

“I think from the Power to Change point of view, which is not an accredited programme, it’s a therapeutic programme and it’s designed to build self-confidence and self-esteem and deal with issues around domestic and sexual violence, again if somebody only has a very short sentence they slip through the net. So in terms of kinds of intervention and people going out and breaking that cycle, it’s really difficult because they’re not in here for long enough. You know, so we’ve kind of condensed the course down to eight weeks because we can get more women on and run more programmes without diluting the programme in any way, shape or form but there are still women that when we come to do the assessment, they’re not in for long enough or we’ve started one and they wouldn’t be in for long enough to finish it.”

For many women, separation from their abusive partners through imprisonment had been the point of realisation that they could live independently. A number of women reported their partners not maintaining contact with them during their period of imprisonment and only attempting to regain contact upon their release when they are “of use”. Scarlett explained: “he doesn’t wanna know me when I am here, only when I’m on the out and he can use me to earn his money and what not.” Poppy reported her partner offered no ‘support’ for her during her time in custody but following her release, by which time he had been imprisoned she stated: “when he phoned me from prison I said don’t phone this number no more, I think the lights had just finally switched on and if I’d have carried on with him, I think I’d probably be dead now.”

Lack of therapeutic services to address issues relating to sexual and domestic abuse was a major problem. Staff acknowledged this in interview:

“You see, I think the counselling side of it is massively needed in here and to think as much as they do a big job, and great job, there’s just not enough. Like you say the waiting lists and all these women, well not all, that’s a sweeping statement but like the large majority... they need counselling for what they’ve been through”.

Of all the women in the sample, only Anna reported not wanting any therapy for the sexual abuse she had encountered. She provided the following explanation:

“I’ve been to see counselling when I got raped in 2008 but to be honest I just want closure on it where they wanted me to start at the beginning and talk through everything and that brings back memories and like flashbacks and

stuff so I and I self-harmed over it in the past... I don't want that. I'd rather just try and forget about it. So I don't think that counselling was for me so I just left it".

The other nineteen women in the study reported wanting or needing to access counselling services to address their various personal issues. Karen said that receiving therapy would be her first priority upon release from prison to help deal with issues of sexual abuse she had experienced in the past. She stated:

"First thing I will do is get my counselling done and I can't think further than that because I don't know how hard it's gonna be and how I'm gonna deal with it because [the sexual abuse] is from being seven year old and up until just recently".

Nadia reported a 'need' to access therapy in order to deal with issues of sexual abuse but despite her efforts she had not been able to attain this type of treatment whilst at New Hall:

"They say that they're gonna pick me up because I know I need that and I am absolutely determined that when I leave here because I am going to set things up for myself this time. I've already gone to turning point⁹ and I've knocked on the door myself and I've told them what I want them to do. If they don't do it, I've got family outside that will do it for me and make appointments for the day that I leave jail. I want to go and do an introduction to counselling myself, to see if I can learn out about myself. But when you come in they'll say, you know you'll go over to OMU and it's kind of "ohh you could fill this out [Nadia]", yeah I probably could but it's your job to fill it out and your job to tell me what I can get from here and I never get any kind of help, but when I came in this time I was in absolute, I was a right state and Miss [prison officer] down at reception who I've known for years even phoned across to the wing to see if I was alright and I told her, I need counselling. I need to speak to somebody. I need to offload cos I'm dying inside and they said they were gonna pick me up straight away. They won't. I bet I don't see a counsellor".

In a later discussion with Nadia, a few days before her release, despite her ongoing distress she had not managed to access any therapeutic support whilst at New Hall as she had predicted, but claimed her daughter had successfully secured her an appointment for a treatment assessment for counselling with a community organisation.

⁹ Turning point is a third-sector organisation which aims to help improve people lives by offering a variety of support services, particularly in relation to mental health and substance misuse.

7.5 Sex work

A report on the inspection of HMP New Hall (HMIP, 2012) stated twenty-one percent of women reported having worked in the sex industry. Of the twenty women who were interviewed, eight (40%) disclosed undertaking sex work. Engagement in the sex industry was not directly addressed in the interviews and therefore the number of disclosures may not represent the actual number of women who had been involved in prostitution. The women spoke very little about their involvement in sex work; this could have been due to the uncomfortable nature of the topic or perhaps because they saw it as of little relevance. Only one woman in the sample was serving a sentence for an offence linked to her prostitution, that being 'theft from a person' following the theft of money from a client's property. Prison workers did report that involvement in sex work appeared much more prevalent amongst the short-term prisoner population than amongst the long-term population. Amongst the eight women who reported involvement in the sex trade, there were reports of different experiences of engagement. Five of the women reported having worked as prostitutes on the streets at some point in their lives; one of whom was sent to work by her partner who often acted as her procurer or 'pimp'. Two of the women who had commenced their work at street level, procured a number of regular clients who would fund their habits through regular sexual contact at the men's homes. These men regularly provided accommodation when the women were in need of somewhere to stay. On these occasions there had often been no financial exchange for the sexual activity, but these women were 'waged' in the form of shelter as discussed in the previous chapter. One woman was paid for sexual activity in order to finance her drug addiction by her step-father over a long period of time, starting in adolescence. Another prisoner reported being a victim of a human trafficking gang and received no or little money in exchange for sex, but was 'waged' in daily drug supplies and accommodation, but suffered long-term abuse at the hands of the gang members.

The women who were not coerced by a partner, relative or gang to partake in sex work reported making the choice to sell sex as they claimed it was easier to obtain the money they needed to fund their drug habits with less risk of getting arrested than there was for shoplifting. For example, Anna explained:

“I have shoplifted. I used to shop lift in the past but then because I was coming to jail all the time I thought well to be honest I found it easier selling my body and it was quicker cos I’d have to graft loads to get what I needed whereas I would just give a hand job or whatever for twenty quid and normally some of the old men would let me have some of the money, go get my drugs and then come back and do it”.

Despite the reported high level of involvement in the sex industry, New Hall did not offer any specific support service for those women involved in the sex trade. As mentioned previously, the prison offered links with a small number of community agencies or charities through referral or signposting services but the onus was very much on the women to identify themselves as a candidate for this type of referral as there was no method of pinpointing these women to propose assistance.

7.6 Mental health

It is widely recognised that mental health issues are more common amongst prisoners than in the general population (Brooker *et al.*, 2008; Singleton *et al.*, 2003). Previous research has also demonstrated that female offenders have a greater incidence of mental illness than male offenders (Palmer *et al.*, 2010; Singleton *et al.*, 2003; Shaw, 2001; Teplin *et al.*, 1996). Mental health was an issue considered relevant to all women in the present study sample but the experiences reported varied in length, causation and severity. Mental health has been closely linked with the issues previously discussed in this chapter. For example, results from the ‘Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction’ (SPCR) study found that childhood abuse was more frequently reported amongst prisoners with mental health issues, and disproportionately by women prisoners (Williams *et al.*, 2012). Prison staff acknowledged that the women’s structural and personal issues such as: homelessness, unemployment, debt, histories of abuse, addiction and so forth, impacted their mental health considerably but the short nature of their sentences created barriers to addressing their mental health needs. One prison officer stated:

“It all impacts on their mental health and of course on a short sentence there is no mental health provision either is there. You’re in and out, in and out, but yet you aren’t going to get any better.”

All twenty women in the sample presented depression as their primary mental health issue, often a long-standing condition, and in many cases linked with general anxiety

disorders. Although some women had not been formally diagnosed with depression, they described habitually feeling ‘down’, ‘low’ or ‘sad’. The frequent reports of depression and anxiety from the women in this study are aligned with earlier findings on the prevalence of these issues. For example, the SPCR assessed the prevalence and severity of anxiety and depression symptoms in both male and female prisoners, with almost half of the women in the sample (49%) found to be suffering from both anxiety and depression, compared to 23 percent of male participants (Cunniffe *et al.*, 2012). Considering anxiety disorders in isolation, 61 percent of the SPCR respondents were assessed as suffering from anxiety (compared with 33% of male prisoners) with reported symptoms such as feeling tense, fearful, nervous, and panicky. Reported symptoms indicative of depression included: hopelessness, worthlessness, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts, with 65 percent of the female survey respondents reporting suffering such symptoms (compared to only 37% of their male counterparts). A number of the women in the present study became emotional in interview when they described in detail their feelings of anxiety, depression and despair. Daisy, for example said:

“My mental health is just... I’m just that down and depressed, I just don’t know where to turn anymore. Some days I might smile on the outside but on the inside I’m crumbled. I can’t cry anymore, I just... there’s nothing more I can say or do to make things any better.”

It was common for a multitude of underlying factors contributing to their feelings of depression and anxiety. Daisy explained her depression stemmed from multiple problems, incidents and experiences, including the death of her mother, domestic violence experiences, homelessness, rape, permanent separation from her children, physical health problems and battles with drug and alcohol addiction. Arguably the prison environment may exacerbate the incidence and severity of mental health issues (Birmingham, 2003; Staton *et al.*, 2003).

Other than neuroses, some women did disclose or exhibit psychotic symptoms. Charlie was the only prisoner who had a formal diagnosis and was prescribed anti-psychotic medication, however she reported failing to take her medication on occasions in the community which she described causing ‘rebound psychosis’ and stated: “if I stop taking my medication I go off my fucking head”. Many of the

women expressed confusion over their mental state, for example Nadia questioned her own sanity and stated:

“I know that what I do is mental behaviour, but am I mental? I’m not really sure, but I do mental things. Am I insane? A little bit I think, but not really, do you know what I mean?”

The SPCR comprised questions taken from the Psychosis Screening Questionnaire (PSQ) (Bebbington and Nayani, 1995) which explored the experience of symptoms indicative of psychosis in the twelve months prior to custody. Findings indicated symptoms in sixteen percent of SPCR survey respondents; 25 percent of female respondents compared to fifteen percent of males. Approximately six percent of those measured by the PSQ in the community (Johns *et al.*, 2004) reported symptoms indicative of psychosis, and other more recent research sustains reports of great prevalence of psychosis amongst the prison population (Brugha *et al.*, 2005; Singleton *et al.*, 1998).

Despite reports on the overall higher rates of mental health issues found in prison, staff in the present study spoke of the suspected number of women who exhibit symptoms, but never receive a diagnosis or treatment. In one focus group, staff discussed the particular case of a woman (coincidentally, Jasmine in my study) who they agreed exhibited clear symptoms indicative of a personality disorder (PD), yet despite having been in and out of New Hall regularly for over a decade, had failed to receive a psychological assessment:

Martha	... and if you know [Jasmine], I mean as she’s got older she’s got a lot better but I’ve often wondered over the years about her having a PD.
Joe	<u>Without</u> a shadow of a doubt yeah.
Dominik	Hmmm same.
Martha	She, she, you know, just by meeting her and talking to her for half an hour you can pick up on those things and no one has ever done anything with her on that you know.
Dominik	And you’re right, and that’s another thing I erm referred somebody, who again a short-sentence

prisoner who I had a similar feeling about to psychology, got a reply back saying sorry [Dominik] we're only working with lifers.

