

## **LOST INSIDE**

**Report of the Howard League Inquiry into the Use of Prison Custody for  
Girls Aged Under 18.**

**Chair: Baroness Masham Ilton**

### **Acknowledgments**

The Howard League's greatest debt of gratitude is to the young women who spoke to us so openly about their lives and to all those working in the prisons who took time out of their extremely busy days to answer our questions.

We would also like to thank the Governors for allowing us access to their prisons and to those within the Prison Service Headquarters who promptly provided policy documents and factual information whenever it was requested.

Lastly, we would like to thank our members and supporters for their concern and generous contributions; and we are also greatly indebted to the following trusts whose funding enabled this research to take place; The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; The Calp Trust; The John S Cohen Foundation; The Lyndhurst Settlement; and The Rowan Charitable Trust.

## **PREFACE**

In 1995 I took part in a debate in the House of Lords on the report of the Howard League's Commission of Inquiry into violence in penal institutions for teenagers aged under 18. "*Banged Up, Beaten Up, Cutting Up*" described a prison system where teenage boys were kept in an environment with inadequate regimes and where levels of bullying were shockingly high.

After 25 years as a member of the Board of Visitors at the male Young Offenders Institution at Wetherby I was well aware of the problems in boys' prisons. However, I noticed that the Inquiry had been unable to make recommendations about teenage girls since it had only been given access to one female prison. During the debate therefore I raised the question of whether it would be possible to set-up a similar inquiry to investigate their situation. The Howard League immediately sought funding and asked me to chair the Inquiry.

I was personally able to visit three of the nine prisons holding 15, 16, and 17 year old girls. Whilst I was impressed by the commitment of many of the staff to do the best they could for this difficult age group I was struck by the total unsuitability of such an environment for girls who were little more than children.

Apart from the fact that crisis management prevented the prisons from providing adequate rehabilitative regimes for any prisoners because of rising numbers and increasing budget cuts, it was clear these adult prisons were only succeeding in further damaging the juvenile girls in their care and entrenching their offending behaviour.

It is imperative that the criminal justice system works to ensure a young person who has broken the law is held accountable for their actions but it must also seek to tackle the causes of that child's offending. To do less fails both the individual victim of crime and society as a whole, who look to the criminal justice system for protection. By brutalising children in the way described in this report we simply create victims of the young people and do little to prevent crimes.

I hope the Government will look carefully at this powerful report and take action to stop these practices which breach the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is crucial that the Government not only invests in effective non-custodial programmes for the most difficult juvenile offenders but that it positively promotes those sentences to the courts and to the public.

Finally, I would like to thank the distinguished members of the Advisory Panel who gave so generously of their time and expertise and the Prison Service who gave us full access to all the prisons we wished to see. I would also like to thank Barbara Norris of the Howard League who organised all our visits and Fran Russell who was Researcher to the Inquiry and who wrote the report.

**Baroness Masham of Ilton.**

## INTRODUCTION

The Howard League's Inquiry into the use of prison custody for girls aged under 18 began its work in February 1997. Its terms of reference were-

***To investigate the use of prison custody for girls under 18, the conditions and treatment they experience and to make recommendations.***

All nine prisons holding girls under 18 at that time were visited over a compact period of 10 weeks between February and May. Each visit was made by two members of the advisory panel and the researcher. The members of the advisory panel provided a range of experience in dealing with young women in the criminal justice and care system.

The purpose of each visit was to take a "snapshot" look at the conditions and regimes provided for girls in prison and to collate the views of those working with them.

We spoke with management, staff, and other professionals involved with the young women, these included probation officers, teachers, medical staff, psychologists, chaplains, members of the Board of Visitors and drug counsellors. All those we spoke to were extremely helpful and we appreciated their willingness to be honest about the problems in the system.

We spoke to prisoners who worked as part of the Listening Schemes established by the Samaritans. In these schemes prisoners were trained to act as 'Samaritans' for fellow prisoners. We found their accounts and views enlightening. Given their positions of "living" within the system they were able to give an insider's perspective.

We interviewed all those girls aged under 18 who were willing and able to see us on the day or days we visited. In total we talked to 61 out of the 74 girls being held at the time we visited. This number is largely representative of the female juvenile population on any given day.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with them about their lives and their experience of being in prison. Where we were able to verify the information the girls gave, those we checked had not exaggerated or given us inaccurate information. Rather, they were inclined to understate their experiences. We guaranteed the girls anonymity and in most cases they spoke candidly about themselves and their lives. Panel members were often struck by the need in these young people to communicate their considerable pain to someone who had the time and willingness to listen.

At the end of each visit we left a questionnaire at the prison requesting basic factual information. This included, population figures and the levels to which self-harm and bullying were present in the prison. We also asked for information relating to the effect of mandatory drug testing. It is unfortunate only three prisons returned the questionnaires.

The existence of youth crime has been a consistent problem for administrations of all political hues. Primary concern has been focused on the offending behaviour of boys rather than girls because of the relatively low levels of offending by young women.

However, in recent years, there has been a growing public view – largely unsubstantiated – that girls are becoming more violent and ‘criminally minded’. This impression can be attributed, at least in part, to the media’s interest for sensationally highlighting incidents of violence involving girls, a tendency which has grown almost into an obsession since the actress Elizabeth Hurley became the victim of street robbery.

This has coincided with an alarming rise in the number of teenage girls being sent to prison, a 175% increase since 1992. We suspect that magistrates and judges are being influenced by the drip fed of stories of “girl gangs” and “girl violence” and that some are handing down custodial sentences to teenage girls who previously would have received a non-custodial alternative. This has combined with the Conservative Government’s “prison works” policy introduced after the 1992 General Election which has helped effect an upward increase in the whole prison population by a third without any significant change in legislation.

The Howard League is concerned at generally increasing levels of crime in Britain and the damaging effect this has on the fabric of our society. It is this concern which motivates our research and promotion of measures for dealing with those who offend in ways that which to reduce re-offending.

Prison is a brutalising experience and is ineffective in combating youth crime. Re-offending rates for young people following terms of imprisonment have been consistently between 80% and 90%. Neither the individual victim of crime nor members of the community at large, who could be potential victims, are served by such a system.

The reasons why teenage girls offend are many and complex and the nature of their offending is different from boys. Taking a lead only from sensationally highlighted crimes in now way brings us to an understanding of the offending characteristic of young women in the late 1990’s.

Little research has been completed on the offending and imprisonment of girls. The Howard League hopes that this report will firstly, highlight the damage already experienced by girls being sent to prison, and the brutalising and negative effect it has on them; and secondly, that it will stimulate a serious and informed debate about the need to construct a wider, more positive and effective approach to tackling young female offending.

## LIST OF ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS

### Chair – Baroness Masham of Ilton

- Jane Ashley** Director of the Laura Ashley Foundation and Honorary Psychotherapist at Charing Cross Hospital
- Ernie Barratt** Secure Services Manager for South Gloucestershire Social Services Department which includes managing the Vinney Green Secure Unit, a 16 bedded unit for young men and women who represent some of the most damaged youngsters in England and Wales. He has worked with disadvantaged young people for the past twenty-five years.
- Jane De Zonie** Barrister practising family law and specialising in local authority care proceedings. Member of the MIND Lawyer Network.
- Margaret Donnelly** Former Governor of the Mount Prison, Coldingley Prison and Low Newton Remand Centre. She has been an Assistant Regional Director and responsible for governor-grade training and prison policy on women and girls. Recently retired, she now chairs Eclipse Video Productions, the trading arm of the Prison Video Trust.
- Mary Geaney** Director of the Crime Intervention Service, Thames Valley and was previously Policy and Performance Manager with Kent Social Services. She has worked her entire professional career within the criminal justice context in both Ireland and England.
- Rachel Hodgkin** Principal Policy Officer for the National Children’s Bureau and clerk o the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children. She was involved in establishing the Children’s Legal Centre where she worked until 1993. Her most recent publications include “*Safe to let out? The current and future use of secure accommodation.*”
- Barbara Hudson** Professor of Criminology at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. Her work focuses on the impact on punishment of factors such as gender, race, and income inequalities. She has published several books and articles including *Understanding Justice* (1996); *Racism and Criminology* (1993); *Penal Policy and Social Justice* (1993).
- Pamela Martin-Dominquez** Criminal Solicitor and partner of Powell Spencer and Partners. She specialises in representing young

offenders.

**Sue Masham** Cross bench peers and a member of the All Party Parliamentary Penal Affairs Group since 1975. Between 1963 and 1994 she served on the Board of Visitors at Wetherby Young Offenders Institution. She is also a member of the All Party Parliamentary HIV and AIDS Group and the All Party Parliamentary Drugs Misuse Group.

**Caroline Newman** Master of Law and specialist in the field of the mental health of offenders and the criminal justice process. She is a Council member of the Howard League. And a member of the Society of Black Lawyers. She formerly worked for the Mental Health Foundation where she edited "*Promoting Care and Justice*". She has also worked in local government developing policy in the areas of housing and social services.

**Annabella Scott** Justice of the Peace for over 20 years. She was appointed to the Inner London Juvenile Panel in 1975 and currently sits as a court chairman in adult, youth and family proceedings courts in Inner London. She has been Chairman of the Inner London Youth Panel since 1994. She is a member of the Council of the Howard League for Penal Reform.

#### **Observers**

Polly Bide  
Kevin Heal, Catherine Crawford

Journalist  
Prison Service

#### **Howard League**

Fran Russell was Researcher to the Inquiry, went on each visit and wrote the report. Barbara Norris was the Administrator to the Inquiry. Staff member Laura Irvine and volunteer Charlotte Day assisted in the analysis of the research material.

