

The Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme



The Griffins Society

Working for female offenders

www.thegriffinsociety.org

Research Briefing 2003/03

Last Chance: Older Women Through the Criminal Justice System

Carlie Newman

1. Introduction

A magistrate sees many offenders passing through the courts. Worryingly, in the past ten years there have been a growing number of women. And the saddest of this group is the small number of women aged over 50 who appear before us.

Until I retired recently I was the Director of the Greater London Forum for the Elderly (GLF), which promotes the voice of older people through local Forums established throughout London in order that older people can be asked their views on issues of importance including health and social care, lifelong learning, arts and leisure activities, housing and, of course, crime. But discussions have focussed on the rise of crime, the fear of being attacked and its prevention, rather than on the perpetrators and their needs.

I am also a Magistrate in a busy London court and thus have witnessed both sides to the story without ever approaching either side from an analytical viewpoint. The Griffins Society, by way of the LSE Visiting Research Fellowship, provided me with the opportunity to study in depth older women going through the criminal justice system.

Background

The population as a whole is ageing: by 2010 around 35% of the population will be over 50. At present there are 10,624,559 females aged 50 and over. Total males and females aged 50 and over are 19,599,852 [national population projections 2000 based].

The population projection for 2011 is 11,597,000 females aged 50 and over. (Total males and females aged 50 and over are 21,951,000) [As above. Data supplied by Age Concern England]

The growth in numbers of the over 50s in the population and demographic trends in general lead naturally to the conclusion that there has been an increase in older women involved in the criminal justice system and that this will grow in the future. There has already been a rise in the number of older offenders in the USA criminal justice system, with special adaptations having to be made in their prisons, and we can expect the UK

to follow suit.

This study aims to provide a focus on older women offenders (aged 50+) within the criminal justice system. Whilst it appears that community sentences may be a more appropriate option for older women, the use of these varies considerably around the country. In looking at some individual cases we can begin to assess whether they are of benefit to older women offenders, especially those with drug and alcohol problems.

The summary has focussed on describing the study and its findings, but clearly some of the observations by those interviewed are contentious and I do not necessarily agree with them. They will be discussed in the full report.

Objectives

1. To ascertain what proportion of older women (50+) offenders make up the growing prison population.
2. To examine community sentences and other punishments given as an alternative to custody for this group.
3. To provide a focus on the rehabilitation and resettlement of older women on their release from prison, especially those with drug and alcohol problems.
4. To examine the role of outside agencies in the resettlement of older women offenders and to determine their effectiveness.

Outcomes

1. Evidence of the growth in convictions of older women and of the trends in sentencing them.
2. A profile of older women offenders identifying those more likely to receive custodial sentences compared with those given other types of sentences.
3. Evidence of the effect that different sentences may have on the resettlement problems of older women offenders.
4. Evidence of the role and effectiveness of outside agencies, both statutory and voluntary, in resettlement programmes for older women offenders.

Methodology

I undertook a small-scale study based on a very busy area in London. This took the form of an in-depth qualitative investigation to enable me to acquire rich data and, thereby, to gain a more thorough understanding of the views of the various parties involved. I used a semi-structured interview schedule with open questions.

It proved difficult to make contact with the identified group, partly because of the small numbers of offenders involved. I began by using data and material collected by a London probation area on their offenders over 50. Subsequently I widened my group to include some clients of voluntary organisations. I also went to an open prison to interview some inmates. In spite of strenuous efforts I was unable to enter H.M.P. Holloway to interview “first nighters” or any others in custody there. However, all the chosen voluntary organisations

concerned with older women offenders were most co-operative. There are no good statistics available on the ethnicity of older women. Many are deported at the end of prison sentences in serious drug importation cases. They have not been dealt with as a separate category in this study.

I interviewed 38 individuals: 10 offenders (of whom 6 were serving prisoners, 3 were undertaking community sentences and 1 who had offended in the past), 4 lay Magistrates (1 of whom was also a lawyer), a District Judge, 2 Justice’s Clerks, 1 Deputy Prison Governor, 3 Home Office/London Probation Service personnel, 3 local Probation Officers, 1 Crown Court Judge, 2 Government Ministers and 11 representatives of voluntary organisations. Fuller data, particularly on the interviewed women offenders, can be found in my report.