The Department of Health who conducted a survey of psychiatric morbidity amongst prisoners in England and Wales reported that of the women who had a clinical interview, half were found to have a personality disorder (Singleton *et al.*, 1998). Jasmine, who the staff deliberated over, reported in interview not being able to cope with life and said: “I end up slipping into a real bad depression and like start thinking of doing really crazy things to myself”. Like many women at New Hall, Jasmine had a long history of self-harming and attempted suicide in custody. Self-harming behaviour was a serious problem at New Hall, as reported to be problematic in the general female prison population (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009), with a vast number of incidents of women cutting themselves, especially amongst the younger women imprisoned. Although only a small number of women revealed previous experiences of self-harm, it was not a focus of the study. The eldest woman in the sample talked of her concern for young prisoners self-harming:

“I can't believe the amount of girls in here that actually cut themselves. That's frightening to me. Especially amongst young girls and they do it and then ten minutes later they are laughing. I just find it hard to comprehend. It's their release but it's unimaginable isn't it.”

As with many of the personal and emotional issues discussed in this chapter, rates of self harm and attempted suicide are found to be more prevalent amongst female prisoners than their male equivalents (Liebling and Maruna, 2005). The Department of Health reported 37 percent of female sentenced prisoners had at some point in their lives attempted suicide (sixteen percent in the previous year alone), compared to twenty percent for male sentenced prisoners, and seven respectively (Singleton *et al.*, 1998). More recently, research has found that nearly half of female prisoners had attempted suicide at some point in their lives (Borrill *et al.*, 2003), compared to approximately six percent of the general population (McManus *et al.*, 2009). Many women in the present study spoke of self-harming as a ‘release’ for their pains and internal suffering. Poppy described that outside the prison, her method of coping with her struggles and blocking out memories of traumatic incidents was through use of heroin and other illicit substances. A strong link has been found between women’s

histories of traumatic experiences and an increased risk of mental illness (Rees *et al.*, 2011). Despite this recognition, as mentioned previously in this chapter, access to psychological treatment at New Hall was a particular challenge for those women serving short-term sentences.

7.7 Conclusion

There is a great deal of evidence demonstrating that large numbers of women in prison present significant emotional, personal, and mental health issues, notably more so than male prisoners. One of the few surveys to focus on female prisoners found histories of childhood abuse, repeated traumatic experiences, combined with higher rates of self-harm, mental disorders and substance dependence amongst the sample (Borrill *et al.*, 2003). In order to reduce the likelihood of reoffending for the population of short-term repeat prisoners at New Hall, gaining an insight to these issues and experiences is crucial. The findings presented in this chapter provide a great insight into the mechanisms by which the women's lives affect their mental health, and vice versa.

It is clearly evident that many of the personal issues discussed in this chapter are highly interlinked. Noticeably, previous experiences of working in the sex industry and emotional, physical and sexual abuse and victimisation were contributory to mental illness and substance misuse. Additionally, this data has highlighted the commonality for the type of emotions and mental health problems experienced and the consistency in the reported triggers of these problems.

Perhaps more significantly, the chapter has highlighted the need for interventions to address or help the women in prison serving short-term sentences deal with these issues, whether it be through medical treatment, psychosocial or therapeutic treatment, or a required combination of the two methods. The restricted time creates obvious concerns and implications for the prison since the treatment process for mental health is typically intensive, time-consuming and long-lasting. This merely highlights the need to identify and assess the issues early, and focus on improving community contacts to make suitable treatment referrals to ensure they receive the support they require upon release.

Although the women's previously experienced negative incidents and events cannot be reversed, it could be argued that using the limited time the short-term prisoner population have in custody more productively (specifically, by addressing the most immediate, fundamental concerns, particularly homelessness), would imaginably relieve some of the depression and anxiety these women were experiencing.

The issues identified throughout this chapter and the previous evidence that the women face a multitude of complex interlinking issues that contribute to their offending behaviour and failure to address these issues negatively affects their chances of successful rehabilitation. In addition to the structural and personal issues these women face, entering custody to serve a short-term sentence creates further issues and barriers beyond their control, caused by aspects of the criminal justice system. These systemic issues are explored further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Systemic Issues

8.1 Introduction

As described in chapter one, there is currently no prison rehabilitation regime specifically designed to meet the needs of short-term prisoners. The justification for this is that prisoners serving short sentences are unable to benefit from rehabilitative programmes and make sufficient progress in the short period of time they are in custody (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2005). The data presented over the preceding two chapters has evidenced the need for a major rethink about the management of women who serve short-term sentences. As the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2005:76) indicated:

“The complacent thinking that nothing effective can be done to rehabilitate short-term prisoners has crippled the response to regime provision for short-term prisoners. Inaction towards and neglect of this majority group of prisoners can no longer be justified”.

This inaction towards the short-term prisoners relates back to what was identified in chapter two as a distinct set of pains experienced by the short-term repeatedly imprisoned women labelled ‘the pains of neglect and abandonment’. The barriers short-term prisoners face in accessing rehabilitative and resettlement services in custody and upon release has created a ‘revolving doors’ pattern whereby these prisoners are returning to custody only a short time after release. This chapter explores the issues the prison service and establishments like HMP New Hall confront in trying to break these barriers and address the short-term prisoner population’s needs with the intention of helping them lead useful lives upon release. Furthermore, the prison aims to meet the targets on which the prison’s performance will be quantitatively measured, including the reduction of reoffending. This chapter will explore the challenges staff at New Hall face in attending to both of these responsibilities concurrently.

8.2 Short-term sentences: inherent problems

As detailed in chapter five, New Hall prison administers and coordinates a range of interventions and support services for the prisoners confined there. Nevertheless, accessing and benefiting from this provision was not so straightforwardly accomplished, particularly for the short-term prisoner population. Staff highlighted during discussion:

“If somebody only has a very short sentence they slip through the net, so in terms of kinds of intervention and people going out and breaking that cycle, it’s really difficult because they’re not in here for long enough”.

The prison induction process at New Hall was often described as a lengthy procedure depending on whether the woman had previously completed the induction course within twelve months of reception to prison on their current sentence. The induction process incorporated classroom based sessions covering specifics of the regime and rules, visits from representatives from various departments, required completion of courses including the ‘Introduction to Training and Employment’ (ITES) course and the British Safety Council Health and Safety level one certificate. Furthermore, the length of the induction procedure was dependant on the immediate needs of the woman. For example, those requiring immediate treatment for substance misuse issues intensified the reception process given that medication such as chlordiazepoxide for an alcohol addiction comprised an approximate seven day detoxification period, whilst the stabilisation onto medication such as methadone for opiate dependency could take up to 28 days. Due to the duration of the prison induction process and length of time it took to identify and address immediate needs, commonly there was insufficient time to identify and manage other issues (such as accommodation, unemployment, long-term treatment plan for substance abuse, and mental health). The National Audit Office (2010:5) recognised in its report on the management of offenders on short custodial sentences that:

“Homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, mental health and other problems affect short-sentenced offenders more than other prisoners. NOMS has only a short time to try and motivate and support prisoners who may be very needy [and] unstable from substance misuse... thereby delaying the point at which they can start work to address their offending.”

Prisoners and staff revealed that in many cases, the duration of the reception process lasted the entire length of the prisoner's sentence leaving no opportunity for the women to have their other needs assessed and access support before they were released. One prison employee explained:

“It’s finding the time to assess the need and to make sure that we’ve got time then to get people in, make referrals, it’s just capturing that need to begin with, someone on a sentence of six weeks for instance, there’s little chance of capturing them, it’s very difficult.”

OASys (Offender Assessment System) was customarily only used to assess those serving a sentence of one year or more. Aside from extreme lack of time, risk and need scores were not typically calculated for prisoners categorised ‘short-term’, excluding even those serving sentences of almost twelve months where there may have been an opportunity to use their time in custody more productively. The Revolving Doors Agency (2011) produced a summary of research exploring the needs of short-sentence prisoners suggesting ‘what works’ in terms of possible models of intervention with this group of prisoners. The research highlighted the need for “making the best use of the limited time available” by means of “early assessment of needs, attempts to engage the prisoner, sentence planning and streamlined processes for allocating short-term prisoners into prison-based activities” (RDA, 2011:2). Unfortunately, this did not appear to be the case at New Hall; there was no early assessment of short-term prisoners’ needs nor was there any streamlined process for allocating short-term prisoners into specialised treatment and support before their release. Immediate needs (as explained in chapter five) are assessed on entry to prison using a basic screening tool, however this assessment did not contribute to the generation of a sentence plan for short-term prisoners, with no follow-up from the Offender Management Unit (OMU) to ensure the women’s needs had been addressed effectively, if at all. The HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2012:5) last assessment of HMP New Hall reported that “there was a prompt, basic custody screen for women serving short sentences which identified their resettlement needs, but this needed to be more effectively followed up”. This situation emphasises the pains of neglect and abandonment for this population of prisoners given that the needs of this population fail to be identified through an appropriate assessment and addressed.

Insufficient time to address prisoners' issues relating to their offending was the most common grievance made by prison employees during discussions within this research, with a broad consensus of the ineffectiveness of short-term sentences. Many of the prison, police and probation staff who engaged in the present study exhibited strong support for the abolition of short-term sentences entirely. For example, one prison officer affirmed:

“In an ideal world we'd say no, there's no such sentence under twelve months, ideally that would be, in my mind, there'd be certain legislation saying that sentences start at twelve months upwards. Politically I think that'd be a bit of a bombshell but... get rid of short sentences... If anyone should be serving under twelve months they should be doing sentences in the community... if they break those orders eventually the minimum sentence you should get in prison would be a twelve month sentence, so at least we've got someone for six months, or four month period if they're gonna get out early so at least we know, at least we got someone for this minimum of time, then it would be a lot easier prioritising their needs. We could do a proper needs analysis... then we'd actually be able to help people and try and stop them. We don't need six week sentences!”

The proposition to abolish short sentences was not an approach supported by the Coalition Government who despite acknowledging problems associated with short-term imprisonment, stated:

“We are clear that abolishment is not the right approach. Courts do not send people to prison lightly, and only use a short sentence where they perceive that a viable alternative is not offered in the community. Some people will need to go to prison for a short time and it is important for magistrates to be able to use custody where necessary” (MoJ, 2010c:57).

Despite the problems associated with short-term imprisonment highlighted throughout this thesis, the Ministry of Justice (2010f) contended that short custodial sentences remain a vital option but only as a last resort for persistent offenders who fail to respond to other punishments in the community. Correspondingly, a number of the women in the present study commented on their sentencer's reluctance in administering a custodial punishment. For example: Charlie described her attempts to intentionally get herself re-imprisoned due to homelessness by repeatedly breaching her community orders, but explained: “I get arrested loads before I come back. They don't want to send me to jail.”