## VISITS CONDUCTED BY THE INQUIRY

<b>DATE</b>	<b>PRISON</b>	<b>PANEL MEMBERS</b>
26/2/97	Askham Grange	Lady Masham Margaret Donnelly Pamela Martin-Dominquez Fran Russell
13/3/97	Drake Hall	Mary Geaney Jane Ashley Fran Russell
20/3/97	Low Newton	Pamela Martin-Dominquez Caroline Newman Frances Crook Fran Russell
26/3/97	Styal	Barbara Hudson Jane De Zonie Fran Russell
2/3/97	Risley	Ernie Barratt Fran Russell
8/4/97	New Hall	Lady Masham Annabella Scott Rachel Hodgkin Fran Russell
14/4/97	Holloway	Lady Masham Jane De Zonie Ernie Barratt Fran Russell
15/4/97	Holloway	Caroline Newman Fran Russell
24/4/97	Bullwood Hall	Margaret Donnelly Pamela Martin-Dominquez Fran Russell
25&26/4/97	Bullwood Hall	Margaret Donnelly Fran Russell
7/5/97	Brockhill	Ernie Barratt Fran Russell

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

- The Howard League Inquiry into the Use of Prison Custody for Girls aged under 18 was set up in January 1997. The terms of reference are:

***To investigate the use of prison custody for young women under 18, the conditions and the treatment they experience and to make recommendations.***

- The report provides a view of the conditions and regime experienced by girls in prison and collates the views of those who work with them. Members of the Advisory Panel visited all nine prisons holding girls under 18 between February and April 1997. We spoke to management, staff and other professionals working with the young women and interviewed 61 of the 74 girls being held in those prisons on the days they were visited.
- Little research has been done on the offending and imprisonment of this age group reflecting the fact that young women prisoners are the most neglected and the least understood group of people being dealt with in the criminal justice process.

### Background

- Whilst juvenile girls still make up a tiny part of the prison population the numbers being sent to prison rose by 175% between 1992 and 1996 – more than two and a half times the increase in the prison population as a whole.
- Media reporting of girls involved in violent crime is sensationalised and gives the false impression that “girl violence” is becoming a massive problem. This may be influencing courts in sending more girls to prison.

### The Prisons

#### a) Conditions and regimes

- Over 300 girls each year aged 15, 16 and 17 are being held in adult jails alongside adult women in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and despite the fact that they are “children” under the Children Act 1989 requiring protection from harm.
- There are no establishments solely designated as Young Offender Institutions for female offenders so girls sentenced to “detention in a Young Offenders Institution” are sent to women’s prisons partly

designated as Young Offender Institutions but with no separate regime or culture for the teenagers.

- Regimes are barely rehabilitative and in some prisons girls can be locked up in their cells for up to 18 hours a day because of staff shortages.
- There is little or no specialist education, work or training provision for the under 18s.
- The teenagers are expected to behave like adults and are punished for displaying typically teenage behaviour. It is not an environment in which they can easily progress.
- Staff (including governors) are largely untrained in dealing with damaged, vulnerable and difficult young girls. Most of the prisons we visited were unable to implement the training pack designed by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence because of pressure on staff time.
- Many staff members are not suited to working with demanding youngsters nor do they particularly want to. Young people need to be looked after by staff who have genuine concern for them and who are properly trained.
- Girls are often held a long way from home making it extremely difficult for their families to visit. This is despite research showing that maintaining family ties is crucial in assisting youngsters to re-integrate back into the community without re-offending. Once damaged these ties are difficult to re-form.

#### **b) The prison environment**

- Adolescent girls are subjected to a prison environment where emotionally damaged women regularly self-harm; where bullying is endemic; and where drugs are widely available.
- The threat of physical assault is ever present. In several prisons we were told of the practice of “de-crotching” whereby a group of women forcibly search another woman’s vagina for suspected hidden drugs.
- Staff were concerned that teenage girls held in their care are in danger of learning self-harming behaviour from the older prisoners and that they are at risk of being bullied or being enticed into becoming bullies.
- Girls could be leaving prison with a serious drug habit they did not have before they started their sentence. Evidence suggests that Mandatory Drug Testing (MDT) in prisons is causing a shift from the use of cannabis to opiates such as heroin and crack cocaine.

### **c) Mixing with adult offenders**

- The Government and Prison Service argue that older women 'mother' the girls and keep them calm but older prisoners warned that 'mothering' sometimes hides exploitative relationships where a youngster is in fact being bullied. Staff can find this difficult to identify.
- Even if the girls have mother figures in the women in their forties it is the women in their late teens and twenties who they look to as role models.
- The volatility of youngsters can be controlled without the presence of older prisoners by creating smaller units with greater staff/prisoner ratio as found in local authority secure accommodation units.
- Despite being minors the girls are not given protection under the Children Act. We found cases of girls mixing with adult offenders who had committed serious violent and sex offences against children. We were told of one case where a 15 year old was placed in a cell next to a woman convicted of procuring 15 year olds for prostitution.
- There was concern that questions about other issues around growing up were getting distorted for the 15, 16 and 17 year olds as a result of their being in prison.

### **Racial Issues**

- Black young women are disproportionately represented at 18%. This mirrors the imbalance of Black women in the women's prison population generally.
- Black and Asian women reported that they felt marginalised and isolated because of lack of understanding as to their different background and culture.

### **Governors**

- Many staff and governors within the Prison Service feel that their prisons are not equipped to deal effectively with such young women alongside adult prisoners. Their jobs are made particularly difficult with the large increase in the prison population and budget cuts across the board.
- Resource pressures and the relatively small number of girls within the system means that their need for suitable accommodation and regimes is being subjugated to the management needs of the prison service.

### **The Girls**

- We interviewed 61 girls aged under 18 being held in nine prisons between February and April 1997.
- The stories of their lives and the information given to us by staff conformed to characteristics identified in previous studies about young people who offend.<sup>1</sup> We found that a high percentage:
  - had been subjected to sexual, physical and emotional abuse
  - suffered from low self-esteem
  - abused drugs and alcohol
  - had poor relationships with their parents who in turn had difficult, stress ridden and violent lives
  - had been in care
  - had experienced family breakdown
  - were excluded from school or were long term non-attenders
- Of the 50 girls who had been convicted, 50% were for violent offences and 42% for non-violent offences.
- The majority of those violent offences consisted of fighting with other girls known to them. Cases of random violent attacks were rare amongst our sample.
- 44% of those convicted of violent crimes reported that they had been either the victims of violence or they had witnessed violence in the home, usually against their mother or siblings by either their father or other male partner.
- 24% of those convicted had been sentenced to short sentences of six and a half months or less.
- 42% of the girls convicted had either no previous convictions or had previously received only a caution or conditional discharge suggesting that the courts were not using prison as a last resort as required under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

### **Key Recommendations made to the Home Secretary.**

- Introduce legislation to prohibit the use of prison custody for all girls under 18.
- Fully implement all articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child without reservation.
- Place those few girls who genuinely require secure conditions in local authority secure accommodation units.

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<sup>1</sup> *Young People and Crime* Grahama and Bowling. Home Office Research Study 145

- Invest in and promote non-custodial sentences for teenagers and make detention available only in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort.
- Apply the provisions of the Children Act 1989 to prison and all places where children are detained.

## **RECOMMENATIONS**

### **To the Home Secretary**

- Introduce legislation to prohibit the use of prison custody for all girls aged under 18.
- Fully implement all articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child without reservation.
- Places those girls who genuinely require secure conditions in local authority secure accommodation units.
- Promote the use of non-custodial sentences and make detention available only on exceptional circumstances and as a last resort.
- Divert money from funding custody to resourcing effective non-custodial programmes.
- Ensure that there are fully resourced programmes in the community to treat young people's addictions.
- Apply the provisions of the Children ACT 1989 to prisons and to all places which detain children.
- Ensure that the provisions of the Education Act apply to prisons and all places of detention holding children under school leaving age.
- Divert money for pupils who are in prison from schools to the prisons whilst they are detained.

### **To the Director General of the Prison Service**

#### **Whilst the Prison Service is still responsible for holding girls aged under 18 we recommend the following:**

- Separate juvenile girls from older offenders into small units in line with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Set up a separate directorate with a dedicated budget responsible for dealing with girls and boys aged under 18.
- Provide a rehabilitative and caring regime which recognises and tackles the damage and disadvantages faced by the girls.
- End the use of segregation units.
- Specifically recruit staff who have a commitment to working with challenging teenagers.
- Provide a high level of continuing training and support for those staff ensuring that this includes an understanding of abuse induced behaviour.

- Ensure the use of Mandatory Drug Testing and introduce a system which encourages rehabilitation and which does not focus on punishment for drug taking.
- Ensure that girls are placed in establishments near their homes and enable staff working with the girls to fully involve other family members in that work.
- Ensure that no young person leaves the prison without proper help and support outside.
- Provide for continuing support by staff for girls after release with whom they have developed strong and positive relationships.
- Ensure that all establishments have a fully effective anti-bullying strategy which pervades every aspect of the regime.
- Ensure that all prisons have a fully operational personal officer schemes and sentence planning.
- Fully review the education provision to ensure that every young girl has access to relevant education and training for her needs.