2. The Position of Older Women in the Criminal Justice System

Present Situation

Women age 50 and over form a very small part of the criminal justice system with the result that little specific information is available on them. It is accepted that there has been a huge increase in the female prison population, including, until 2000, older women, although only 5% are over 50.

The tables below illustrate the sentences given to under and over 50s and the percentages over the five years 1997-2001

Table One:

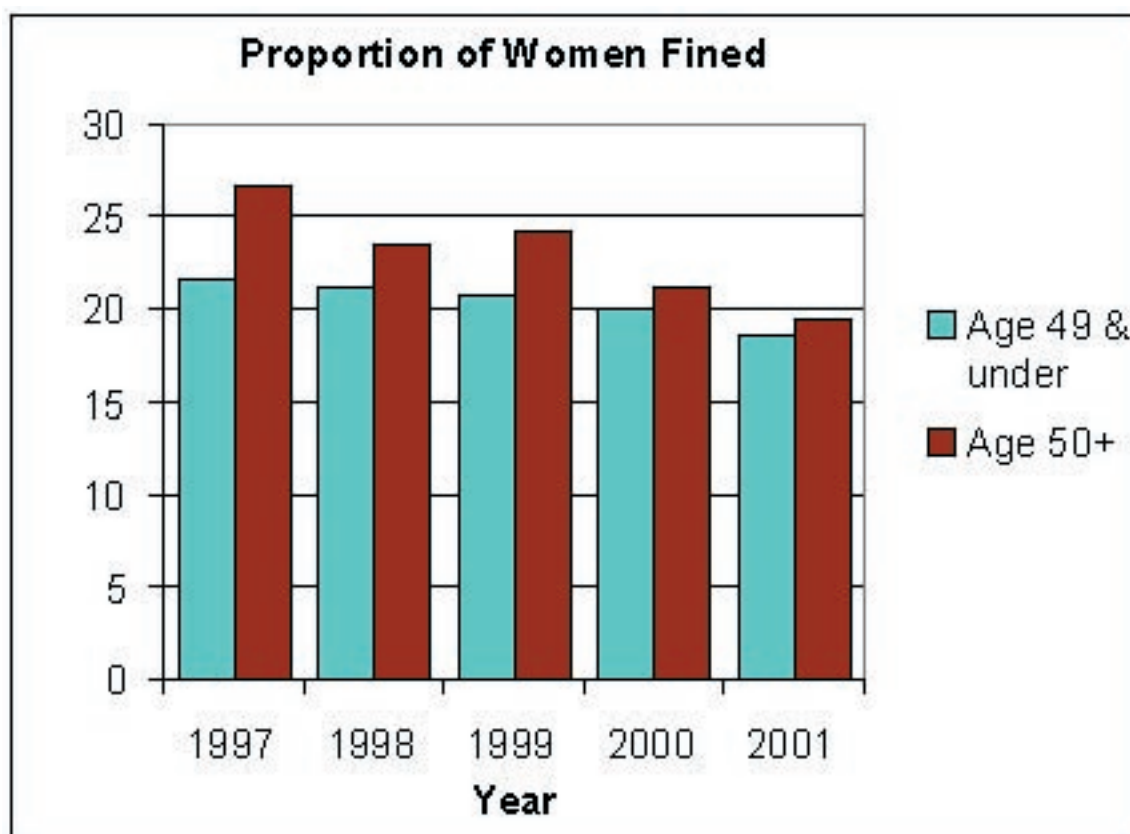


Table Two:



Table Three:

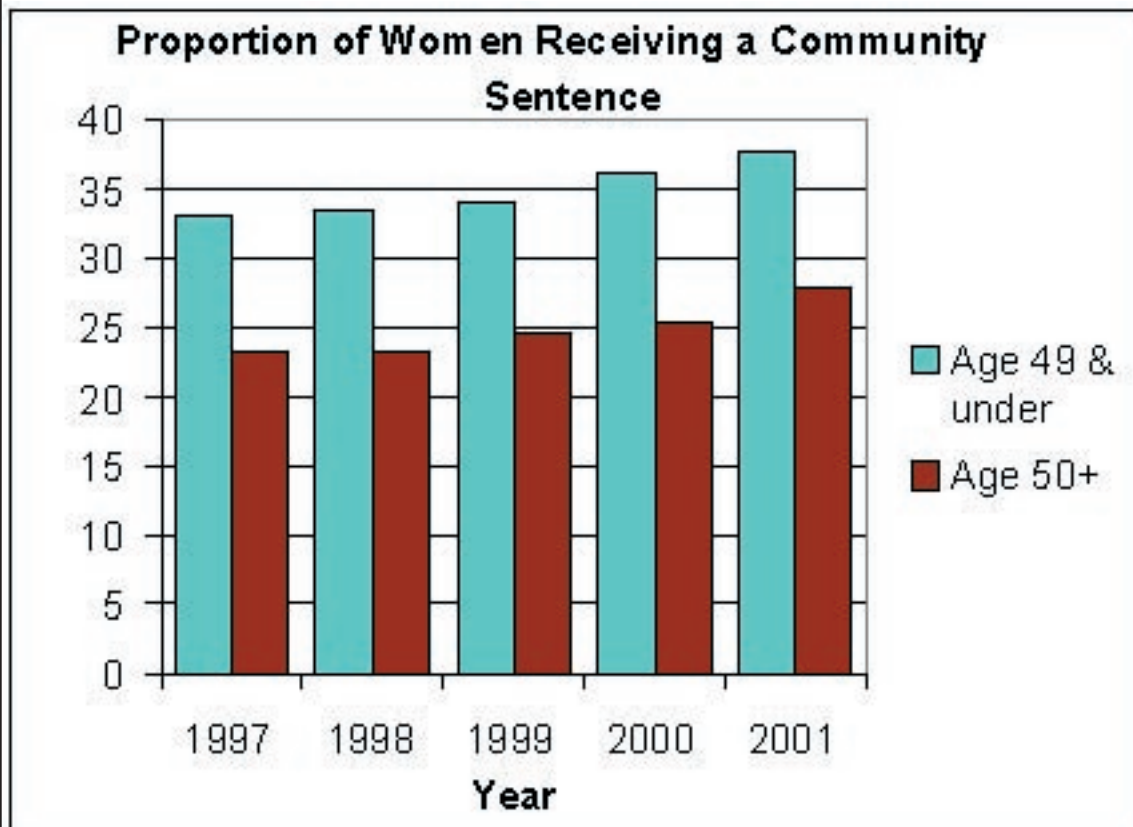
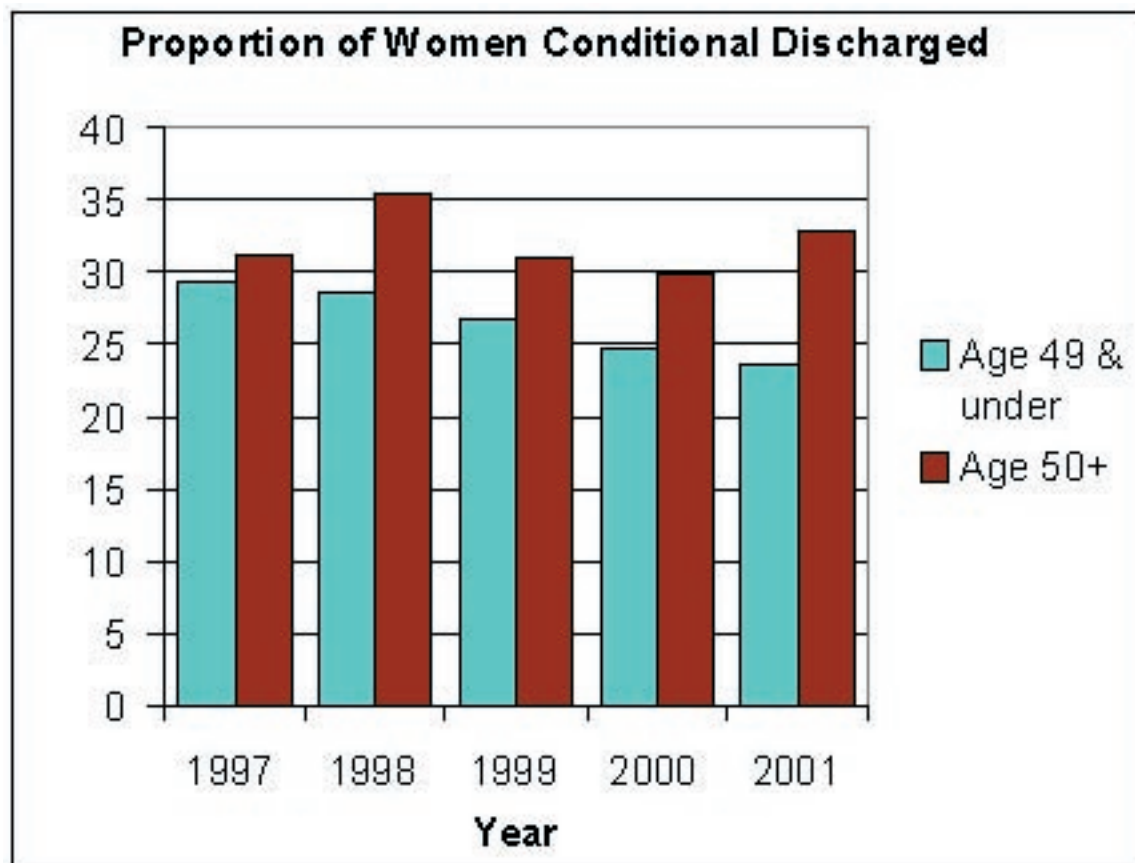