Hedderman and Gunby (2013:436) pointed out that:

“If the reason that magistrates use custody is that other options have been tried and failed, it seems sensible to offer as many credible community alternatives as possible and to present them as options of increasing severity. While bringing all the previous forms of community supervision (community work, community rehabilitation orders, community punishment and rehabilitation orders, etc.) together in the single generic community order may have increased magistrates’ abilities to tailor supervision to the offender’s ‘risks’ and ‘needs’, it may also have replaced four of five different steps on the sentencing tariff with a single broad one. Guidance which provides magistrates with a clearer idea of how different combinations of conditions may relate to each other in tariff terms may help reintroduce additional steps on the sentencing ladder for women and thus delay the decision to impose a short custodial sentence”.

As presented in chapter one, there is much evidence supporting the benefits of diverting women from custody and instead enforcing appropriate community sentences which can arguably be a more effective response to reducing reoffending (Ministry of Justice, 2010b; House of Commons Justice Committee, 2013; Corston, 2011; APPG, 2011; Hedderman and Gunby, 2013; NAO, 2010). Evaluations of community-based one-stop shops, strongly support these claims (e.g. Ministry of Justice, 2015d; Jolliffe *et al.*, 2011; Hedderman *et al.*, 2011; Gelsthorpe *et al.*, 2007; Loucks *et al.*, 2006). However, Hedderman and Gunby (2013:425) argue that “other changes may be needed before these are seen as a replacement for prison rather than just a useful supplement to community orders. And it seems that the probation service has a key role to play in bringing about such a transformation”. They found in their study which questioned magistrates on what might help to reduce the use of short prison sentences for women, that having other options presented to them by a probation officer, for instance, being notified of the existence of appropriate alternative community-based options such as ‘Together Women’ would be most effective in encouraging them to divert the offender from custody.

The absence of supervision in the community upon release for short-term prisoners was discussed amongst prison and probation staff in focus groups. Staff generally agreed that probation supervision following release for this group of offenders would be beneficial. One probation officer stated:

“It’s got to be a bonus I think hasn’t it? Because these girls need the guidance and support on the out don’t they and they’re going out to nothing, with

nobody. So they just openly admit that I'll just go back to my old ways, back into that offending cycle and straight back in for stability and structure”.

Another prison worker responded with a suggestion that efficient referral to community-based resources like one-stop shops would be more effective for these repeat offenders upon release than inflexible probation supervision:

“Yeah but I think that the way they work it with twelve months or over in terms of going out and working with probation, in place, like ‘Together Women’ or ‘Evolve’ seems to work better than having them trail to probation offices and things like that”.

Despite all the claims that short-term sentences are ineffective, prisons are expected to make the most constructive effort they can with the short-term prisoners they receive by developing a regime that attends to the prison’s statement of purpose which includes the duty to “help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release” (HM Prison Service, 2012c).¹⁰ Employees working with short-term prisoners at New Hall described in this study feeling “helpless” and exhibited much frustration towards the ineffectiveness in achieving the objective of assisting these prisoners in leading law-abiding and useful lives. Staff debated the true function of imprisonment and whether New Hall was being utilised effectively, questioning: “what do we actually use prison for? And this needs to be a question asked to society. I know it’s a big question but what do we want prison to be used for?” One prison officer described the use of New Hall for imprisoning low-risk women for minor offences as “absolutely ridiculous”, arguing that punishing these offenders using short-term sentences did not function as a deterrent since the women repeatedly caused their own re-imprisonment intentionally, nor did it productively rehabilitate the women due to lack of available time, and rarely offered any consolation to victims. As one prison worker pointed out: “it’s a pointless situation and on the flipside of that the victims don’t particularly see any justice from seeing somebody being in [prison] for six weeks.”

Morale amongst staff appeared to plummet during discussions of the problems relating to short-term prisoners with statements made such as “we all look really flat and deflated now don’t we” and “every day we fight this impossible battle”. One

¹⁰ The Prison Service’s Statement of Purpose can be found on the HM Prison Service page of the HM Government website: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps/>

occasion saw a male prison officer cry during discussion of the likely prospect of short-term imprisonment essentially damaging the lives of these women and their families. The following quote demonstrates his feelings of frustration and defeat:

“The reality of the situation is that we can’t do any good with someone serving that short of a sentence... it’s been proven time and time again, all we are doing is causing damage which is why the reoffending rate is so high for this sentence group... I think generally the short-term sentences all they’re doing is damaging people’s lives... I don’t know what the judiciary seem to think we are achieving by them. I mean any report I’ve ever seen on short-term sentences say exactly the same thing. All we do is disrupt someone’s life. We haven’t got time to work with them to help with the risk factors, to help with, you know, to do interventions to help with their problems etcetera. All we are doing is just interrupting someone’s life all the time... it’s no surprise we get them back time and time again because they’ve got nothing else have they”.

A number of prison workers also argued that short-term imprisonment to be especially damaging for women as the following extract illustrates:

Mohammad	And it’s more damaging for women isn’t it?
Andy	<u>Definitely, definitely</u>
(?)	Hmm yes
Mohammad	Because of family responsibilities and then benefits are kind of stopped and then they might lose their housing, they might lose a job that they’ve got.
Grace	Hmm children!
Andy	It all impacts on their mental health and of course on a short sentence there is no mental health provision either is there. You’re in and out, in and out, but yet you aren’t going to get any better.

What became evident during the fieldwork was that the absence of early assessment of short-term offender needs was not the only cause of their issues going unattended. Even in the cases where a need, such as a mental health issue, was identified, either through self-referral or being recognised by staff, the detection did not give rise to the issue being attended to, often due to a short-fall in services. As presented in the preceding chapter (section 7.6), a discussion took place in one of the focus groups

about Jasmine; staff shared their concerns of her possible personality disorder but despite recognising the need for support, they failed to make a referral to the necessary support services due to lack of provision. Inability to make a referral to appropriate support services was not purely an issue pertinent to mental health services at New Hall, but a common lack of available channels for staff to make referrals was a recurring grievance. For example:

“I think the counselling side of it is massively needed in here and to think as much as they do a big job, and a great job, there’s just not enough!... the waiting lists and... like the large majority they need counselling for what they’ve been through.”

Much of the problem was that New Hall was heavily reliant on voluntary help, as one member of staff explained: “We’re relying on voluntary sectors and these third sector agencies coming in with no funding. We don’t pay them to come in. So it’s a very difficult one.” The National Audit Office (2010:5) also recognised that “NOMS relies in large part on the efforts of other public bodies that have responsibilities to offenders, for instance, local authorities”. As previously outlined in chapter five, the resettlement services at New Hall delivered by third sector organisations were based collectively within one department identified as ‘the drop-in centre’, despite in reality there being no opportunity to physically ‘drop-in’ for admission to these services since they were accessed via an appointment only facility. These voluntary services’ capability and workload commitment at New Hall was contingent on their independent finance budgets amongst other things, and could not be depended on to provide a reliable and consistent service resulting in their services occasionally becoming temporarily unavailable or exceptionally limited. Many of these agencies habitually scheduled visits to the establishment every fortnight or on a monthly basis; consequently they may not be accessible to prisoners serving exceptionally short sentences, depending on whether their visits coincided at the right time in the women’s sentence. Considering the high number of women serving short-sentences, prisoners may put an application into the system to be contacted by a service provider, but often complete their sentence term before the agency has been able to respond. Responses would often be in the form of acknowledgement and acceptance onto a waiting list. When external resettlement or treatment facilities were available to deliver a service, there were reportedly additional difficulties in women attending appointments or sessions, which this chapter proceeds to unravel. These further

obstructions were resultant of the pressures on prison employees to prioritise institutional targets over women's access to wider support services to ensure prison performance ratings were not compromised. This is a further example of how short-term repeatedly imprisoned women at New Hall experience the pains of neglect and abandonment.

8.3 Prison performance ratings, targets and 'Purposeful activity'

Prison performance is measured using the 'Prison Rating System' (PRS) managed by NOMS. The PRS examines four key domains of the prison which are: public protection; reducing reoffending; decency; and resource management and operational effectiveness (MoJ, 2014d). These four domains are broken down into 'drivers' which are further broken down into 'measures' (which are directly measurable). For example, at New Hall at the time of this study, the domain 'reducing reoffending' comprised five drivers, these were: (1) reducing and tackling offender drug dependency (measured using mandatory drug testing), (2) quality and targeted coverage of OASys (measured on offender assessment system quality), (3) targeting quality interventions to the right offenders at the right time (measured by offending behaviour programme completions), and (4) resettlement. There were four specific measures for resettlement: settled accommodation on release, employment on release, education and training on release and HMIP resettlement¹¹ (MoJ, 2014d). The various measures and drivers bear different weights for different prisons depending on their relative importance and where certain measures are not applicable. For example, for some male establishments, the 'reducing reoffending' domain comprised an additional driver to that at New Hall relating to sex offender treatment programmes. In the cases where there are less applicable drivers, the weights are redistributed amongst the other measures.

A target that appeared to largely impact the regime for short-term prisoners at New Hall related to work activity. At the time the fieldwork took place (January 2013-June 2014) more of a focus had been placed on work in prisons (as described in

¹¹Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons' independent assessment of how well outcomes for prisoners are met, as described in 'Expectations' (inspection criteria) in each of the four healthy prison areas: safety, respect, purposeful activity, and resettlement (HMIP, 2014).

chapter six). The Ministry of Justice (2010c:1) claimed that their plans to transform the administration of punishment in England and Wales would include the enforcement of hard work and industry “instead of enforced idleness”. The following intentions were outlined: “to deliver our ambition for prisons to become places of hard work and meaningful activity, we will ensure that more prisoners are subject to a structured and disciplined environment where they are expected to work a full working week” (MoJ, 2010c:14). This focus was enforced through the increased weighting of work in prison in the PRS specification. Through comparison of the annual PRS structures it was noted that the 2013-14 PRS structure was amended to introduce an additional driver under the ‘reducing reoffending’ domain *and* the ‘decency’ domain, entitled ‘work in prisons’, measurable by ‘the number of hours worked by prisoners in industry’. Since contributing to two domains, the weighting for this driver was particularly high compared to some other drivers, and its implementation involved reducing the weighting of other drivers within those domains. For example, incorporating ‘work in prisons’ as an additional driver under the ‘decency’ domain resulted in the reduced weighting of the drivers: ‘mental health (self harm)’, ‘decent conditions’, ‘safety’, ‘violence management’, ‘availability and quality of offender regime’ and so forth. At New Hall (like many other establishments), the prison performance rating relied more heavily on women achieving the target number of hours at work per week, than the inspectorate of prisons assessment of whether or not prisoners are engaging in activities that are likely to benefit them at all. Sadly, targets and the weighting of the drivers were not tailored to suit female prisoners’ needs. As outlined in chapter six, a focus on meeting key performance targets and producing a high prison rating, does not necessarily mean the needs of the population are being met (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2002; Prison Reform Trust, 2004).

There was much pressure on staff to ensure the targets were met with league tables being made available publically on a quarterly basis rating each establishment’s performance on a scale of one to four, with four being awarded to the highest performers. As outlined in chapter five, the Ministry of Justice performance rating for New Hall prison each year throughout the research (2012-2014) was at level three, which is considered ‘good’ performance.