### **To the politicians of all political parties.**

- Take party politics out of tackling youth crime and facilitate an open, informed debate about how best to effectively deal with young people on the fringes of society.
- Take a lead in educating the public to the reality that the majority of young people caught up in the criminal justice system are damaged children, in need of intensive help and support; and, that prison is a destructive and inhumane response.
- Recognise that the offending of girls aged under 18 is of a different nature and that they are particularly vulnerable in the prison system.

## **BACKGROUND**

In its 1990 White Paper, *Protecting the Public*, the Government suggested that girls aged under 18 could be removed from the penal system altogether. The idea had the broad agreement of all the political parties, penal reformers and criminal justice practitioners. The consensus at that time was that even short periods of custody were likely to entrench offending behaviour by young people as prison mixed them with more sophisticated offenders who would be a poor influence. Prison was therefore reaffirmed as a sentence of last resort in the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

However, in 1993 this approach was reversed. Kenneth Clark followed by Michael Howard as Home Secretary put prison and harsh punishments at the heart of the government's law and order policy ignoring all evidence that imprisonment of young people is particularly ineffective<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See Introduction

Having inherited this policy the new Labour Government has shown few signs of reversing this approach as the prison population continues to rise. In July 1997 the Home Secretary announced that despite having previously opposed the establishment of privately run child jails for 12 to 14 year olds, they would nonetheless go ahead under the new administration. The first Secure Training Centre is scheduled to open in April 1998 and will be run by Group 4.

## THE FIGURES

During 1996, 214<sup>3</sup> sentenced 15, 16 and 17 year olds girls were held in prison in England and Wales.

Of those 68% were for non-violent offences and 66% were given sentences of 6 months or less.

In addition, 224 girls aged 17 were held in prison on remand awaiting trial<sup>4</sup>. In past years approximately 30% of female remand prisoners did not subsequently receive a custodial sentence. There is no reason to presume 1996 should be any different.

## THE LAW

### a) Sentenced

There are three kinds of custodial sentences available to the courts –

- “Detention in a young offenders institution” – a youth court can give this sentence for a term between two and six months for a single offence and a maximum aggregate sentence of 12 months. A crown court deals with more serious cases and can impose the same sentences to a maximum of two years. In 1996 the average length of sentence handed down to girls under 18 by the Youth Court was 4.3 months. In the Crown Court it was 15.1 months.
- S53 (2) Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (CYPA)- a sentence of more than 2 years can be given by the Crown Court under this provision, to a girl who has been convicted of a grave offence. In 1996, twelve girls were given this sentence.
- Detention at Her Majesty’s Pleasure – this is a mandatory sentence given to girls and boys convicted of murder. They are subject to a tariff set by the Home Secretary, similar to the system for adult mandatory lifers.

### b) Remand

Girls under 17 who are refused bail whilst awaiting trial must be held in local authority accommodation and cannot be held in prison custody. However, 17

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<sup>3</sup> Prison Service Statistics 1996

<sup>4</sup> Some of whom will be also counted in the sentenced figures.

year olds are treated as adults for remand purposes and are always held in prison.

Fifteen and 16 year old girls who have been committed for sentence to the Crown Court following conviction in the Youth Court, can be held in prison custody.

## **PLACE OF CUSTODY**

Ninety-nine percent of girls are sentenced to detention in a Young Offenders Institution. Since there are no Younger Offenders Institutions (YOI) solely designated for girl, as there are for boys, they are held in adult jails partly designated as YOIs.

Girls sentenced for more serious offences under S53 CYPA can be held either in prison or in a local authority secure unit. Secure units specialise in dealing with damaged and difficult teenagers. The regimes are child centred and staffed by people who have chosen to work with challenging children.

### **a) A recent change.**

Until 22 August 1997 all newly sentenced young female offenders were taken from court to one of the local prisons whose role was to receive prisoners from court before being allocated to another prison within the system. These were adult prisons which had not been also designated as YOIs.

In a High Court action<sup>5</sup> challenging this practice the court held it was unlawful for young female offenders to be put into adult jails as a mater of policy. It could only be done from 'time to time' in individual cases.

This decision only applied to those adult prisons which were not also designated as a YOI and therefore didn't affect the bulk of the prisons where teenage girls continue to be held.

## **THE GIRLS.**

### **A INTRODUCTION**

On each prison visit the Inquiry team sought to interview every girl aged under 18 who was being held by the prison on that day. Six decided they did not want to talk to the team or had a visit during the time we were there and eight were in court on the days we visited. In total 61 girls were interviewed, a number which is largely representative of the under 18 population held in prison on any one day.

Of those we interviewed:

- 4 were aged 15- 7%

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<sup>5</sup> R v Secretary of State for the Home Departmen and others, ex parte Flood, Independent Law Reports: 2 October 1997.

- 20 were aged 16 – 33%
- 35 were aged 17- 60%
  
- 11 were Black – 18%
- 2 were Asian – 3%
- 44 were White – 72%<sup>6</sup>
  
- 11 were on remand – 18%
- 43 had been sentenced to Detention in a Young Offenders Institution. – 71%
- 7 had been convicted under S53 of the Children and Young Person's Act – 11%.
  
- 25 had experienced of being in local authority care either in children's homes or placed with foster carers. – 40%
- 40 had experienced family breakdown – 65%
- 35 admitted they were either excluded from school or were persistent non-attenders – 57%
- 25 admitted to drug or alcohol abuse – 41%
- 13 told us they self-harmed – 22%

### **Types of offences.**

Of the 50 who had been convicted 42% (21) had committed non-violent offences, such as theft and shoplifting; and 50% (25) had committed violent offences of which two were for murder.

Of those on remand 63% (7) were charged with non-violent offences and 37% (4) were charged with violent offences.

### **Violent offences.**

Of those who had committed violent offences 60% consisted of fighting with other young people of the same age. Frequently, in these cases the girls reported that bullying incidents or the breakdown of a friendship had played a part in the events leading up to the offence. In other cases the violence was incidental to the main aim of stealing property i.e. theft or robbery. It was rare that an offence involved a random gratuitous attack of the kind so often linked to male violence. Where a girl was involved in such violence boys were also involved.

Out of those who were convicted of violence against a person 44% admitted to having either been observers of violence or themselves the victim of violence in their home. In all cases where they witnessed violence it was perpetrated against their mother by their father or other male partner. Only 8% reported no violence in their home.

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<sup>6</sup> Four were not recorded.

This suggests that experience of violence by children is linked to their disposition to use violence and conforms to the finding of the 1995 Commission on Children and Violence convened by the Gulbenkian Foundation which said –

*“Violence by children is inextricably linked to violence to them. Available research disproves the still-popular theory of the original badness of children. Scapegoating of children for the development of violence when most of the identified determinant factors are controlled by adults is to do a children a gross injustice...”<sup>7</sup>*

As regards the two girls who were convicted of murder one had been subjected to years of systematic physical abuse by both her mother and the victim; and there was considerable doubt over the mental well being of the other.

### **Length of sentences**

Twenty-eight percent (14) of those convicted were given a sentence of six and a half months or less of which 10 were for violent offences. Twenty-four percent (12) were sentenced to more than six and a half months and up to one year. Another twenty-four percent (12) were given a sentence of over a year and up to 2 years; and 14% (7) were given a sentence of over 2 years but less than life. Two girls convicted of murder were serving life sentences<sup>8</sup>.

Most of the girls posed little threat to the safety of the public but this was particularly true of those with sentences of six months or less. Even prison staff thought non-custodial alternatives would be preferable in those cases. Even if resources were available it would be impossible to do anything constructive with those on such short sentences and once a younger person has been in prison and survived it, the deterrent effect of prison is weakened.

### **Previous sentences**

Ten of the girls reported they had no previous convictions and 42 reported that they did. Of these nine said that previously they had only received a caution, two had received a conditional discharge, two a probation order, one a Community Service Order and six had been given Supervision Order. Nine had said they had either been in prison before or a local authority secure unit.

This suggests some courts are using custodial sentences before first trying other possible non-custodial sentences on the tariff.

We contacted all the youth justice and probation teams in England and Wales to ask about the sentencing outcomes of their female juvenile clients. Most said it was impossible to detect a pattern of treatment by the courts of girls as the numbers were always so small and many said courts were more lenient on girls. However, some said that in the courts they serviced there was a

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<sup>7</sup> p32

<sup>8</sup> 6% did not tell their interviewer the length of their sentence.

growing tendency to give harsher sentences to girls than to boys where violence was involved. It must be these courts which account for the increasing use of custody for juvenile girls.

## **B WHAT THE STAFF TOLD US.**

***“There is a much higher percentage here than outside of girls suffering physical, emotional and sexual abuse and many have been in care. The young ones are in a mess, desperately trying to understand life and many have been badly let down by the adults in their lives. They turn to drugs and alcohol and then they end up in here.”***

(teacher)

Overwhelmingly, prison officers, probation officers, psychologists, medical staff and education staff told us that most of the girls in their care had –

- suffered some form of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse in their young lives and often all three.
- poor relationships with their parents.
- experienced the loss of parent either through death or separation.
- experience of local authority care.

As a result a high percentage of the girls had –

- experienced low self-esteem.
- abused drugs and alcohol.
- experience of prostitution to finance drug and alcohol habits.
- mismanaged their anger because they had no good role models from whom they could learn.
- were excluded from school or were long term truants.
- were often involved in violent relationships.

## **C WHAT THE GIRLS TOLD US.**

The following stories are what the girls told us about themselves and their lives. Whilst they have been grouped together to demonstrate the various characteristics of the collective experience of the girls we interviewed, many of the stories contain aspects of all those characteristics. Their names have been changed.