Table Four:



(Source: Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate 2002)

The percentage of younger women being fined remains smaller than that of older women although both age groups received fewer fines than at the start of the five year period. It is evident that an increasing proportion of older women given sentences are being sent to prison but it is noteworthy that a slightly smaller number of women aged 49 and under are going to prison now. The percentage of older women receiving community sentences has increased a little over the 5 year period shown in these charts. During the same period the number of women of 49 and under receiving community sentences has grown in the same proportion. There is no noticeable trend with women over 50 getting conditionally discharged.

The increase in prison numbers is also due to longer sentences being given.

Literature and Other Studies

Although studies have been carried out on both older women (eg. Bernard & Meade 1993), Bernard & Phillips 2000, Friedan 1992), and on women criminals (e.g. Malloch 2000, Devlin 1998), little research has been undertaken specifically on older woman offenders. Most of the available literature, and the relative studies deal with women as a whole and do not focus on the older age group. In particular, Frazer (2002) is concerned primarily with older male criminals and Wahidin (2002) looks specifically at older women in prison. This study differs in that it addresses the issues of older women within the entire criminal justice system, not only those serving prison sentences.

3. Findings

a) The Women Behind the Statistics

Of the 19 cases studied:

- 10 were obtained through personal interviews
- 7 were obtained through reading Probation Officer reports, pre-sentence Reports etc.
- 2 were obtained through sitting in Court as a Magistrate on their cases

Offences

- 8 committed offences of fraud or deception.
- 4 were guilty of importing drugs
- 2 were persistent ‘shoplifters’
- 2 drove while unfit through alcohol
- 1 committed an offence of violence against the person
- 1 committed arson
- 1 laundered money

b) What Links the Women?

Personal Circumstances

Obviously it is difficult to be definitive in such a small sample, but of these 19:

- 8 suffered from violence by a parent or partner
- 8 had mental health problems including depression
- 6 suffered from alcohol or drug abuse
- 4 were deprived of a parent early on – either through death or abandonment

Name	Violence: parent or partner	Deprived of parent	Mental Health inc. depression	Alcohol/Drug abuse	No category
Ann	x				
Olive			x		
Maggie					x
Hilda			x		
Valerie				x	
Mary				x	
Jodie			x	x	
Laura			x		
Maria		x			

Name	Violence: parent or partner	Deprived of parent	Mental Health inc. depression	Alcohol/Drug abuse	No category
Lisa		x			
Paula	x			x	
Teresa	x		x		
Vera	x				
Ava	x		x		
Susan	x		x		
Emma	x			x	
Mercia		x	x		
Rose		x			
Sandy					

Punishment

- 9 were given a prison sentence
- 6 received a Community Rehabilitation Order
- 3 were given a Community Punishment Order
- 1 was awaiting a pre-sentence report at the time of the study and was therefore unsentenced.