The sources of data used to generate a score or ‘band’ for each measure varied, but included accessing data from various prison databases and independent audits or assessments of the establishment, for example, from ‘Measuring the Quality of Prison Life’ (MQPL) team and HMIP. The MQPL informed measures such as safety, diversity and equality and decency, which overlapped in some domains with data delivered by HMIP who inspect on four prison areas mentioned earlier, including: safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement. ‘Purposeful activity’ encompassed various activities including: vocational or production workshops, classroom education, physical education, and accredited cognitive behavioural programmes. Since ‘purposeful activity’ is a measure of the ‘availability and quality of offender regime’ driver, and encompasses work in workshops, the most practical and effective way of achieving these targets with the short-term prisoner population was to allocate them to a production workshop as they would then contribute towards both the ‘purposeful activity’ target and both ‘work in prison’ drivers, collectively producing a higher prison performance target than might be achieved in other areas with less weighting. One staff member explained:

“Prison performance is rated on workshops, you know, whether you’re a level three or four or whatever, it comes down to the amount of activity hours that is in working areas, in workshops... because they’re only gonna do a six month or under twelve month sentence, so where do you put them, if the prison is crying out for ‘purposeful activity’? They’re going to end up in a workshop aren’t they, where you don’t get anything from them other than a good prison rating.”

Additionally, allocation of short-term prisoners to workshops meant they not only contribute to ‘hours at work’ figures, but since there is no ‘completion point’ or required ‘achievement’ there is less risk of increasing the number of individuals who fail to complete a fixed-length programme or course. What was observed during fieldwork were women being ‘required’ at work (such as sewing male prisoner underwear in a workshop) in order for the prison to meet its ‘work in prisons’ target, but this meant the woman not being available to attend to other, arguably more vital needs (such as housing and mental health). The representatives from external agencies who engaged in the study, described having difficulties getting workshop and education-based staff to allow the women to leave work or class to attend their appointments. One programmes facilitator explained:

“We’ve had some difficulties, they’ve not been happy when we’ve had women come down when they’re supposed to be at work, but actually, which is more important? It is important and it’s not seen as important and that’s because people have different targets.”

Another prison employee stated:

“What do we give priority to? Through-the-gate has got to be recognised as important as working activity in custody and it’s that balance, the Government and the KPT’s they set and decide where we put that work and how it fits through. If we don’t get that balance right, we don’t get everything met”.

A representative from educational services, who was a directly employed member of prison staff (required to meet institutional targets), argued:

“I think, talking from –you know, looking from my side, from prison side... we’ve ETE targets to meet which are two massive ones, you know the focus on it in offender management! I know what you’re saying because it’s like they either go to work and you don’t disturb them and leave them in work or they come out and do this what they need to do... I do agree with you that its either one thing or another; it’s either meet this target or meet that target or let them do things like your programmes and they don’t seem to get that happy balance.”

The Ministry of Justice (2012e:18) reports that “the most prevalent offending-related needs for short sentence prisoners are retaining or finding accommodation and employment, overcoming substance misuse, and thinking skills deficits”. Despite this, deployment into industrial workshops was taking priority for these short-term imprisoned women at New Hall. Although it is acknowledged that engagement with educational services, work experience opportunities and training are beneficial in supporting the women to lead useful lives after release and are an essential part of the rehabilitation process, the pressures on the prison to ensure women engaged in a minimum number of hours of work resulted in the prison failing to allow the women to address other essential elements of their rehabilitation and resettlement progression.

HM Inspectorate of Prison’s ‘Expectation Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for women in prison’ (2014:91) defined ‘purposeful activity’ as one of the criteria of a healthy prison and insisted that “women are able, and expected, to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them”. Regardless of this perspective, prison targets are not gender-specific and as one prison officer proclaimed:

“What is classed as purposeful activity isn’t necessarily what we would define as purposeful for a woman. Purposeful for a woman is looking for accommodation, building up family ties, looking for those areas of –for those areas that can –for desistance as opposed to sitting them in a workshop sewing male-wear, but that’s fine if they want wages and they want money to buy their tobacco and buy their luxuries etcetera but perhaps in terms of what we’re trying to do which is stop people coming back in to prison, it’s not, it’s nothing to do with it, sitting in a workshop, and no disrespect to any workshop instructors but it’s not going to stop someone coming back into prison. We know that. Time and time again, we know that. We need to be looking at the desistance factors and working on that and that should be purposeful activity, not sitting in sewing workshops or whatever we are doing!”

Based on New Hall prison’s ‘good’ performance rating and achievement record of targets designed to reduce reoffending, it would be expected that a large proportion of the population of those released from New Hall prison would not repeatedly return such a short time after release. However, reoffending figures presented in chapter one of the thesis show the short-term prisoners discharged in 2007 from HMP New Hall produced the highest one year reconviction rate of all English and Welsh prisons (male and female) at 76.6 percent (MoJ, 2010b). This demonstrates that successful achievement of reducing reoffending targets does not transfer to effectively reduce reoffending, especially for the short-term female prisoner population who are repeatedly returning to custody only a short time after they are released.

As outlined in chapter one, women make up a small proportion (4.6%) of the prison population (MoJ, 2015b), so measures including target and performance ratings have been developed mainly with male offenders in mind and without taking women’s distinctive offending profile and needs into account. One senior management prison employee described his experience of attending a commissioning event where the focus was very much on developing policies and services to meet the needs of male prisoners. The following quotation highlights his frustration:

“At a commissioning event myself and [Sophie] went to and that, male, male and I was like ‘well what about the female, what about the female, what about the female’... I got the impression that they thought we were being a bit of a pain in the arse, especially when [the presenter] said he’d come and talk to us separately about female stuff.”

Gender differences were acknowledged by some staff members during discussions who argued for a customised set of targets that recognise gender differences and to take into consideration the specific needs of female offenders:

“I think in terms of reducing reoffending rate, maybe we need to remember that the protective factors for women are very different from men, yet the KPTs we have are generic, they’re for men and women so we have our targets like ETE, however the protective factors for women is more family and the support network there. There’s no KPT for us, no target for us to meet that, however that’s where we need to be looking to stop them coming back inside again. So it’s a bit of a –we’re stuck between a rock and a hard place; we don’t hit our KPTs we get questions asked in parliament etcetera but then again, if we are hitting our KPTs we’re not actually reducing the reoffending rates”

The Prison Reform Trust (2004:23) produced an analysis of the prison service’s performance against its key performance indicators, concluding that:

“Although KPIs can provide a useful indication of aspects of prison service performance, they should not be viewed in isolation. A number of KPIs... do not provide a clear picture of the situation in our jails and there is a danger that the KPI is distorting the reality of what is actually being achieved... Most importantly KPIs do not reflect whether or not the different needs of prisoners in different prisons are being met.”

A further gender difference highlighted by staff during discussions was disparity in the psychological effect imprisonment has on women and men, arguing that imprisonment can be additionally destructive to women’s mental health as previously discussed in chapter two on the pains of imprisonment for women.

8.4 Staff attitudes and motivation

Much of the work done with offenders focuses on identifying and targeting risk factors; factors that increase the likelihood of reoffending. Often, less attention is paid to identifying and building personal strengths (perhaps since there was no measurable target that required this). The concept of a strength-based approach is central to the ‘Good Lives Model of Rehabilitation’ (GLM) (Ward and Brown, 2004; Ward and Maruna, 2007). The GLM focuses on offenders’ personal strengths and development, positive change and the achievement of identified goals. Rather than over-emphasising risks as observed in this study and “using only the language of deficiency and inadequacy” (Matthews *et al.*, 2014:10), the GLM aims to construct a

positive approach that is responsive to the individual's core aspirations, interests and aims, which is advocated in the literature as an effective way of increasing motivation (Maruna, 2001). It is suggested that by supporting the development of skills and competencies the individual is more likely to achieve their objectives and lead a rewarding life without crime. One employee argued that being able to instil confidence in women is effective in reducing the likelihood of their returning to prison, but highlighted the difficulties in achieving this with only a short-term sentenced prisoner:

“women in closed conditions, they stoop, they keep low and you know as they progress through their sentence they get more confident, they have their hair done, they put make-up on, they have their nails done, they go out to work, they're earning and it's empowering... I never believed it until I went to Askham [Grange prison]... after having spent [a long number of] years here [at New Hall] I was a bit cynical about [a specialised resettlement regime], but it does work. The more you can work with them, the more interventions you have, it does work.”

Staff with low expectations of offenders can create self-fulfilling prophecies which encourage repeat offending. One prison officer argued: “I think with women even more so than men. I think men are a bit more thick skinned in terms of [how they are impacted by what people say]”. NOMS (2013b:11) reported on staff behaviours that promote desistance suggesting that “when frontline staff engage with offenders using a particular set of skills, there is a positive impact on reoffending”. One member of staff stated:

“we went for a [service level agreement] meeting and were told the Ministry of Justice are to focus on staff attitudes towards people coming in and out and wanting to change it so they're more positive and trying to pump hope into these women because there are a lot of comments in terms of ‘oh we'll see you again in six weeks’ and just how that little –that attitude can have a massive effect on the women's beliefs about themselves.”

In a separate focus group, a prison officer described a scenario pertinent to this point:

“[Jasmine], I know a lot of people in here know [Jasmine] has been coming in and out of this prison since she was fifteen years old, and I spoke to [Jasmine] when I released her today at reception and that, I said ‘right, [Jasmine] what's happening now’... She says ‘I've actually got housing and support’... and they've given her a support worker. [Jasmine]'s from [Leeds], she says, ‘I'm moving town...I've actually had the option of some support out there, someone's going to be there for me’. I said to her, and again coming back to

what you said... you know, giving her a bit of hope, I said 'this is the best chance you've ever had [Jasmine], please don't blow it, etcetera but then as I'm walking her down to the gates I hear 'see you next week [Jasmine]'... it's banter and people don't ever mean it maliciously but I thought all that I've just said and I got out the gate and I said 'ignore that, I don't want to see you back now.'"

A police officer in the discussion responded:

"But it's not just banter though is it, there's a lot in the power of suggestion so a throw away comment like that can be really powerful in terms of how someone feels about themselves and with women, I don't think we realise how destructive that is to actual someone's psyche."

Many desisters talk about the powerful effect of having someone believe in them and of interactions that communicate a belief that they can and will change (Rex, 1999; LeBel *et al.*, 2008). There was much expectation and assumptions made from both staff and fellow prisoners on the women's likeliness to shortly return to New Hall.

One member of staff said:

"There is very little we can do with them so a lot of it is just a matter of we're just waiting for them to leave and come back and leave and come back and sooner or later, hopefully, they'll get a longer sentence so we can actually do something with them. I know it's a horrible thing to say but that's the reality of the situation."