### **Experience of Care**

#### **Bel- aged 15**

Bel had been in about fifteen children’s homes for the age of 14. The longest placement was for 6 weeks. She had a 20 year old brother who had also been in care and was now in prison, a sister aged 19 who was also in care. They had all been sexually abused by their father.

Bel had a problem with drugs. She said she took crack because it released that “pain and anger inside”. She stole in order to get money to pay for crack. In fact she had been put in the first children’s home for her own safety because she was taking drugs. She had been moved from one home to another because she “kicked-up” a lot, including stabbing a member of staff with a carving knife in anger.

In prison, Bel got depressed, bored and told us that she cut herself. She had also tried to hang herself and set fire to her room. She said being locked up was “driving her up the wall”. Because of staff-shortages she was often locked-up in her cell alone for up to 18 hours a day.

She told her interviewer that “life stinks, I wish I had never been born.”

Bel felt it was “out of order” sending a 15 year old to prison. She says she needs a smaller group with more staff who you can get to know. Having been in prison, she thought she would definitely be back again.

Bel said she didn’t turn to officers if she got depressed “I am a trouble maker, you see.” However, she did give her interviewer permission to check whether a counsellor would soon be available for her.

## **Experience of Sexual Abuse**

### **Geri – aged 16**

Geri said hers was “a messed up life”. It started, she said when she was sexually abused by her Dad when she was fifteen. But the psychiatrist thought she was blocking out earlier incidents.

She got flashbacks of incidents from the past. She remembered her dad kidnapping her and beating her mum up. At one stage she was living abroad and her step-dad used to beat her up. She remembers him throwing her mother in the pool and her mother bleeding on the floor (Geri was 7).

Geri’s Dad has been in prison. She said he was a very violent man.

At some point as she was growing up, Geri appeared to become uncontrollable. She used to throw chairs out of the window, tell teachers to “fuck-off” and would run away.

She got into trouble with the police for shoplifting. Her mum threw her out. She was put in a children’s home and then into foster care.

She first saw a psychiatrist when she was eleven. She had been on anti-depressants for a year and a half. She took an overdose when she was fourteen and has often wanted to do it again. She cut her wrists twice in prison and was always depressed.

### **Sonia- aged 17**

When Sonia first walked into the interview room she was very bouncy and nonchalant. However after she had been talking for awhile she began to show signs of deep distress. Her voice dropped and she lost the animation she had started with. She told her interviewer that she had been “switching” a lot lately but she couldn’t understand where the anger was coming from.

As she talked, it began to emerge that the day before she had, for the first time, told someone about the sexual abuse she had suffered at the hands of her “uncle” – a family friend, when she was a child. She had also been raped when she was 13 but the only person she had previously told about what had happened to her was a boyfriend who got angry and started to throw her around the room. Sonia told the interviewer- “He tried to strangle me and said I must have wanted it”.

She had told no-one else since then until she found a sympathetic personal officer in the prison who suggested she write it all down.

Sonia then spent an hour of the interview talking about how dirty and useless she felt and how she had attempted suicide on five occasions, the most recent just a few days before. Clearly very depressed she was now talking a low voice with her head down and her hand covering her face.

Sonia also spoke of how her dad had been stabbed in front of her after her brother had made enemies of a gang of violent boys who then broke into their house. Even though she said she had been able to identify the boys the case did not get to court. She was very angry about what had happened and it was after that that she began to drink heavily.

She said she had been very drunk the night she had committed her offence. She said she had just snapped when the girlfriend of one of the boys who she believed had stabbed her father began to taunt her. Goaded on by her friends she and they attacked this girl. Sonia admits it was a vicious attack of which she is very ashamed. This was the first time she had ever been in trouble with the police and yet she was given a custodial sentence.

Of prison she said there were a lot of drugs. Everyone takes heroin, she said. “It costs £10 a joey” and that three or four splifs (cigarettes made with cannabis) cost one phonecard.

After finding out that a 40 year old woman who had befriended her was in fact in prison for child abuse Sonia wrote to the Home Secretary arguing that she and others of her age should not be put in prison. She had not yet had a reply.

### **Experience of violence**

#### **Barbara – aged 16**

Barbara was 15 when she started her sentence. She had witnessed a lot of violence in her young life. Her father frequently beat up her mother in front of

her. By the time Barbara started school at the age of 5 she thought it was normal to hit people and was expelled for fighting.

Barbara went to a special school for a while and then returned to the same primary school. She didn't get on at secondary school and stopped going when she was 13. Although her father no longer lived with them he still used to come round and assault her mother.

Barbara started taking crack/cocaine when she was 12. She says she got in with the "wrong sort of people" and started getting involved in violent crime including robbery. She has a two year old son who lives with her mother and when she gets out she will go back and live with them.

Whilst she says she has stayed off drugs in prison and that the drug awareness course was helpful, with no follow-up she is likely to find it hard to resist drugs once she is released.

### **Charlie – aged 17**

Charlie had also known a lot of violence. Her mother was an alcoholic who constantly used to beat Charlie and her brother. She burnt Charlie and slashed her neck with a knife. At four years old Charlie was taken into local authority care and she has been backwards and forwards between various children's homes and her mother ever since.

At 13 she was raped. Three boys dragged her into a park. Her mother beat her for having torn her school uniform. She reported the rape to the police but in the end nothing happened.

In the children's home a staff member tried to sexually assault her. She 'kicked-up' and was originally charged with criminal damage. But the charge was dropped when the full story came out.

Charlie has never known her father. All her siblings have different fathers. Her sister's father was stabbed to death.

One time Charlie had attempted suicide in a children's home and said that if she had not known anyone in prison she would have tried to do it again. There was a girl in prison who she knew from one of the children's homes.

Charlie met her boyfriend in a children's home when she was 13. They have a daughter who was born 3 months before she was sentenced.

### **Lucy – aged 15**

Lucy was 15 when she got involved in a fight with three other girls and was sentenced to one year in an adult prison. She had been cautioned once and had often run away from home, but this was her first time before the courts.

Lucy's mum and dad split up when she was a baby and her dad now lives abroad. She stopped getting on with her mum when her mum got a new boyfriend who was an alcoholic and violent. The police were called many

times when he was drunk and was beating her mother. He would pull Lucy away from her mother when they were sitting watching television so that he could sit with Lucy's mum.

Eventually her mother ended her relationship with this man but Lucy, now a teenager, had already started running away from home. Her mother found it difficult to talk about what had happened and the two of them had grown further and further apart.

Lucy started getting bullied at school and stopped going. She said she talked to the teachers about it but that they didn't do anything.

Lucy said the other women on her wing ranged from 17 to 31. She said she had met women in prison for murder but that most of them were nice to her.

She had seen women who had really bad scars on their arms where they had cut themselves and told us that her 16 year old friend convicted with her is now also cutting-up.

She said she got very sad in prison especially when she was in her cell on her own. This was usually for 3 hours during the day and 15 hours over night (from 5 p.m. in the afternoon until 8 a.m. the following morning). She tried to read and write letters but she could not help "thinking a lot, feeling very lonely and crying".

## **Experience of Loss**

### **Helen – aged 16**

Helen's mum and dad split up when she was very young and Helen lived with her mum. Unfortunately, her mum died when she was 13 years old and so she had to go and live with her father. She had never been in trouble up to that point.

Her father worked night shifts so she was always alone. She started going out at night and got in with a bad crowd. She started getting into all sorts of trouble. She took drugs and started stealing to get the money to pay for the drugs and clothes. She was excluded from school. Eventually she was caught and given a custodial sentence.

When she got to prison she told everyone she had been convicted of armed robbery and acted in a very tough way. Very quickly she got herself a reputation for being hard and difficult and was removed from Education. A probation officer in the prison told us that she had not, in fact, been convicted of armed robbery and that it seemed she was presenting a veneer of toughness simply to protect herself.

### **Kate – aged 17**

Kate had been in and out of local authority care since she was nine years old because her mother died and her father found it difficult to cope with her. She

had never been given a custodial sentence before but had got a couple of cautions in her early teens for shoplifting and common assault.

Because she had been in so many children's homes she said she knew what institutional life was like and could survive anything for a short period of time.

She told us that she had a history of self-harm and that she "had nearly cut her hand off" last year. She had done it when she was drunk. This had frightened her but she thought that now she had grown out of it.

Kate complained that although she wanted to go to Education, she found the courses too easy saying that everything was pitched at such a low level it held her back.

She found that a small number of the staff were really nice but that the majority were disrespectful and hard faced and did not recognise her or the others as individuals. She said she had learned to do as she was told "to play the game" but not to be intimidated by them.

## **Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

### **Anita – aged 17**

Anita looked young for her age. She had bright blue eyes and long blond hair. She had been a heroin addict since she was 13.

Her father was an alcoholic. He used to beat up Anita's mother regularly and would be abusive towards Anita and one of her elder brothers. Eventually, about three years ago her mother made her father leave.

Anita had been smoking cannabis with her elder brother since she was 12. He had encouraged her to try heroin saying "go on, have a bag, I won't tell Mum". She soon had £60 a day habit and stopped going to school.

Her mother discovered the truth when Anita was 14 and took her to a drugs counsellor but that didn't help. Her mother also tried to get Anita to go to school but nothing she did could make Anita go. Eventually, her mother was fined because of Anita's truancy and was held responsible for the fines given to Anita but because she could not afford to pay. Her mother was sent to Risley prison for 3 days. Anita and her brothers had no idea this had happened. Their mother kept it from them saying simply that she was going away for a few days and they were looked after by their grandmother.