Although the sample in my study was very small, violence from a parent or partner (Prof. Carlen, 1990 found that 90% of women lifers were at some point abused by men) suggests a link as do mental health issues and abuse of drugs or alcohol. Most did not have a loving, close family. An absentee parent may well lead to the lack of a good role model. The rise in custodial sentences for the over 50s shown in my statistics is also reflected here.

c) What Statutory Organisations Are Doing To Deal With The Problem

i) Home Office

The Home Office Development and Statistics department provided me with the statistics used in this study. The Government Minister responsible for the Criminal Justice Bill (2003), along with officers working in the London Probation Service, strongly advocated alternatives to prison and work was being undertaken to making the general public realise that a community sentence is not a soft option. Inconsistencies were perceived between different Magistrates' courts. Re-iterated by others was the point that there are no programmes to assist people to stop offending for those serving under 12 months. The view was expressed by this Minister that offenders should be tested for drugs at the bail stage. He questioned whether they should be given bail depending on whether they agree to go on a drugs programme.

At the time of interview the incumbent Minister for Prisons commented that there used to be a greater difference between the length of sentences given to men as opposed to women. The courts are now handing

down longer sentences to women, the average

being 17 months, whereas it used to be 9 months. He suggested that this narrowing of the difference might be due to greater equality in society!

Through interview I learnt of the effect of the work of the Policy Adviser, Adult Offenders and Rehabilitation Unit, Home Office, on social exclusion and its report (Home Office 2002). Work on a national rehabilitation strategy concerning the resettlement of offenders and strategies to reduce offending is on-going. Although affecting younger people too, stable accommodation is of major importance to older women offenders as lack of it can cause offending behaviour alongside social exclusion and family breakdown. Hopefully older women will now be on the Home Office agenda, too.

ii) Probation Service

London-wide

Research officers for the London probation area find there is a lower re-conviction rate when offenders have programmes, e.g on anger management, in their community rehabilitation package. The only concrete measure of success is whether someone manages not to re-offend during the life of the order. Programmes are designed to change their attitudes and thereby reduce recidivism. The probation service keeps data on compliance with community orders.

Local London area

The head of service delivery of the London probation area studied noted that records are not kept of older women who care for a parent so we do not know how many women are affected by carers problems.

iii) Courts and Magistrates

I interviewed a Crown Court Judge, 2 Justices' Clerks, 3 Magistrates, a District Judge and a lawyer (who is also a Magistrate).

There are not many older women appearing in the (very busy) PSA in London that I studied. The District Judge and lay Magistrates (who work voluntarily within the statutory system but with considerable training) said that they saw very few women over 50 and where this did occur, it was nearly always for offences of dishonesty. All agreed that the approach of the Magistracy is the same as that for other offenders – depending on background and whether, for example, it is a first time offence. Half those interviewed thought there had been no change in the last ten years in the way that they decide on a sentence when dealing with older women offenders and half thought it had changed in that there is now a more structured approach and full use of psychiatric reports and help. Magistrates were getting conflicting messages from Government about giving more prison sentences or not giving a prison sentence. Obviously, most of the women sentenced to custody for more serious offences are dealt with in the Crown Court. Magistrates sentencing all offenders in 2003 gave immediate custodial sentences to only 4% of those dealt with; fine 73%; community sentence 12%; other sentence 11% (Home Office 2004).

Magistrates sentence on the facts of the case - for all age groups - and whether the sentence is appropriate, so “the offence is so serious that only a custodial sentence is appropriate”. They look at three elements in determination: punishment, deterrence and prevention of re-offending. The lawyer thought that sentencing is formulaic these days, particularly for more serious offences, and is dictated from above, from the Court of Appeal. Only the District Judge (DJ) was able to respond fully to a question on assessing the effectiveness of a sentence. She relies on information from the Probation Service and notes whether the offender has complied with a previous Order or not. It is important not to impose a community sentence older women cannot or will not comply with, resulting in certain re-sentencing. All the lay Magistrates feel that there is no way of knowing in the majority of cases as they do not receive feedback (although there is provision to require a report back on compliance, most magistrates do not know/use this).