Similarly, a number of the women shared a desire for a long-term custodial sentence to allow them to access support to help prevent their return to prison. As previously mentioned, Daisy shared her thoughts of increasing the seriousness of her offending from theft and handling to violence with the firm intention being to receive a longer prison sentence. Like many of the women, Daisy reported feeling neglected due to her categorisation as 'low-risk' and suggested she would need to commit a criminal act that would result in her re-categorisation to 'high-risk' offender before she would receive the attention and support she required. Staff also considered whether the lack of focus on low-risk offenders was justified:

Tracy	<u>But they're not high risk</u>
Rob	No, no, no [they're not high risk]
Tracy	Compared to the ones that are causing the biggest problems in society and I think that's what government are looking -concentrating on
Rob	If you look at no risk of harm, but high risk of reoffending, which is the majority of our offenders, your shoplifters
Tracy	Yeah yeah yeah
Rob	You know, your acquisitive criminals like that, they <u>are all of course without [a shadow of a doubt,</u>
Tracy	<u>[They're NOT [prolific priority offenders] though are they</u>
Rob	No, they're not [prolific priority offenders] but they are -cause <u>-what frustrates me</u> is the actually <u>cost</u> , when we look at finances to the tax payer, they are a lot more because they are in and out of court, in and out of court, in and out of prison, they actually cost the tax payer three four five times as much as the high risk of harm, low risk of reoffending, the sex offender etcetera

Staff and prisoners both commented on there being a strong focus on rehabilitation for high-risk prisoners. Most would agree that protecting the public should be a key focus for all agencies within the Criminal Justice System, including NOMS, and that attention should focus on the population of prisoners who are most at risk of endangering others. This is not to say that those who are of low-risk of harm should be forgotten and experience 'the pains of neglect and abandonment' previously identified. Nonetheless, thoughts should not be to increase the length of sentence for those who are deemed low-risk, nor should these women contemplate elevating the seriousness of their offending in order to become a priority for help and support. Instead it is argued here that custody should be reserved for only those who must be removed from society in order to protect the general public, whilst those who do not pose this risk should be dealt with in the community.

8.5 Conclusion

As previously discussed, the number of women who are assessed as posing a serious risk to the public is extremely low. Furthermore, the imprisonment of mothers has been found to create added difficulties and significant suffering for children. In light of this, it is often questioned whether the use of short-term custodial sentences for non-violent female offenders is the most effective option in supporting these offenders in leading law abiding lives. The Howard League (2005:24), for example, argued:

“prison custody for women should be virtually abolished so that only those women who are convicted of serious and violent offences and who represent a continuing danger to the public should be held in custody. For other women offenders community-based interventions that make amends for the wrong done and encourage women to change their lives offer the best chance of creating a safer society”.

This chapter has highlighted that the multitude of issues women classically present on entry to prison, are often exacerbated through imprisonment, and the brevity of time in custody, combined with the shortage of services to deal with the population of women means that short-term female prisoners often exit prison with their needs unmet, which typically leads to their re-imprisonment. Since the prison relies heavily on a limited supply of third-sector agencies to deliver their services, arguably a smaller female prison population would allow for a better distribution of resources.

Despite Governments recognising these problems and expressing a desire to ‘break the cycle’ of offending amongst this population of offenders, prisons are incentivised and closely monitored with the use of performance targets. What this chapter has recognised is that satisfying the prison rating system by achieving targets does not necessarily mean the needs of the short-term population at New Hall are being met, and in reality, often their needs are neglected to allow the prison to achieve Government set objectives. ‘Purposeful activity’ should denote women engaging in activity that is likely to benefit them; this was rarely found to be the case at HMP New Hall.

Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated that the use of short-term imprisonment is ineffective, largely due to the prison having insufficient time to work with the women. Despite the Coalition Government’s objections to bring an end to short-term

imprisonment for non-violent female offenders, this chapter supports the argument that they are unproductive, and emphasises the need for an alternative way of dealing with this population of women in the community.

PART FOUR

CONCLUSION

The fourth and final part of the thesis contains just one chapter. The final chapter summarises what the study has uncovered chapter by chapter and explains how this relates to the existing literature on experiences of imprisonment presented in part one of the thesis. It reflects upon the research aims presented in chapter three of the thesis, considering what and how the findings from the research contribute to existing knowledge. It also discusses how changes in policy are likely to impact this population of offenders considering what we have learned about them and their issues. The final part of the thesis summarises and reflects on what has been learned through this research process and makes recommendations based on this knowledge of how to most effectively tackle the problems faced with this population of women.

CHAPTER NINE

Discussion

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research on which this thesis is based was to explore the lived experiences of women who are repeatedly sentenced to short-term custodial sentences, a marginalised group whose accounts have previously been overlooked in prison research. The empirical research in this study was developed with a view to understanding the nature and dynamics of prison life for adult women repeatedly serving short sentences in an English closed prison. As outlined in chapter three, ‘unlocking’ the narratives of women prisoners was considered to be of great importance and helped identify a distinctive set of ‘pains’ experienced by this population of women. The research sought to discover how the women experienced their time in custody, their previous experiences of release and problems they faced which led to their re-imprisonment by providing the women an opportunity to narrate their personal experiences. In doing so, this thesis sought to advance the debate about using short-term imprisonment for non-violent women, and explore how this population of offenders could be most effectively supported in exiting a cycle of repeat imprisonment. Although more recently there has been an increased realisation of the gender-specific needs of women in prison (e.g. Heidensohn, 2000, 2002; Corston, 2007; Hedderman *et al.* 2011; APPG, 2011) and concern for those repeatedly serving short custodial sentences (e.g. Corston, 2007; Revolving Doors Agency, 2011; Howard League for Penal Reform, 2005; House of Commons Justice Committee, 2008, 2013), as continually highlighted throughout this thesis, there remains a lack of positive action towards improving the situation. As long as successive Governments continue to view short-term imprisonment as a necessary option for persistent offenders (MoJ, 2010c, 2010f), the need remains for implementing a suitable prison regime comprising a gender-appropriate needs assessment system for short-term women prisoners, followed up with appropriate support and treatment to address their need.

This chapter serves a number of purposes. First, it brings together the findings of the research and provides an overview of the key findings from this research. Second, this chapter reflects upon the research aims outlined at the start of the research. This

final chapter then presents a review of recent changes in policy considering how they might impact repeat short-term sentenced women. The limitations of the research and suggestions for possible future research in this area are then considered. Following this, the chapter assesses the overall contribution of the present study before offering my concluding thoughts and final reflections on the research.

9.2 Overview of thesis

The thesis began with an overview of the current situation regarding female imprisonment in England and Wales, providing a review of the statistics on the population of female short-term prisoners, reoffending rates for this population and the excessive costs to the economy as a result. Chapter one revealed the extent of the problem, highlighting the number of women imprisoned in England with children and mental health issues amongst other things, for non-violent offences. The chapter also presented a brief outline of the current Government's plans to deal with the situation, before presenting an overview of the following chapters in the thesis.

Chapter two evaluated the literature pertaining to the 'pains of imprisonment' with a view to exploring the experiences of women and the pains and deprivations they experience as an outcome of imprisonment. The chapter documented that although many of the pains historically rendered in the literature are still very much relevant, there are additionally, reports of more contemporary 'pains of imprisonment' claimed to be consequences of systemic policies and institutional practices (Crewe, 2011). Pains generated or exacerbated by problems with institutional systems were found to be pertinent to this study and were explored in chapter eight of the thesis. However, chapter two highlighted a need for further research. With only a handful of exceptions, previous studies (predominantly based on male prisoners) have failed to consider how experiences of imprisonment differ for women. Furthermore, since a large proportion of women serve short-term custodial sentences, the existing literature failed to recognise how the 'pains' may differ for those who are repeatedly imprisoned for sentences of less than twelve months. The previous literature is misleading by implying prison is harsher for long-term prisoners since the pains are endured for a longer period, neglecting the idea that the chaos and instability associated with the process of repeat imprisonment created a distinctive set of 'pains'.

Chapter two presented an overview of the pains distinctively experienced by repeat short-term female prisoners, starting with ‘the pains of neglect and abandonment’. This ‘pain’ was identified in relation to a number of different deprivations that became more apparent throughout the thesis; this included ‘the deprivation of psychological assessment’. Chapter two outlined how Crewe (2011:515) identified the forms and processes of psychological assessment as a ‘pain’ and stated that psychological assessment is relevant to a large proportion of the prison population since “all [prisoners] go through the offender assessment process” to determine eligibility and assignment to interventions such as offending behaviour programmes. This assumption was not true for the short-term repeatedly imprisoned women at HMP New Hall, and in effect, depriving the women of an assessment of their needs created a barrier to accessing the support and treatment they required. The deprivation of support and treatment further contributed to ‘the pains of neglect and abandonment’.

Chapter two also helped identify further ‘pains’ that are considered distinctive for repeat short-term female prisoners. This included ‘the pains of isolation and separation’. Chapter two evidenced how imprisonment is experienced very differently by women than men, highlighting the serious consequences associated with the population of female prisoners being so small. Research explored in chapter two evidenced that the rural locations and geographical dispersal of women’s prisons in England (with none in Wales) makes visitation especially difficult for families (Devlin, 1998; Hale, 2005; Prison Reform Trust, 2010, 2014a; Women in Prison, 2013). Reports that the difficulties often prevent women’s support networks and children from visiting them in prison, resulting in isolation (HM Prison Service, 2008) was supported by the data in this study with all twenty interviewed women stating they had not received a visit on their current sentence due to the efforts it requires of their relatives.

Finally, after exploring Crewe’s (2011) ‘pains of uncertainty’ in chapter two it became clear that some of the associated symptoms applied equally to repeat short-term female prisoners, but for different reasons. For the women in this study, ‘the pains of uncertainty’ related to uncertainty about their future after release from custody. Since these women often faced a number of issues, such as homelessness, mental ill-health, debt, drug and alcohol addiction and so forth, but suffered the pains

of neglect and abandonment, they have no clear pathway to rehabilitation which triggered stress and anxiety. It was also considered whether women experience pains specific to their gender taking into consideration that women are the minority. In addition to the ‘pains of isolation’ experienced as a result of the geographical scattering of, and often rural locations of, female establishments in England and Wales, there are also higher report rates amongst women of mental health conditions and histories of abuse; pregnancy and motherhood and other biological differences. The chapter detailed much evidence to support claims that women experience imprisonment very differently from men, highlighting the need for further research in this area. The empirical research presented in this thesis sought to contribute to the established literature.

Chapter two also considered the notion of so-called ‘gains’ of imprisonment, above and beyond basic needs such as: shelter, warmth clothing, food and so forth, in view of the support services that prisons are known to offer, for instance: education and treatment programmes. Nonetheless this chapter concluded that the target population in this study – repeat short-term adult women prisoners – were less likely to benefit from these supposed ‘gains’ due to their time in custody being so brief.

Chapter three presented the research methodology of the empirical study, from the design of the study to the analysis of the data collected. Both observations and interviews were carried out, allowing a rich insight into the thoughts and experiences of women and staff at HMP New Hall. The chapter provided detail of the problematic nature of prison field-research and detailed the factors which shaped the research process. The purpose of chapter three was to provide an overview of how the voices of those women who are repeatedly imprisoned were captured in order to gain an understanding of the reality of the challenges and barriers they face.