Anita said she began stealing to get the money to pay for her drugs. She had breached her community service order because of her drug taking.

Anita was really just marking time in prison. At Education she did cooking and sewing, making duvet covers and cushions but she was getting no drug counselling and seemed very proud that she had done this on her own without methadone. However, without intensive help with the problems lying behind her drug taking it seemed unlikely she would be able to remain drug free when

released back into the same community and the same situation she had come from. If anything her life will be harder having had the experience and the record of being in prison.

## **Prostitution**

### **Sally – aged 17**

Sally was on the streets working as a prostitute from the age of 11. She had got into prostitution when living in a children's home. Her parents had split up and she had tried living first with her dad and then with her mum and step-dad but no-one could handle her she says. So at ten years old she had opted to go into care.

At that time she started smoking cannabis and soon moved on to take speed, cocaine, and heroin. She was always running away and so ended up going to several children's homes and was unable to settle. It was in one of the children's homes that she met other girls who were involved in prostitution soon Sally was doing that as well.

After she left the Care system at 16 she was sharing a flat with another prostitute. Together they were convicted of a violent offence against one of her flat-mate's 'punters'. At that time she said, she was spending £200 on crack cocaine a day.

She had just discovered she was pregnant and as she was afraid her baby would be taken away from her she went on the run. In fact the baby was removed the day after she gave birth and spent only 10 minutes with her.

Sally was a bright and resilient young woman. She was taking GCSEs by correspondence, virtually without any help, planned A'Levels and hoped to go to University when she was released. She had become a Buddhist and, apart from the occasional visit from her father and step-mother her only visits were from members of the nearest Buddhist community.

Her daughter lived with her father and step-mother and called them mum and dad. Sally said she had no bonding with daughter and believed it would be best for her daughter to stay with her own parents even when she was released. "I do not love her. I have not bonded with her. She'll think of me as a sister."

Sally, who was white, told us that racism was a problem, especially from staff. Bullying was widespread in the prison and that the youngsters were particularly vulnerable. She told us that 17 year old had recently been held down in the showers and 4 older women had put a spoon up her vagina checking for drugs. However she said "You can be bullied for a plate of chips, for a chain, for a hair-dryer if you've got one and they haven't."

## **Short Sentences**

27% of the girls we interviewed who had been sentenced to 'Detention in a Young Offenders Institution' had been given a term of 6 months or less. If they do not have days added for breach of rules in the prison they will serve half of that time. Many staff pointed out that they can do nothing positive with girls in prison for such a short period of time and argue that a community sentence would have been more effective.

### **Claudia**

Claudia was given a 4 month prison sentence for theft and handling stolen goods and burglary. She was to serve 2 months in prison. This would be too short for her to do anything in prison other than find things to do to pass the time.

Claudia's mother died when she was 11. Her father had married again and she did not get on with his new wife her extended family. She had begun to take drugs at 15 years old and was a heroin addict.

Now at aged 17 she told us that she had spent the first few days of her sentence in a prison where she was held in her cell for 20 hours a day and says she was not offered a change of clothes or a bath. She said she needed drug rehabilitation not prison. She was under the influence of drugs when she did the offence.

She said there was a lot of bullying in prison which centred around older women forcing younger women to pick up their 'drop-offs' (i.e. drugs dropped over the prison fence to inmates inside). They could not tell the officers because of the risk of retribution. She also said that the officers treated the women better in front of visitors.

### **On Remand**

#### **Ronnie – aged 17**

When we interviewed Ronnie she had been on remand for three and a half months and had received no visits in that time from anyone.

She told us she had been sexually assaulted by her grandfather at the age of 7 and this had been the start of her problems. Neither her mother nor her father had believed her. She ended up in local authority care at the age of 10 and had been in numerous homes. She had first started getting into trouble for shoplifting at the age of 12 and was now charged with burglary but she had never been violent.

When Ronnie left care she moved to the YWCA on her own. She soon found herself getting deeper and deeper into trouble. She described herself as having a serious drug problem and had started prostitution to pay for her habit. She had been prosecuted for prostitution in the past.

Ronnie told us that in prison drugs were easily available and there was a lot of bullying particularly of the younger inmates. No one would tell an officer if they were being bullied because the officer would tell the bullies and make the

situation worse. She said that most of the bullying was done in groups and she had joined such a group to protect herself. If you did not you would be vulnerable.

She had seen a lot of women self-harming especially when she was kept on the hospital wing where she could hear women screaming in other cells. She said that “slashing-up” (self-mutilation) was common in the dormitories. Ronnie had also cut herself when she had been in children’s homes and showed the interviewer the scars.

### **Sophie**

Sophie had been on remand awaiting trial for one week when she was interviewed. She was charged with robbery and had been in prison a few months earlier on remand for shoplifting for which she eventually got a probation order. Clearly for her, prison was not working as a deterrent.

Sophie’s mum and dad had divorced when she was 12. She told us it was a really acrimonious divorce with lots of arguments over the house and she and her mother ended up living in a homeless hostel for a while until they were rehoused by the council. It was at this time that she started to run away.

She started shoplifting three years ago to buy food, clothes and so on, while she was living rough but, she said, she was not a drug user.

The last time she had been in this prison Sophie had been kept on the hospital wing where she saw a lot of self-harm with girls trying to injure themselves and overdose.

Sophie had her name on the list for education but there were no places so she was only getting exercise for a few hours in the morning and afternoon and was spending a lot of time in her cell.

She seemed depressed and withdrawn. She no longer saw her father, although her mother came to see her once every two weeks – the maximum amount of visits allowed.

### **Segregation Unit**

#### **Vikki – aged 16**

When Vikki was interviewed she had just come up from the Segregation Unit. She had been on the Segregation Unit twice before because she had refused to respond to a direct order given by a prison officer. Her punishment had included loss of mattress for three days.

Not surprisingly Vikki was very stressed and anxious saying that she needed medication to help her sleep which most likely contributed to the behaviour which resulted in her being put in the segregation unit. She said that the officers were very intimidating and very petty, often exercising control over the prisoners simply because they could. She thought some staff members were all right but others treated the prisoners as if they were scum.

Vikki was in prison awaiting sentence. She had been convicted of burglary, shoplifting and a public order offence and had been in the prison for 8 weeks so far. She had received no visits from her parents and although she told us she had never been in care, it was clear she had not lived with her parents for some time. Fortunately she was visited by her sisters and grandmother with whom she seemed to have a good relationship.

Vikki told us that drugs were easily available on the wing and that most people took them although she didn't. She felt that there was no support for people coming off drugs who were more or less told to do the 'turkey' and 'enjoy it'.

Vikki also complained that the prison was dirty and disgusting. She felt humiliated when going to the toilet because there was no privacy. She said male officers could look into your cell when you were on the toilet.

### **Interrupted Education**

Even though the vast majority of the girls we interviewed had not been successful at school, we did meet some who had. Their education was being seriously disrupted which would make it more difficult for them to move on from their adolescence successfully.

#### **Georgia – aged 15**

Georgia was in the top stream at school and had been studying for 8 GCSEs. She had no history of taunting and enjoyed school. In prison she was studying just English, Maths and Art and had not been asked about her school work.

Although her parent had been separated since Georgia was 5 she had good contact with her father who used to come back to the house after school to see Georgia and her brother every evening.

Georgia had never been in trouble before. She had got caught up in a fight between three of her friends. All of the other girls said Georgia had hardly been involved in the fight.

She said she could not stand being in prison. She was depressed with nothing to do and being locked up alone in her cell so frequently (between 15 and 17 hours per day). There was nobody whom she could talk to. Her Personal Officer was away on holiday. She hated being away from friends and family. She got just two visits a month.

Georgia was having trouble sleeping and was getting muscle spasms. She was not taking antidepressants but thought she was going to have to go onto sleeping tablets. The doctor wanted her to see a counsellor. She said there was not much time to talk to the nurses, doctors or staff.

#### **Gina – aged 17**

Gina was serving a 12 month sentence for a first offence of robbery which she had committed two years previously when she was 15. She had not been in any trouble since.

She told us she had got into a fight at school which had gone wrong. She had become angry with another girl who was her close friend, for sleeping with her boyfriend. She and her co-defendant had got into a fight with the victim, egged on by others. She admitted she threatened the victim with a small scalpel knife she had on a key ring but claimed she did not hurt her. Gina said someone took the girl's rings but neither she nor her co-defendant had them.

Gina said she was "hotheaded" then. She had been bullied at primary school and "used to feel angry inside". She said she started sticking up for herself in secondary school. She wanted to get back at people for the earlier years.

Whilst waiting for her case to come before the courts she had changed. She had done much better at college and had all As and Bs in her GCSEs mocks. But now her education had been disrupted by her sentence and she felt very bitter – "two years later at 17, I'm a different person," she told us.

The prison's Education Department had said that they would see if she could take her exams but they would not be able to help her prepare as they did not cater for Geography, French, English Language and Literature and Psychology, the subjects she was studying. She had spoken to the education department when she first arrived but had not had any contact with them since. Our interviewer took this up with the education department and found that indeed no action had been taken. They said there had been an oversight.

Gina came from a tightly knit family who were important to her. She frequently felt down because she felt she had been a disgrace to her parents. She said she could not go back home as the family felt it was better for someone who had been in prison not to live with them.

Gina often felt depressed and once took an overdose which made her feel sick. She hated being in prison and felt that she couldn't do anything there. She slept late in the day in an effort to get through the day.