Regarding the causes of offending behaviour by older women, there was agreement that family breakdown and lack of support from family and friends, mental health issues, abusive relationships, poverty and alcohol abuses were the chief reasons. Factors that were perceived as influential in helping older women to stop offending included having a place of their own, financial support, stability in their lives and good family relationships; counselling and probation input were also considered important. Some of the Magistrates interviewed thought that nothing can stop older women offending and that the responsibility for them does not lie with the Magistrates who are there to guard the public. Others of us – including the DJ – believe that by helping older women to stop offending we are serving the community as less crime will lead to a safer society.

The DJ thought that older women offenders should be dealt with in the community, but the lay Magistrates were of the opinion they should be dealt with in the same way as all others, on the merits of the case.

iv) Prison Service and the Women’s Estate Policy Unity Liason Forum

The Women’s Prison Estate (all the women’s prisons in England and Wales) is a group rather than an area. The Liaison Forum brings together those working (both statutory and voluntary organisations) within the Women’s Estate. It discusses practical ways of developing closer relationships with the voluntary sector. There is also a women’s offending reduction programme. Those interviewed noted that there are more women in prison although crime has generally gone down. 3% of all sentenced women are over 50.

d) What Voluntary Organisations ^(see Appendix 1) Are Doing To Deal With The Problem

The voluntary organisations I interviewed dealt with offenders in different ways. There are caps on some support services whereby those over 50 are excluded.

Three of those interviewed spoke to me about the general public’s adverse reaction to older prisoners and the establishment of a network of people interested in older prisoners’ needs. I am now involved with this group.

On the whole the representatives of these organisations feel that a community sentence is better for an older person than a custodial disposal as serving time in prison frequently results in loss of employment, loss of a

home and the weakening of family relationships as well as suffering from financial hardship. There is scope for prisons to work with voluntary agencies operating in the area of a prison.

4. Discussion

How Should We Deal With Our “Problem Older Women”?

At the present time there is only one prison - Kingston – catering for older prisoners and that is only for men.

In my study – albeit small – 10 of the 19 women were first time offenders. A higher number of younger rather than older women are getting community sentences as there appears to be more suitable work to satisfy the Community Punishment Order for them. The work available, in particular in isolated and rural areas, seems geared to young people, predominantly male. Older women’s needs fit uneasily into a system designed for men.

Prisoners generally suffer more health problems than those outside. Older women in prison find that their needs are not catered for (Wahidin 2002). They suffer more from age-related illnesses than older women do in general and their medical needs are not dealt with appropriately. It is also important to appreciate that older women can be carers upwards as well as downwards.

Women are more disadvantaged than men because they generally get paid less than men in employment. Older women are doubly disadvantaged because they find it harder to find employment than men. A custodial sentence makes it more difficult for a woman, particularly an older woman, to adjust back into society. Older women who are not capable of working in prison do not receive money to put aside for when they are released.

It is important for everyone to have a stable home life. Older women, in particular, have generally lived in the same community, if not house, for many years. Placing these very vulnerable women in prisons far from home (the tendency is to move prisoners as they progress nearer to a release date) is far from helpful and can result in a complete breakdown of their family unit. “At the end of 2004 half of all women in prison were held more than 50 miles from their home and a quarter were held more than 100 miles away.” (PRT 2004). The women lose touch with their local probation officer if they spend many years in custody and, when they are moved around, can miss important medical appointments.

Many of the organisations, both statutory and voluntary, have questioned whether custody is the appropriate sentence for women over 50. But is it the case, that for some offenders, prison may well be the right place for them? For drug abuse offenders, prison may be the only place where they can receive and benefit from a proper, long lasting detoxification programme. It cannot be right that some offenders feel that the only way that they can get long-term treatment for a drug problem is by remaining in prison. We know the consequences of prison for older women (see my comments below), and there needs to be adequate care and on-going treatment in the community to enable women to feel secure in receiving treatment outside so that they are not thrown back into the same situation that contributed to their offending in the first place.