Although much of the thematic analysis focused on data derived from the interview transcripts, the importance of the observations should not be overlooked. The participant observation periods provided many opportunities for more informal exchanges with imprisoned women and the prison staff, which provided a valuable source of data in and of itself. As well as it working as a useful means of establishing rapport with the women and staff prior to carrying out interviews, the observations were particularly useful for gaining an understanding of the dynamics and feel of

prison life which enabled me to place the perspectives of the women and staff in context. Furthermore, establishing the sorts of issues the women experience as a result of short-term imprisonment helped identify the questions for the interview schedules and my field notes from these experiences increasingly focused on these issues. These issues were identified from the data as three key themes: structural issues, personal issues, and systemic issues.

The purpose of chapter four was to provide a general overview of the women whose experiences were a focus of this study. The chapter was presented in two parts, with part one offering an overall picture of the demographics for the short-term sentenced adult women at an approximate halfway point through the fieldwork (based on roll figures from 30th August 2013) at New Hall (n=60), comprising the statistical composition of the interview participants (n=20) in this research study independently for comparison. The purpose of this was to illustrate how representative my participant group was of the population of adult short-term prisoners at New Hall, with the analysis demonstrating that the women recruited as part of this study largely corresponded with those of the target population. Part one of chapter four also highlighted the prevalence of some of the women's issues which were further explored later in the thesis, such as drug and alcohol issues and children. Part two of chapter four presented a detailed narrative of a woman considered representative of the participants who were interviewed. The case study, conveyed based on the woman's own reports disclosed in interview, although disheartening, effectively highlighted many of the issues typically experienced by women who are repeatedly subject to short-term sentences at New Hall. Importantly, this chapter emphasised, not only the pains typically suffered by the women, but also the extensive collateral damage caused to families and children through the short-term imprisonment of mothers.

Chapter five revealed details of the regime at New Hall prison. In order to explore women's experiences of custody at New Hall and release, it was important to gain an understanding of how the prison functions and what support services it offered in its attempt to prevent the women reoffending after release. The chapter demonstrated the restricted access to support services for women serving short-term sentences compared to the opportunities available to the rest of the population. This chapter highlighted a number of system failures in relation to identifying the short-term

prisoner's needs and proving a suitable access route to the services; such issues were later explored in chapter eight. Ultimately, the chapter drew attention to the fact that the time spent in custody, although limited for the short sentenced prisoners, was not used constructively due to the barriers preventing access to the necessary support services. Instead, it was reported how short-term sentenced prisoners typically spent their time working in workshops with little benefit, whilst serious needs, such as housing and psychological therapy were neglected.

Chapters six, seven and eight presented data from periods of observational fieldwork and interviews with twenty women and a series of focus groups with individuals who work with short-term imprisoned women in custody, as detailed in chapter three. Each of these three chapters presented findings under the key themes identified through a detailed thematic analysis of interview transcripts.

Chapter six focused on the women's descriptions of the structural issues they experienced after release, prior to their re-imprisonment. The findings were presented under thematic headings identified from the data analysis: accommodation; education, training and employment; and financial difficulties. The chapter concluded that issues with housing and homelessness were the most significant and concerning. Failure to secure stable accommodation in the community was found to be a large contributing factor to their repeated re-imprisonment. Despite recognition that short-termers are at much higher risk of reoffending, and only a short time after release, barriers remained in place typically preventing their access to much needed housing provision. There were similar barriers preventing access to educational services in prison, or limiting opportunities, often due to restricted time available. Overall, educational services were generally seen positively, allowing the women an opportunity to develop skills and gain formal qualifications required for employment, however many of the women struggled with confidence, self-esteem, independence and did not have the necessary social skills required for employment. The main barrier to attaining employment or education upon release was lack of stable accommodation. Housing was seen as the foundation for successful rehabilitation, while education and finance, although important, were considered somewhat secondary.

There was a great deal of evidence offered in chapter seven demonstrating that the majority of imprisoned women present considerable emotional, personal, and mental health issues. Many of the personal issues were clearly interlinked, for example: histories of abuse were contributory to mental health conditions and drug abuse. The analysis of the data in this study found many similar accounts of personal problems experienced and paralleled reports of causes of these issues. What became clear once again, as with many of the reported contributory factors to their repeat offending, were the barriers to accessing the required support for exiting the 'revolving door'. In this case, therapeutic services or medical treatment for emotional and mental health factors were reported as inaccessible, which highlights concerns again as to whether short-term imprisonment is appropriate for these non-violent offenders.

The findings presented over these two chapters highlighted that many of the women, particularly those repeatedly serving short-term prison sentences, had a multitude of complex structural and personal issues, often interlinked. Considering the brevity of the women's sentences, there is only a limited amount of time available to address those needs while they are in custody. Therefore, many of these issues were considered in terms of their significance and importance. In order to assess these priorities, they first need identifying through an appropriate needs assessment; something which was not typically prepared for those serving short-term sentences.

Chapter eight examined the many problems associated with short-term imprisonment, highlighting why so many of those released after a short-term prison sentence return to custody after such a short period of time. This chapter drew together evidence that short-term sentences are largely ineffective and ultimately damaging given that they break family ties and mothers' relationships with their children, exacerbate existing issues such as mental ill-health, housing, financial difficulties and so forth, all at a large economic cost. Chapter eight outlined how the ineffectiveness of short-term sentences for this population was realised by those who work with these women at New Hall which evidently built attitudes of abandoned hope amongst workers and prisoners. In this chapter, staff reported feeling trapped between their responsibilities to engage women in 'purposeful activity' that is likely to benefit the women's future and their duties to meet institutional targets by occupying the women in activity that would allow them to achieve a good prison performance rating. Chapter eight demonstrated that positively addressing the needs of the women and meeting the key

performance targets is not necessarily achieved concurrently. Ambiguities in the definitions of terms like ‘purposeful activity’ allowed for targets to be met, whilst the women experienced the ‘pains of neglect and abandonment’. Despite the evidence presented in this chapter pertaining to the ineffectiveness of short-term sentences for low-risk female offenders, whilst the Government continue to insist on the use of short-term imprisonment, the need remains for implementing a suitable regime designed to meet the needs of the short-term female prison population, and redefining what ‘purposeful activity’ means for this population of women to ensure it signifies action that is likely to benefit the women.

9.3 Research limitations and factors to consider

No research project is without limitations, and this research is no different. A number of the potential limitations have been discussed throughout the thesis, which mainly relate to the population being studied and associated restrictions. Discussions of these limitations are expanded upon below.

The research presented in this thesis was conducted in one female closed prison in England, at one specific period of time, with a particular group of adult women prisoners. Therefore, generalisations cannot be made about the extent to which the findings are the same for other female prisoners at other establishments across the country, and beyond. There will certainly be dissimilarities between prison regimes, offered services, their providers and variation in their delivery. As a result, experiences are expected to differ somewhat. Furthermore, a population analysis of New Hall prison’s short-term population presented in chapter four of the thesis showed the large majority of participants (90%) were from areas of Yorkshire, therefore their previous experiences of release and resettlement are likely to differ from women resettling in other areas on account of regional variation such as employment opportunities, cost of living, social housing provision, and so forth. It is unlikely that results of this single-site research could be extrapolated to other populations without careful consideration. Further studies within other women’s prisons in other parts of the country would be needed to explore whether the results of this research could be considered representative of female prisoners’ experiences of repeat short-term imprisoned in England and Wales in general. Although this

research represents detailed experiences of a somewhat small sample of women (n=20), this was an expected outcome of collating empirical data from a closed prison environment within a restricted time-frame. In an ideal world, a larger sample would be recruited, from a selection of prison establishments and carried out over a longer period of time if constraints allowed.

It should also be recognised that those women who participated in the study volunteered to be involved. It could be argued that employing a self-selection participant recruitment strategy may have resulted in a sample that is not representative of women repeatedly imprisoned for short sentences as a whole. Of course it would not be ethical or possible to have made participation in this study compulsory; self-selection bias is widely acknowledged as a potential limitation to research. Women who volunteered to speak to me, especially those who agreed to an in-depth interview, may have done so because they had particular issues they were keen to share, or because they were more motivated and confident at interacting than other women. It could be argued that the women who did not volunteer to take part may have presented with different characteristics. Based on the demographic information presented in chapter four of the thesis, there were no considerable differences between those who did participate and those who did not, however the extent of any differences beyond the fixed categories featured in the demographic data are not clear. Despite these limitations, the self-selection method of recruitment was recognised for having benefits in this study. As Bailey (1994:207) notes “volunteers are highly motivated, and thus may be more careful and may give more information with fewer errors than would less willing respondents”. In the present study, this was found to be the case. As described in chapter three, the women were keen to engage, there was a high response rate to the invitation to participate and the women generally spoke freely and openly in great depth, and so the quality of information obtained is high.

Although the quality and depth of information collated during interviews was good, one of the main limitations, previously discussed in more detail in chapter three, is the reliance on the accuracy of self-report data. The stories were reported directly from those who are involved and therefore the data relies on the honesty of the interviewees. There were a number of reasons identified in chapter three for why the women might intentionally fabricate accounts, such as: self-protection,

embarrassment, overconfidence, pride, confusion and forgetfulness, especially considering the chaotic lives many had experienced, recalling details was often difficult. A study by Jansson *et al.* (2008) reported on the validity of self-reported criminal behaviour from women substance abusers. Their research found that self-report data from their sample should be used with caution, suggesting that the “shame, stigma, and social desirability” may play a part in the underreporting of certain events (Jansson *et al.*, 2008:6).

The data presented in this thesis should be considered in light of the limitations outlined above, however in order to try and mitigate against the potential for error, a ‘triangulation’ of data was sought to increase validity of the women’s reports. The research relied on multiple sources of data to address the same research questions, including direct observation and participation, focus groups with those who work at the prison and semi-structured interviews with women which were supplemented by review of individual P-NOMIS (Prison National Offender Management Information System) records that allowed for cross-checking of some of the data provided by the women.

It is possible to identify directions for future research as a result of this study. Most of the research on experiences of imprisonment to date appears to have been generated from studies of the most serious offenders, and typically males. In view of the limitations described here, it is clear that longitudinal studies are required to gain further insight into the ongoing factors that contribute to the difficulties the prison faces in trying to prevent its population from returning after release. Attaining a view of how women experience the ‘revolving door’ could be better captured by interviewing women at the various stages of the cycle, such as: upon entry to custody, at various points throughout their sentence, exiting custody, with follow-ups in the community. This would add valuable information to our understanding of this experience. More generally, the present study demonstrated the wealth of information that can be gleaned from interviews with prisoners, suggesting that more criminological research should aim to use the offender as expert.

9.4 Assessing contribution

Despite the limitations to the study outlined above, this research is able to make a valid contribution to what is known about women repeatedly serving short-term custodial sentences.