## **Conclusion**

Those who support the use of prison for girls argue that they are dangerous and deserve prison because of what they have done. They maintain that young people who commit offences do so in a kind of conscious defiance of society – "cocking a snook" at the community. These stories show instead that young women who offend are often damaged, vulnerable and emotionally lost young people, who do not conform to the evil and dangerous image so often portrayed in the press and which often figures in the collective mind of public.

An overwhelming number of the girls interviewed were caught-up in an environment and a peer group where stealing, fighting and drug and alcohol abuse were the norm. Many had never had a positive adult role model in their lives and were in need of consistent love and guidance from adults they could trust not to harm them and to be in a place where they felt safe. However, the next chapter will show that the response of the Criminal Justice system is instead to place these children in an environment which further brutalises them. Where most adults around them are themselves damaged and in crisis and where some are intimidating and aggressive.

## **THE PRISONS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

There are no specially designated Young Offender Institutions for girls in the prison estate. Unlike boys, girls aged under 18 are held in adult prisons alongside women of all ages convicted of a range of offences from shoplifting to murder. There is also no separate management or staffing structure concerned with their welfare.

This contravenes Article 37 of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child under which those aged under 18 should be held separately from adult offenders. The United Kingdom Government reserved the right not to implement this article when the “mixing of adults and children is deemed to be mutually beneficial”. The Home Office and Prison Service has subsequently argued that it is in the best interests of girls to be held with adult female offenders as the older women tend to mother the youngsters and help provide a calmer atmosphere.

Evidence found by the Inquiry directly challenges this view as follows:

1. the primary role of prison as a place of punishment, control and security is inappropriate for teenage girls who are young, damaged and vulnerable;
2. any rehabilitative element in the prisons is a secondary objective which easily falls by the wayside as soon as resources are cut;
3. by being in adult prisons, girls are exposed to many dangers and influences which were likely to damage their lives further and make rehabilitation more difficult; and
4. the small number of girls in the system are simply “tacked-on” to the adult regime attracting no measures adapted for their care and needs.

### **B MIXING WITH ADULTS**

***“Prison is not the place for 15, 16 and 17 year olds. We mix them with women who have been in and out of here for 20 years – hardened criminals.***

***They are not going to pick up anything good.”***

(Prison chaplain)

Whilst some staff and professionals agreed with the view that the older women had a calming effect on the girls and that some older women did play a mother role for the youngsters others, including inmate befrienders<sup>9</sup>, thought that there were too many damaging and negative aspects of prison to warrant mixing the youngsters with adults.

Amongst the inmate befrienders we spoke to, there was concern that some of the apparently 'mothering' relationship between older and younger women, in fact, involved subtle bullying which could be easily missed by staff. This is not surprising given, as we were told by psychologists, that in many cases both the adult women and the teenagers have only known exploitative relationships and simply have no experience of how to relate to others in a different way.

In addition, whilst the women in their mid 30s and older might play a mothering role, it is the women in their 20s who make up the 'in crowd' the youngsters will try to emulate. This group of women are more likely to be repeat and more sophisticated offenders as well as displaying the same chaotic experience of life as the younger teenagers. They are unlikely to make positive role models.

Whilst the vast majority of women prisoners are not dangerous we are concerned at the indiscriminate mixing of women convicted of violent and sexual offences against children (defined under the Children Act as those aged under 18). We were told of an instance where a 15 year old girl was put in a cell next to a woman whose offence involved procuring 15 year old girls for prostitution. Another case involved a woman convicted of common assault against a 13 year old being placed next to a 15 year old girl.

In on prison some of the 15, 16 and 17 year olds were accommodated in a separate house without any apparent adverse affects in terms of volatility and control. The house officers told us that whilst they were a little concerned before the house opened that there would be trouble the reality had been that the young women responded to being on their own with officers dedicated to their needs. However, they were still able to mix with adults in the grounds of the prison and during association.

### **Special Needs Overlooked.**

***"Many of the girls have social and emotional problems. They are treated the same as the other women but the young kids are different from adult women. They have different needs."***

(prison nurse)

The primary objective in recent Government policy in the use of prison has been to get young offenders off the streets to "protect the public" for the period they are incarcerated. However, if while they are in prison there is no recognition or accommodation of their particular needs by virtue of their age

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<sup>9</sup> Older prisoners who have been trained by The Samaritans as 'Listeners'.

and immaturity there can be no attempt at rehabilitation and therefore they will be very likely to commit more offences on release.

A consequence of putting a small number of teenage girls in large institutions designed and run for adult women is that their needs will be overlooked. Teenagers cannot act with the same maturity as adult women and therefore will not be able to conform easily to an adult regime.

An unpublished study<sup>10</sup> on young offenders aged 15 to 21 carried out in Holloway found that, compared to adult women, young offenders found adjustment to prison more difficult and had significantly lower levels of self-esteem. At the same time they still managed to maintain higher levels of hope for the future. It was found that they were in more need of safety, love and a sense of belonging if they were to develop and move forward.

A number of the Governors and members of the senior management to whom we spoke recognised that teenagers had needs distinct from adult women which they were unable to meet. This was also the concern of many of the other professionals working in the prisons who felt that the different needs of the teenagers were overlooked precisely because they were held with adult women.

“The problem is differing age groups and their differing needs. For example in the drugs groups we have to put a youngster experimenting with ecstasy in with a heroin addict.” (probation officer)

Teenage girls often find it difficult to assert themselves and ask for help in a positive way particularly in a large institutional adult environment. One psychologist told us –

“The only way to get attention is to kick-off or self-harm”

Hence staff and other prisoners often find the youngsters irritating. Even normal teenage behaviour is not tolerated. For instance it was reported to us that a 16 year old had been beaten up in her cell by two older women prisoners because she insisted on playing her music loudly.

We were told –

“It is difficult to deal with typical teenagers. They’re boisterous and kick up against authority” (prison officer).

“They’re not allowed to be children in here so they have to suppress what is normal for teenage girls. Then they either cut-up or try drugs” (inmate carer).

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<sup>10</sup> A Study on Young Offenders in Holloway by Melissa Jones, Psychology Department, HMP Holloway.

Many staff, and more worryingly some senior management, appeared unable to make a connection between the girls' youth, experience of abuse, drug and alcohol problems and their disruptive behaviour. They therefore did not know how to deal with it.

### **Staff and Staff Training.**

***There are officers who see their role only as locking up. There are others who are very well-meaning but untrained and who can get horribly involved and then feel very let down."***

(probation officer)

We met staff who were extremely committed to the young people in their care and who were also instinctively good at their job. However we also met others who had neither the desire nor the ability to work with adult offenders and could not be blamed for their inability to deal sympathetically with young women.

This situation was exacerbated by the lack of training for officers and governors. An excellent three day training pack was launched by the Prison Service in November 1996 on how to deal with young women in custody. It was developed by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence. Whilst clearly an improvement on no training at all, it is not sufficient to equip someone with the skills to deal with emotionally complex teenage girls. However, even this training pack was not being implemented. Most of the prisons we visited were unable to spare the staff time to be trained and where staff had been trained, there were no plans for refresher courses.

### **C. EXPOSURE TO A DAMAGING ENVIRONMENT.**

Another consequence of mixing teenagers with the adult prison population is that they are being exposed to an intense environment where older women display extremely disturbed behaviour.

Many women try to escape the pain of their lives and the pain of being in prison by taking drugs and cutting-up. This is a process whereby a person self-mutilates herself usually by taking a knife and making cuts in her body. Psychologists explained to us that a woman does this in an effort to bring some control back into her life.

#### **Cutting-Up**

***"Youngsters are very vulnerable to self-harm. There is a danger that in an adult prison it becomes learned behaviour."***

(probation officer)

Self-harm is endemic in most women's prisons and usually involves women cutting themselves. Cuts range from the superficial to very serious self-mutilation including one case where a woman cut right through her stomach.

Prison statistics show that in 1996 there were 1,054 incidents of self-harm recorded in women's prisons among a population of 2,010<sup>11</sup>.

However, a psychologist in one prison told us that the incidence of self-harm was so massive "it is not really possible to record it adequately". The levels of self-harm in each prison varied with closed prisons being the worst. In one prison which held a high number of teenage girls, there was a pervading culture of cutting-up. As we walked through the prison we saw many women and girls who had serious scars on their arms and some on their faces.

For the vast majority of the young girls we interviewed it was the first time they had come across self-mutilation and we were told by staff it was rare a 15, 16 or 17 year old would come in self-harming. The danger is that they will copy this behaviour partly as a way of creating some control in their distressed and chaotic lives partly because it is part of the culture of prison life to which they now belong. Fourteen of the 61 girls we interviewed told us they had self-harmed, one was only 15 years old.

A prison chaplain told us:

"Many women come in who have never cut up but in here it becomes almost cultural to do it. Then they go out with the scars where it is not normal. Some are so mutilated they won't ever be able to wear certain clothes."

## Drugs and Alcohol

***"Some take drugs in prison who had not taken them outside. They may have smoked cannabis, taken speed or experimented with ecstasy on the outside. In here they come across harder drugs and they also have to find a way to pay for them."***

(prison officer)

Staff in every prison we visited estimated that between 50% and 60% of women had a drug and/or alcohol problem. Twenty-five of those we interviewed admitted to taking drugs, 14 of whom said they were addicted to heroin. Drugs are freely available in prison despite efforts to restrict their entry although is not.

We were told by both staff and inmates that most drugs came in via visits and sometimes via drug drops outside the perimeter fence. LSD can be sent in on the back of a postage stamp. The drugs mainly available were cannabis, heroin, crack cocaine and LSD.

Prison provides the perfect breeding ground for drug taking. Populated with people whose lives have hit a crisis point it is an oppressive and restrictive environment where women are locked up in their cells for hours on end with nothing to do.

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<sup>11</sup> Handard Parliament Answer 4 July 1997 by Joyce Quin MP to a question by Mr. Burnett.

Whilst many young girls who come into prison for the first time have experimented with drugs and may already be addicted, others will have little experience of anything harder than cannabis. These young women will suddenly be exposed to an environment where hard drugs are the norm and in a distressed state are likely to succumb to the temptation to take them. We were also told that problems of alcohol abuse were often behind a young girl's offending rather than drugs but that in prison since only drugs were available they switched to taking drugs.

The availability of counselling, drug related or otherwise, is patchy and never sufficient to satisfy the need. Many of the prisons visited relied on voluntary help from organisations outside and did not provide much in the way of drug rehabilitation themselves. Their main strategy was based on a system of punishment for drug users rather than rehabilitation.

Young women who arrived in prison addicted were often left with little help when de-toxing. Different prisons had different policies on whether or how much medical assistance was given to addicted young women. Some provided a course of methadone, which is a prescribed replacement for heroin, from which they are weaned over just a few days. Some provide little more than pain killers and sleeping tablets. We were shocked to see, in one prison, women lying around the wing de-toxing, clearly distressed and in pain. It is well known that this is a very vulnerable time for an addict and has been linked to people committing suicide in prison.

### **Mandatory Drug Testing.**

***“Drugs are a major problem. Losing days under the MDT scheme is not the answer. It doesn't help them. We're making them take stronger stuff.”***

(prison officer)

Mandatory drug testing was introduced into prisons in 1994. Its purpose was to reduce the demand for drugs in prison through the threat of days being added onto someone's sentence when caught.

Under the scheme compulsory urine tests are made at random by each prison on 10% of its population each month. Additional tests can be made on order of the Governor where there is suspicion that the prisoner is taking drugs and as part of risk assessment.

Positive tests are punished with extra days added onto the sentence. Whilst this varies marginally depending on the prison most of those visited gave 21 days for a positive test for cannabis and 28 days for an opiate. The prisoner will also be told of drug counselling or group therapy if it is available and given the option to attend. The process is in itself degrading particularly for women. They are taken by officers to the special mandatory drug testing cell which seemed most likely to be located in the segregation block. The young women would then have to undergo a strip search and be given a short gown to wear.

Prisoners complained that these gowns were barely long enough to cover their bodies.

They are then required to sit on a toilet, in front of the officer, holding the cup under themselves to urinate into whilst the other hand is held to the side.

If the person is unable to give a sample immediately they will be given a glass of water and asked to wait up to 5 hours after which they will be deemed to have refused. Refusal will result in similar punishment as awarded for a positive test.

Many prisoners we spoke to found the whole procedure extremely degrading and humiliating particularly for teenagers who are most self-conscious of their bodies. What is more, it seemed to be causing people to move from taking soft drugs to taking hard drugs. Every prison we visited reported such a shift, caused by the fact that cannabinoids (usually cannabis) are detectable in the body 27 days longer than opiates (usually heroin). So, in order to reduce the chances of getting caught women were taking heroin instead of cannabis and ending up with a more serious drug habit.

One prison had systematically monitored the effect of the introduction of MDT. Just before the start of the programme 77.7% of positive tests were for cannabis and the rest for opiates. A year later 80% of positive tests were for opiates and 20% for cannabis. The prison had also experienced a drop in the total number of positive tests but thought this was mainly because of the improved procedures preventing drugs coming in during visits rather than the MDT.

There was an enormous risk that an impressionable lonely and stressed young girl in prison could start to take heroin. The dangers were not only that on release she would have a serious drug problem obtained in prison but also that, if she injected with a shared needle, there was a high risk she would contract Hepatitis C. Discovered only in 1989 this disease primarily transferred through blood contact, results in cirrhosis of the liver and subsequently death. We were told by medical staff in the prisons visited that Hepatitis C was one of the most serious medical problems facing prisons today and far outstripped the risk of HIV and AIDS.

## **Bullying**

***“Bullying is a big problem in any prison. It can be older to younger, younger to older and it can be between contemporaries. It is difficult for the staff to know the half of it particularly with the youngsters because kids never grass.”***

(prison officer)

It was hard to establish the true extent of bullying because the women and girls rarely told the staff about individual incidents. Staff told us however that it is an integral part of prison life. One girl told our Inquiry that either you join the bullies for protection or you became a victim yourself. An inmate carer

(member of the Samaritans 'Listening Scheme') confirmed this. She told us that bullying was in her view was the biggest problem with youngsters.

"They either go downhill fast and start self-harming or they join the bullies."

Another group of inmate carers believed that the youngsters were most at risk of being bullied and that the bravado often displayed by a teenager was simply a technique for warding off the bullies. It was a strategy which worked but meant they were often then treated more harshly by staff.

The ones who did not appear tough and difficult were very vulnerable to bullying. Whilst the carers sought to protect anyone at risk of bullying often a girl being bullied would be too scared to go to them for help. Even where a carer did know about a case of bullying often the young victim would not allow the carer to do anything about it for fear of reprisals.

It was suggested to us that bullying relates to the women's general experience of violence. A prison psychologist told us that 60% of women in prison had suffered violent relationships with a boyfriend or husband as well as with mothers, fathers, step-fathers, and brothers. Their experience of relating to other people is that either you bully or you are bullied and many are already established victims of life. As a prison teacher told us –

"Many women here have been abused emotionally, physically and sexually. They don't know how to stop it happening."

Usually the bullying is centred around drugs. Most commonly it takes the form of threats and emotional pressure rather than actual physical violence. However we were told by staff, professionals and prisoners of a very disturbing practice colloquially known as 'de-crotching' whereby a woman suspected of having drugs is held down and forcibly searched internally by other women. The victim will rarely make a complaint because of the shame attached to what is a sexual assault.

We were told by a prison chaplain that sometimes women would be bullied into bringing in drugs so that if caught they will get the punishment not the bullies.

"Women who aren't on drugs are forced to get them from visits and hold them internally. The women are terrified."

Bullying is usually organised by groups and often starts when they offer someone some drugs for nothing – even just one puff from a cannabis cigarette – and then later demand payment. The girls would then be told "get me this, get me that" and are forced to buy the bullies items from the prison shop which is where a lot of the bullying can be detected.

We were told that bullying tended to be perpetrated by gangs lead by the 18 to 30 age group.

All prisons have been instructed to set up anti-bullying strategies, however out of the nine prisons we visited 3 did not have one in place. Two of those had plans to implement a strategy as soon as possible. Disturbingly, in the third, senior management appeared not even to be aware of the problem with no immediate plans to develop and introduce an anti-bullying strategy.

Considerable criticism was made to us by staff about the strategies that were in place. Principally this was based on the fact that the strategies operated in isolation instead of pervading every aspect of prison life. In at least two of the prisons the policy seemed essentially to concentrate on simply “shipping out” those who were deemed to be “bullies” to other prisons rather than dealing with the problem.

### **Sexual activity**

***“Many girls are already sexually active when they come in. They are affected by the women in here. They experiment with lesbian activity. There is no way here to discover if that’s their natural activity or part of the culture.”***

(prison chaplain)

Sexual activity was considered to be the inevitable in all the prisons we visited. The women, whether lesbian or heterosexual, were responding to a need for love and physical affection other wise unavailable in prison.

The girls were often held a long way away from families and friends which meant that maintaining contact was difficult. When families did manage to visit it would normally be in a large visiting room full of other people for just an hour and a half making the visits very stilted and tense. This would create more pressure on those already strained relationships.

Whilst there was little suggestion that girls were being forced into sexual activity some professionals were concerned that questions about sex and other issues around growing up were getting distorted for the 15,16 and 17 year olds as a result of being in prison.

## **D CONDITIONS AND REGIMES**

***“There is little rehabilitation. There is a lack of courses. They need very basic things. How to look after themselves, economy buying, how to budget. They have relationship problems – they don’t know how to communicate with each other.”***

(prison chaplain)

In none of the prisons we visited was there a separate regime for juveniles. They shared fully in the adult regime which meant there was nothing designed to tackle their particular problems.

Increasing overcrowding in the last four years coupled with cost-cutting measures throughout the Prison Service has meant they systematic reduction of what rehabilitative regime did exist. Along with the adults, girls can be locked up for long hours each day. Whilst this varied enormously from prison to prison it could be as much as 23 hours a day in times of extreme staff crisis and could regularly be as much as 18 hours a day.

In seven out of nine of the prisons the physical conditions were austere and oppressive. In all but one prison there were a mixture of single cell, double cell and dormitory accommodation. Cells were extremely small.

In the prison which only had single cell accommodation there was a lot of self-mutilation which women told us was due to them being locked-up for hours on end on their own.

### **Overcrowding**

***“It is a daily battle finding places for prisoners. Our CAN is 155. Last week we had 162. Some of the women were being held in the segregation wing.”***  
(governor)

Every prison visited reported immense problems of overcrowding and lack of resources. This has a bad affect on both the work which can be done with the prisoners and on morale.