As outlined in chapter two, much of the existing literature on experiences of imprisonment is based on males, often outside England and Wales, much of which is outdated. The recent (limited) research on women prisoners, and particularly those repeatedly serving short-term sentences, excludes any empirical study, and exists in the form of Government produced reports based on quantitative data. Other relevant research material included information bulletins and statistical reports from organisations such as penal reform groups. Although this previous research effectively highlights the severity of the situation with women reoffending, the ineffectiveness of short-term prison sentences for non-violent women and the collateral damage caused to families and children, it typically excludes the voices of the women who actually experience repeat imprisonment.

Other, more in-depth, qualitative studies of female offenders have tended to focus on a particular issue in isolation, such as sexual behaviour, mental health, homelessness or drug addiction, and fail to consider how these issues are interlinked. This thesis has demonstrated that imprisoned women typically exhibit a range of issues which often exacerbate and create barriers for one another. Studies exploring only part of the problem, fail to consider the impact and restrictions a short-term sentence brings with such limited time available when making recommendations and suggestions for effective methods of treatment, systems or approaches for addressing the issue. In light of my findings and discussion of these in this thesis, I contend that this research contributes a unique account of the complexities of women's experiences of short-term repeat imprisonment. This research highlights the range of problems imprisoned women face and how these issues are interlinked by allowing the women themselves an opportunity to narrate their feelings and experiences, whilst taking account of the fact that large proportions of imprisoned women are only in custody for a short period of time, limiting the opportunity and options for addressing their needs. This thesis has therefore drawn together these various fractured elements. It provides an account of imprisoned women's experiences that is founded on

information gathered directly from women who had a history of repeat imprisonment and who were at the time, in custody serving a short-term sentence.

9.5 Reviewing recent policy changes

As the data presented here was being collected, a number of developments in policy and practice occurred. In May 2013, ‘Transforming Rehabilitation: A strategy for Reform’ was published (MoJ: 2013e). This has relevance to the repeat short-term prisoner population in a number of ways. Firstly, as introduced in chapter one, short term prisoners have not – until recently – been subject to any statutory supervision upon release. However, recent government proposals in the Offender Rehabilitation Bill involved extending supervision to all offenders released from custody. The Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014 accompanies the Government’s plans to transform the way in which offenders are managed as part of the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ programme which involved the extension of supervision to offenders (men and women) sentenced to short-term imprisonment after release. This entails any offender given a custodial sentence term of more than one day whose offence was committed on or after 1st February 2015 receiving a minimum of twelve months of supervision in the community upon release (MoJ, 2013e). The new reforms also involved reorganising the previous 35 Probation Trusts into 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) who are responsible for the low to medium risk offenders across England and Wales, including short-term female prisoners. This means the majority of women will now be supervised through the private sector, as opposed to the public sector, since the majority of women are low risk and serve short-term sentences. Whilst the responsibility for managing high-risk offenders belongs to a single public sector National Probation Service, the Ministry of Justice competed contracts to voluntary and private organisations to deliver through-the-gate and resettlement services through the CRCs. Delivery of these services begins in newly assigned ‘resettlement prisons’ which facilitate the transition back into the community. Due to the few existing women’s prisons in England and Wales, all have been designated as resettlement prisons. For New Hall, since the completion of the research, this has meant that the closure was announced for its ‘partnered’ prison, HMP Askham Grange (an open prison in North Yorkshire) that acted as a resettlement prison for New Hall. It was also reported that a small overnight visits

facility was also being developed within the footprint of New Hall prison which is expected to open in 2015 (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2015).

Although the extension of through-the-gate services and the prospect of support on release is something repeat short-term female prisoners are likely to particularly benefit from, there are potential challenges to be recognised. In addition to the concerns presented in chapter one over the application of Payment by Results to services for women, there are further concerns regarding the commissioning regime. As the thesis reveals, although women prisoners are typically low-risk to the public, they are also more often than not, high-risk in terms of needs which require intensive support and specialist engagement since the factors often underlying their offending behaviour are so complex. It is feared that that larger organisation providing rehabilitative services will not recognise that levels of risk by women may not precisely reflect the level of support such women require and be able to offer the same bespoke services that smaller concentrated services are able to provide. There are also concerns that specialist services that have previously delivered this intensive specialist support such as Women Centres, will be reluctant to engage since having an enforced role would defy their principles, and that the introduction of competition may prevent the sharing of good practice amongst agencies.

The focus on post-custodial supervision in ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ has arguably resulted in our overlooking the damaging effect of short-term imprisonment for women with the additional element of supervision which may increase the numbers of women recalled to custody, increasing the population of women in custody with a further element of chaos to the experience for women. Even with appropriate targeted supervision upon release, this does not alter the damaging nature of imprisonment, and fix the problems associated with separation from family support networks and so forth. Val Castell of the Magistrates’ Association Sentencing Committee argued in her evidence to the House of Commons Justice Committee (2013:56) reporting on ‘Women Offenders – after the Corston Report’, that:

“What the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ proposals are going to lead us towards is a bit more of a blurring between community and custody outcomes. That could work two ways. It may mean that there will be less inclination to send somebody into custody because you will see that they are doing much more of the same sort of thing, and we will not have quite this linear

approach [to sentencing]... However, it could go the other way: if you also have the rehabilitative element, it could lead [sentencers] to say that there is not the harm in a custodial sentence because you have the other work going on as well.”

The House of Commons Justice Committee concluded its report on the matter stating:

“The Government's proposals for Transforming Rehabilitation have clearly been designed to deal with male offenders. Funding arrangements for provision for women appear to be being shoehorned into the payment by results programme, resulting in the likelihood of a loss of funding for broader provision encompassing both women offenders and those with particular vulnerabilities that put them at risk of offending. In addition, the risk of sentencers using short prison sentences as a gateway to support undermines the post-Corston direction of travel in reducing the use of custody for women, and does nothing to mitigate the detrimental impact of short sentences on women, their families and the likelihood of reducing re-offending. If the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms are to work, improvement of information to sentencers about the alternatives to custody, which we have repeatedly called for, must take place.”

9.6 Reflecting on research aims

At the start of the research, as outlined in chapter three, I set out the various questions that this research would answer. A key aim was to explore why short-term female prisoners are repeatedly imprisoned within twelve months of release and what problems they experience prior to re-imprisonment. The data presented in chapters six and seven of the thesis highlighted the problems women face upon release, with access to stable and suitable housing being the most significant and commonly reported issue.

The study also sought to explore the orientations of the prisoners towards their imprisonment, and to examine their understandings and views of imprisonment. The research revealed that the short-term prisoner population at New Hall who had a history of repeat imprisonment recognised they were trapped in the ‘revolving door’ and despite their own desires to desist, their offending was often an act to intentionally cause their own reimprisonment. The women described prison as a place of respite or ‘asylum’, and in most cases, a short-term solution to their homelessness. Beyond the opportunity for short-term respite, shelter, food and other basic needs, the women did not report other ‘gains’ of imprisonment: they

recognised that there were opportunities to ‘gain’ further education, training, psychological support and so forth in custody, but that the shortness of their sentence limited their access to such provision. Ultimately, knowing these potential ‘gains’ were available in the prison, but that their low-risk status and short-term sentence meant they were not a priority for receiving support, exacerbated their feelings of neglect and abandonment. Although the ‘pains’ described in previous literature, presented in chapter two, were of some relevance, a distinctive set of pains was identified for the repeat short-term female prisoner population. The most frequently reported ‘pain’ for this population concerned the women’s feelings of neglect and abandonment as a result of not being able to access the support they need to address the problems associated with their offending behavior.

The study also proposed to explore what HMP New Hall’s role is in helping the women resettle and desist from offending and how these short-term prisoners spend their time in custody. This research revealed that most of the short-term prisoners spent their time unproductively, employed in sewing or assembly workshops undertaking tasks such as sewing male prisoner underwear and packaging toilet rolls. The research found that staff and workers generally shared the prisoners’ frustrations. Although New Hall prison offered a range of support services for the women, many of the services relied on voluntary support and access for the short-term prisoner population was not guaranteed. The limited time available to work with short-term prisoners was a common grievance of prison staff, many of whom supported claims of the ineffectiveness of short sentences for women and argued for the abolition of short-term sentences altogether. However, the research also raised concerns with regard to staff attitudes towards the repeatedly imprisoned short-term females, with staff (and prisoners) sharing expectations and assumptions of the women returning to custody soon after release. Staff made claims which indicated they had abandoned hope of being able to successfully rehabilitate this population of women. As one staff member said: “there is very little we can do with them so a lot of it is just a matter of we’re just waiting for them to leave and come back”.

Finally, in response to the data from this study, I aimed to explore what support interventions are, or would be, most effective in stopping this repeat imprisonment cycle. Although the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ plans previously discussed here have recently been implemented and allow for supervision upon release for female

short-term prisoners, it remains to be seen at this stage whether this new initiative will encourage those women released after a short time in custody to break the cycle of reoffending. Despite the prospects of reduced reoffending from the population of short-term prisoners, this does not change the fact that short-term imprisonment is damaging and unproductive. Following an inquiry into female offenders, the House of Commons Justice Committee (2013:88) concluded that “prison is an expensive and ineffective way of dealing with many women offenders who do not pose a significant risk of harm to public safety”. The data derived from this study presents evidence to support this. The research highlights the ineffective and damaging nature of repeat short-term custody for non-violent women and supports arguments for a significant increase in residential alternatives to custody. If higher levels of community-based projects were available as an alternative option for sentencers to direct female offenders, such as developing women’s centres’ provision, this could prevent women’s entry to custody in the first instance. Research has indicated that these community based initiatives are most effective in helping women desist from offending (Loucks *et al.*, 2006; Gelsthorpe *et al.*, 2007; Hedderman *et al.*, 2011; Jolliffe *et al.*, 2011). As presented in chapter one, the All Party Parliamentary Group (2011:4) highlighted that the investment and development in the provision of additional services for women offenders offering holistic support, such as one-stop shop women’s centres, were intended to “better meet the needs of women” and therefore “provides the courts with strengthened community sentences as an alternative to custody.” By directing finance towards generating improved resources and support to help female offenders engage successfully with a community penalty, the female prison population could be reduced significantly, reducing the large economic costs of imprisoning women and the wider damage this is found to cause to children and families. As Hedderman and Gunby (2013:426) point out “in the longer term, this makes good economic sense because so little of the money spent on short sentence women prisoners goes on their resettlement needs”.

9.7 Concluding thoughts

Overall, the key issue previously identified through examination of women repeatedly subject to short periods of imprisonment is that a short-term prison sentence results in women being unable to access any meaningful interventions to

address their extensive range of needs, whilst the period of imprisonment is long enough to detach the women from all their support networks and children that may have helped to deter them from re-offending. Women are subject to a system designed to meet the needs of male offenders, neglecting the distinct needs of women. The negative experience of short-term imprisonment essentially exacerbates any pre-existing issues and generates further problems and distress. Although the short-term female prison population's impact on overall prison figures may be slight, their impact on prison resources is especially significant because of their extensive needs and the large volume of such offenders going in and out of prison so frequently. However, individual prison establishments are not rated on the real number of prisoners that return to offending after release, but instead on the measures taken to try and prevent their reoffending. Prisons are rated in relation to their performance in four key areas: public protection, reducing reoffending, decency and resource management, and operational effectiveness. Despite the high performance prison ratings (including in the area of reducing reoffending) that are reported for many female establishments in England and Wales, reoffending studies report that the very same supposed 'high performing' prisons are unable to prevent the repeat return to custody for this group of female offenders.