“The main problem here is the overcrowding. There is no time to spend with them. The young women are at a very impressionable age. They need work dealing with their offending behaviour, dealing with relationships and we offer them nothing.” (chaplain)

This situation means also that whilst Prison Service Headquarters is developing new systems and encouraging the development of a more rehabilitative regime prisons are finding them difficult to implement. As one governor told us –

“We are being asked to be ever more exacting but are not getting the resources to match it”

### **Person Officer Scheme.**

***“Some personal officers are better than others. As a generalisation it does work but is set against their skills and pressure of work. Personal officer work is one of the first things that gets dropped off.”***  
(probation officer)

Every sentenced prisoner under the age of 21 is automatically allocated a personal officer whose job it is to prepare a sentence plan for the young woman and, in theory, be the first port of call if that young person has any problems.

Inevitably some officers are better than others at performing this job. There seemed little possibility of only choosing those who had a natural ability to be personal officers.

The system was also breaking down in many prisons because of the pressure of the overcrowding. We were constantly told by personal officers that since no specific time was allocated in their day to do this side of their work, they were often unable to do it. Fifty-two percent of the girls complained to us that they hardly had any contact with their personal officer or that it was sporadic. Thirty percent said they did not know who their personal officer was.

### **Sentence Planning.**

***“There are not enough resources to match the sentence plan. The girls on short term sentence miss out on a lot of things.”***

(prison officer)

Sentence planning was likewise faltering under the pressure of overcrowding although a new system is due to be implemented which we were assured would be more effective.

There were two main problems. Firstly, personal officers in all the prisons visited found it very difficult to find the time to prepare the sentence plan; and secondly, when they did, often behavioural courses identified in the plan as suitable for that young person such as anger management or offending behaviour, either had no places available or were not running at all.

A further problem was that there was no time to create sentence plans for those on short sentences and even where it was possible there were no courses short enough to accommodate them.

Of the girls we interviewed 28% (14) were serving sentences of six and a half months or less. This means they were actually serving just over three months. Seven girls were sentenced to 4 months and were to be in prison for just two months only.

Courts handing down such sentences could only intend them to be a short sharp shock. However, it is now very clearly understood that such an approach only succeeds in entrenching offending behaviour in young people and does no thing to deter it. The Audit Commission<sup>12</sup> found that boys who served short sentences of six months or less had the highest rate of re-offending at 90% within one year.

Clearly, these young girls were not a danger to society otherwise they would have been give much longer sentence. As such there is therefore no purpose in locking them up. An alternative and more likely effective strategy would have been to give them a non-custodial sentence.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid p

## Behavioural Courses

***“We cannot do anything separate (for the under 18s). We are trying to cope with a wide range of needs in the prison: lifers, sentenced, remand, deportees, mother and baby unit, vulnerable prisons, parole, young offenders and the under 18s. How can you address all these needs with the resources we have?”***

(probation officer)

Behaviour courses are designed to help give the offender the social skills they may be lacking. They are intrinsic to any rehabilitative programme and include offending behaviour, anger management and assertiveness training. The courses are run in groups and those which are accredited by the Prison Service get priority. They are run by prison officers or by probation staff.

We were not able to examine the content of these courses or make an assessment as to how effective they were. However, prisons were unable to offer courses exclusively for juveniles. Instead they had to join in with the adults.

It was these courses which seemed to be the first casualty when staff time was short. Of particular concern was the unavailability of pre-release courses in some of the prisons visited. Preparation for release is essential to help promote a smooth transition back into the community. As they were organised by prison officers they were unable to run if there were no staff available. In one prison we were told no such course had ever run despite the fact that two members of staff had been trained.

## Education and Training.

***“We can fill and doubly fill the classes. There are waiting lists for everything.”***

(teacher)

Under Rule 35 of the Young Offender Institution Rules education or training course shall be provided for those under aged 17 for at least 15 hours a week. There is no minimum provision laid down for those aged 17 and over.

Since it was common for a prison to have only one education place for every four prisons or less we did find cases where girls were not in education who wished to be although it seemed that places were always found for the 15 and 16 year olds. None of the nine prisons visited offered separate education provision for juveniles and there was not always special provision for those under school leaving age. One prison held separate classes for 15 to 20 year olds.

The education departments offered some GNVQ courses but no GCSEs. So where a girl had been involved in education before sentence there could be no continuation of her school work. Instead education departments had to

rely on the help and cooperation of the school a young woman was attending, to provide her with work in preparation for exams. However, they could arrange for exams to be taken at the prison.

Mostly, the girls we interviewed had only bad experiences of school. Only 14 out of the 61 told us they regularly attended school. Many essentially stopped going around the age of 12 or 13.

However, prison offered a rare chance of getting them interested in learning and the opportunity to build their self-esteem. The girls like to be busy and the teachers told us that they usually lapped up what ever was on offer which unfortunately was limited. When there were no places some prisons offered 'cell studies; whereby a young woman is provided with learning materials to work through on their own in their cell. Whilst better than nothing, this seems totally inappropriate for a young person who has already failed at school. Enough education places should be guaranteed.

A number of the teachers we spoke to felt that what they were required to teach was not what was needed.

“My personal view is that we are missing the point. What they need is life skills. Who teaches them those? They can't communicate, can't deal with life. They need the basics not maths and English. Behavioural course come too late and in any case are too short.”  
(teacher)

One head of education we spoke to was consciously trying to ensure some kind of integrated approach –

“When women first come here they are usually very apprehensive and nervous. Some arrive with bravado. Most lack confidence and have low self-esteem. They have failed and they are bruised and damaged. So we reduce learning into modules so people can achieve. We are aware of the need for self-esteem and the need for encouragement. We encourage them even to do their hair before coming to work for instance.

“Addressing their training needs is important but the women are going out to the same life so we need to couple that with development training, for example, offending behaviour and anger management. If I know that someone is on one of these courses I try to link in with it when dealing with that woman to help her use the lessons she is learning in here to her day to day life.”

We did not find this approach in any of the other prisons.

## **E RACE**

***“Black women feel isolated. Many come here from London. They feel they don't fit it.”***

(probation officer)

Ten of the girls we interviewed were Black. At 16% this makes them disproportionately represented in this age group as they are in older age groups. They nonetheless made up a small percentage of the total under 18 population. This meant that they were likely to feel extremely isolated as a group. Mostly they complained that their cultural differences and their different needs were not respected or catered for. For instance, different food and hair products were two things often mentioned which added to their sense of isolation.

This problem was exacerbated if they were moved from a prison serving an inner city prison such as Holloway to a prison in the country such as Drake Hall in Staffordshire where they would make up an even smaller percentage of the population.

This feeling of isolation was shared by Asian young women. We only interviewed two. For them the lack of Asian food was a problem and we heard of an instance where an Asian girl refused to undertake a mandatory drug test because she refused to take her clothes off and urinate in front of a prison officer. As a result she had days added onto her sentence.

This lack of understanding by the system was made worse by the lack of Black or Asian staff. In most of the prisons they did not have any Black or Asian staff and in others they made up a tiny proportion.

## **F REMANDS**

There are increasing number of 17 year old girls being remanded into custody. The majority subsequently receive no custodial sentence. They not only mix fully with adult prisoners, but also sentenced prisoners in breach of article 10 of the UN Convention on Human Rights. They are held alongside prisoners without any distinction.

## **G INAPPROPRIATENESS OF PRISON**

***“Prison doesn’t deter them. When they leave here they have a criminal record so employment is impossible for them and mostly they will only have a hostel to go to where they’ll get little support. If they have a drug problem they will go back to shoplifting or prostitution to fund the drug habit. It’s a circle. It’s sad. They don’t know any other way of life.”***

(prison officer)

We met few staff who thought that prison was an appropriate place of custody for girls. Firstly, there was concern about what young and impressionable girls would be learning from the experience.

“I see people change in terms of their attitude and learning to cope with the prison environment. I see someone come in and they are easy to deal with but by the end of the sentence they have become difficult to

cope with. They have become harder and more aggressive. I wonder how they will be when they leave.” (teacher)

In particular many staff expressed concerns at the networks they girls were building and the models of behaviour with which they were being presented.

“Young women are thrown into this environment set up against all sorts of people. They may be in a cell with someone who is more dominant and more sophisticated.” (probation officer)

Prison is not a normal or healthy environment. The girls are young, still in the process of developing and many are already badly damaged. All of them are in need of help to deal with that damage in their lives, to tackle their behaviour and to gain skills that will enable them to achieve something in life. Whilst staff did the best they could many felt prison offered very little that would make a positive difference to young girls so desperately in need of help.

“This age is a bridge between childhood and adolescence. Some of them are still very childish. They are in the process of developing and separating out. In a prison it is impossible to see that their experience here is positive in helping the way they mature and grow up. Being in here does not stop them from offending. It gives them a more negative view of themselves and the world.” (prison officer)

Instead it was thought they needed separate units dedicated to dealing with teenagers.

“Youngsters of this age group shouldn’t be here. There should be a place set up for this particular age groups where help and courses are set up from day one to cater for their needs.” (probation officer)

## **H CONCLUSION.**

Prisons are ill-equipped to deal with young women who are damaged and who display extremely challenging and difficult behaviour. The numbers of juvenile girls in the system are small and as a result they are simply tacked onto the rest of the system with little recognition that their needs are different and separate from older women. It also means they attract few resources.

An alternative for the Prison Service is to set up separate units for juvenile girls within each adult prison. However, the experience of separate units and separate young offender institutions for boys has not been positive. The punitive ethos of prison rather than a regime which is child centred is totally unsuitable for dealing with damaged children. The role of the prison service is at odds with the care and intensive work which these young people need if they are able to stop offending.

We therefore recommend that all girls aged under 18 be removed from the prison system altogether. Where they genuinely need a custodial environment this should be in local authority secure accommodation.

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