One of the main contributing targets for prison performance rating was 'work in prison'. This was measured by the number of hours prisoners engaged in 'purposeful activity', encompassing work or activities in education, vocational workshops or offending behaviour programmes. For practical and time-restricting reasons, for the short-term prisoner population this typically meant working in a sewing factory where they were tasked with stitching male underwear for shipping to local men's prisons. At HMP New Hall, this proved to be the most practical and effective way for the prison to achieve its targets in respect of the short-term prisoner population. The 'purposeful activity' target did not encompass, for example, spending time with external agency employees who work to address the women's resettlement needs such as arranging housing or counselling for release. This thesis has shown that what was considered 'purposeful activity' for the benefit of meeting targets was not necessarily useful or 'purposeful' in effectively supporting women in addressing the issues they face upon release which often lead to their reimprisonment. Ambiguity in the definition of 'purposeful activity' allowed for targets to be met while the needs of

the women were neglected. There is a strong argument here to redefine what 'purposeful activity' means in this environment for the population of short-term imprisoned women. Due to the short length of many of the women's sentences, it would be naïve to expect the extensive needs of women to be addressed by the prison staff in a short period however it is argued here that 'purposeful activity' should be redefined to include the undertaking of tasks associated with addressing their resettlement needs, often carried out by third-sector agencies who can create links with community-based organisations, women's centres and one-stop shops, who offer support and services such as counselling, drug and alcohol support, education, and so forth, allowing women to continue addressing issues upon release from custody.

This thesis has shown that short-term imprisonment for women is damaging and unproductive. Although women's criminogenic needs have been acknowledged within government agendas, the criminal justice system continues to fail to implement change and adopt a gender-specific approach which encourages consideration of the alternatives to women's imprisonment. As prisons fail to meet women's rehabilitative needs and prevent high proportions of women reoffending and returning to custody only a short time after release, many charities and penal reform groups argue for the transfer of resources from a custodial setting to community programmes that can effectively manage the needs of female offenders. However, many would agree that there is still a need for custody for women, but that this should be reserved only for those who commit violent or serious offences in order to ensure public protection. Strong arguments have been made for the abolition of short-term imprisonment for non-violent women who commit only minor offences by both penal reform organisations (for example, the Howard League for Penal Reform) and academics (such as Pat Carlen), which are supported by most prison employees who were part of this research. Instead, the greater use of non-custodial sentences is favoured by many as it is seen to offer services such as counselling that this study found to be difficult, if not impossible, to access in custody on a short sentence. Although community alternatives are likely to provide women with better access to rehabilitative services than on a short custodial sentence, it must be considered whether there is currently sufficient women-specific community provision to deal with the female offender population. This raises important

questions as to whether the new private and voluntary organisations running Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) who are responsible for supervising medium to low risk offenders (since 1st February 2015) are in a position to effectively manage much larger numbers of women whilst taking into account the specific needs of females. A lack of women-specific provision could mean women are required to travel long distances from home to meet requirements of community sentences, taking into account the potential difficulties such as financing travel and childcare. There are many uncertainties with regards to the effective management of community sentences for women under the new CRCs and an apparent shortage of community-based interventions and services such as women's centres and one-stop shops designed with the needs of women in mind.

Although it is clear from this research that short-term imprisonment is largely ineffective, community sentences are subject to a number of barriers such as resourcing. In order to confidently support an argument for such radical change, there needs to be sufficient evidence demonstrating the successful management of women and their criminogenic needs on community sentences under the new CRCs. The hope is to see improved and developed women-specific community supervision and projects such as women's centres with greater capacity, which would encourage sentencers to divert female offenders from custody in the first instance. In the meantime, whilst the short-term imprisonment of women continues to be viewed by successive Governments as necessary (MoJ, 2010c, 2010f), the need remains for reforming the prison regime for the population of short-term sentenced women, comprising a gender-appropriate needs assessment, followed up with appropriate treatment and support facilities which will require the definition of 'purposeful activity' to be reconfigured to ensure their time in custody is used more productively, engaging in activity that is likely to benefit them and by addressing the problems that threaten their prospects of leading a productive, law abiding life upon release.

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APPENDIX ONE

RESEARCH INFORMATION

What is the research about?

The study will look at women who are repeatedly sent to prison for less than 12 months. The aims of the research are: to explore what problems these women face upon release from prison, the women's views towards imprisonment, how the prison service and other support services could better help women to stop reoffending. The research is funded by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC).

Who is doing the research?

The research is being carried out by Lucy Carr, a postgraduate student at The University of Sheffield who has been given access to New Hall for the purpose of carrying out this study.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to talk privately with Lucy about your experiences of imprisonment at New Hall. There are no right or wrong answers; Lucy is simply interested in learning more about your experiences and your views. Participation will not affect your prison sentence. This discussion will be recorded by Lucy to help her remember what you said later on. The interview will last about an hour, although, you are free to end the discussion at any time. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, no information you provide will be used in the study.

Who will have access to the information I give?

No one in prison service will have access to the information you provide. You will be given a participant number so that your responses and your personal information are kept confidential and to ensure that what you say is not linked to you. General discoveries from the study will be written up and available for people to read and learn more. If quotes are used from the interviews, people will be given a pseudonym (i.e. a pretend name). The data set will be archived at the ESRC, but all data will be anonymised, so no one will know what you said or that you were involved.

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact Lucy by putting in a general application to the Programmes Department.

APPENDIX TWO

RESEARCH INFORMATION

What is the research about?

The study will explore the experiences of women who are repeatedly imprisoned for less than 12 months. The aims of the research are to explore: what problems these women face upon release from prison, the women's views towards imprisonment, and how the prison service and other support services could better help women to stop reoffending. The research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Who is doing the research?

The research is being carried out by Lucy Carr, a PhD student at The University of Sheffield, and a previous employee at HMP New Hall who has retained access to the prison for the purpose of carrying out this research.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in a focus group alongside other members of prison staff which will be led by Lucy. You will be invited to discuss your experiences of working with short-term prisoners at New Hall and share your views towards their imprisonment. This discussion will be recorded by Lucy to help her remember for analysis all comments made. The focus group will last about an hour, although, you are free to leave the discussion at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, no information you provided during the focus group discussion will be used in the analysis.

Who will have access to the information obtained?

In order to ensure anonymity, you will be allocated a participant number in the write up of the information obtained. If quotes are used from the focus group, people will be referred to by their broad job role (e.g. prison officer, SMT member, external agency worker etc.) so your responses will not be linked to you. General discoveries from the series of focus groups will be written up and available to others. The data set will be archived at the ESRC, but with all data anonymised, to ensure comments and views remain confidential.

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact Lucy. External email: LJCarr1@Sheffield.ac.uk, Internal email: Lucy.Carr@hmps.gsi.gov.uk

APPENDIX THREE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Previous release plans

- What were your plans after you were released from prison previously? [*specify sentence end month and year*]
- What was release like?
- Who did you live with? And where? (Family/ relationships/children and accommodation)
- Did you have a job? (employment/ training/ education) What was your source (or sources) of financial support/ income? (finance/ benefits/ debt)
- How did you spend your days/spare time? (lifestyle/ social life/ friendships etc.)
- Did you seek any help or use any services to help you resettle in the community? (e.g. 'through the gate' or community provisions) How long was engagement for? How useful was this?
- What happened with regards to your drug/ alcohol - use/treatment? [*if relevant*]
- What were the most challenging aspects of returning to the community?
- How does your life in the community compare to your life in prison?

Reoffending/ reconviction

- Tell me about your last offence. What led up to it? (Nature of offence, motivation, co-conspirators, relationship with victim(s), financial gain, drug/alcohol use, etc.)
- How did you feel when you knew you were going to court (and then back prison)? Do you feel you deserved to go to prison?
- What happened to your life (dependants, job, accommodation, relationships etc.) when you returned to prison?
- Can you summarise your time in the community?

Current prison term and plans for release

- What is it like to be back in prison? (good/ bad points)
- How do you spend your days in prison? (purposeful activity/ spare time)
- What are your relationships with staff and other prisoners like?
- What are your plans for release? (accommodation, drug/alcohol treatment, family/relationships/children, employment/education etc.)
- What will be your source(s) of financial support/ income?
- Is there anyone/ anything in your life you see as a positive influence/ support?
- Tell me about any support services that are available at New Hall to help you? (welfare, health/ substance abuse, psychological needs etc.) Are you accessing (or have you accessed) them? Reason for (or not) using them? Are they effective/ useful?
- How will you avoid returning to prison again? What are the main challenges you need to overcome? How difficult do you think it will be to not reoffend? What could New Hall be doing to help?
- If you had a magic wand, how would you use it to help you?
- Is there anything else you want to say?

APPENDIX FOUR

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Research topic: Repeat imprisonment of women serving short-term custodial sentences at HMP New Hall

- Record date and time of meeting
- Welcome/ Researcher introduction
- Purpose of the meeting/ verbally explain project briefly

[NB. recruiter will have briefed all participants with information about the project, including the aims of the research. All participants will have read the research information sheet and consented to participate before beginning]

- How the session will be run

This focus group will be organised by the focus group leader asking general questions or issues about the repeat short-term imprisonment of women at New Hall. The topic can then be discussed/ debated among the group. Please remember to allow each person to speak in turn. All information is treated confidentially. As mentioned in the information sheet, the discussion will be recorded (to save time taking notes).

- Introductions

Go around the table allowing everyone to introduce themselves and give brief details about their position.

- Highlight the issue

Open by providing a brief overview of the current situation with New Hall's repeat short-term prisoners/ re-offending stats etc.

Questions/ topics

- 1. Why do we think these short-term prisoners keep coming back to New Hall so soon after release? What problems are they experiencing upon release?**
- 2. How do you think the prisoners view/ feel about their repeat imprisonment? Do they want to come back?**
- 3. What are New Hall currently doing to help these particular women resettle and desist from offending? How are the short-term prisoners spending their time in custody?**
- 4. What support interventions are currently available? Are they effective? Are they being used?**
- 5. What else could New Hall be doing? What would be most effective in stopping this repeat imprisonment cycle?**

APPENDIX FIVE

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Name of Researcher: Lucy Carr
Contact me: lucy.carr@hmps.gsi.gov.uk or LJCarr1@shef.ac.uk
Title of Study: Experiences of women repeatedly imprisonment for short lengths of time

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, circle the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please do not hesitate to ask.

- I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and written form by the researcher YES / NO
- I understand that the research will involve my participation in a focus group discussion and that this conversation will be recorded. YES / NO
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation. YES / NO
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study. YES / NO
- I have been given a copy of this Consent Form and the accompanying Information Sheet. YES / NO

Signature:.....

Print name:.....

Date:.....