It is disturbing to see (Table 2), therefore, that more women over 50 are being given custodial sentences. In spite of crime having gone down, there are more older women in prison. Is this as a result of equality issues? The aged used to be treated with more leniency but my research shows that older, as well as younger, women

are getting longer sentences than they used to, more like their male counter parts. Surely this is not the way of progress. Prison is not suitable for older women. Women who go to prison age more – by 10 years (Wahidin, 2002) – than women who do not. Conditions in prison are not conducive to the good health of older women. The significant care needs of older women in prison, particularly in the areas of gynaecology and osteoporosis, emerge from my report. Certainly it is not appropriate to ‘give them a pill and shut them up.’ There are environment issues of design including the glare of strip lighting, lack of carpet, slippery floors in showers, lots of stairs, even sharing a room; older women are sometimes put in prison dormitories as a disciplinary measure to control undisciplined younger women. Often older women suffering from depression are quieter than younger women and thus seen as a civilising influence. If there were to be designated establishments for older women this would be lost but older women would be more content. I am not recommending this as the women might end up further from home. However all bed allocation and access to facilities should take age and disability into account.

It could be considered to be an advantage that a large number of magistrates are over 50, however I have not found that this has resulted in fairer treatment for older women.

I expected to come across the ‘sandwich’ criminal, older women stealing to support an aged parent, grown-up children, and, perhaps, grandchildren. There are no statistics kept on this and I did not come across examples.

5. Recommendations

1. There is a need for somewhere that enforces detoxification. However, this does not have to be a prison; it would be preferable for the offenders to go to a proper rehabilitation facility.
2. Short-term residential detoxification facilities for those abusing drugs or alcohol should be developed and this should form part of a Community Rehabilitation Order.
3. Community women’s prisons should be established so that where a custodial sentence is imposed, older women can remain near their families, close to the area where they will be released and thus stand a better chance of not re-offending.
4. Prisons should provide good prison care, particularly catering for women’s health and emotional/psychological needs. It is important to keep older people physically and mentally healthy as long as possible (Newman, 1989). What a person has done should be reflected in the sentence, not in the care she receives. Once in prison older women should have the same opportunities as younger women for education, employment and other resettlement needs.
5. There should be an Older People’s Panel (similar to a Youth Court Panel) which specialises in dealing with the over 50s. This Panel would receive training in dealing with older people’s needs as well as general ageing issues including persistent older male and female offenders. In a busy court members from the Panel could sit one morning a week to hear all cases. In a court with a smaller throughput it might be more appropriate to sit say one morning a month to hear all except some first hearings which may need to be heard earlier.

6. Petty offenders should not be in prison, which should be kept for those older women who commit violent or more serious crimes. There are no programmes offered for those serving less than 12 months. Lord Irvine, Lord Chancellor (2002) said, “Prison only when necessary and for no longer than necessary”. Prison should be reserved for persistent and dangerous offenders.
7. There is a need for women only programmes designed for older women under community rehabilitation orders. Appropriate community service, which is a useful disposal, should be given to older women wherever they happen to live. Older women offenders coming out of prison need help, before release, with housing (which might include dealing with issues around domestic violence or marital breakdown), with their educational needs, with finding a job or sorting out their pension, with relationship issues.
8. Proper account should be taken of the recommendations of the National Service Framework for Older People (Dept. of Health, 2001), “At any point in time 700 people in prison are aged over 60. They have a wide range of health and social care needs both while in prison and on release...important that there is good liaison...to ensure that prisoners who are being released are assessed for and receive services which meet their continuing health and social care needs.” The NSF’s standards include dealing with incontinence – a disabling condition for some older women prisoners.
9. Environmental design in prisons, e.g. replacing strip lighting, being able to switch on lights from bed, should be looked at to make them more comfortable for older women.
10. There is a need for the Government to develop a strategy for older offenders. This is being partially addressed in the Thematic Review (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004).

In Conclusion

Older women offenders, who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System, face a last chance to lead a life free from contact with the law. Perhaps it is also a last chance for society – which is all of us – to prove to the older women, through the CJS, that we care what happens to them.

“Many a woman has a past...” Oscar Wilde

Can we not offer them a future?

Bibliography

- Age Concern England (2003): *Older People...in a prison somewhere near you*, Report of a Seminar attended by C. Newman
- Age Concern England: Information Department
- Age Concern London (2003): *Making Age Work for London*, London: ACL
- Ageing, Crime and Society Conference* organised by British Society of Criminology in association with Better Government for Older People (3 March 2004)
- Arbert, S. & Ginn, J. (1991): *Gender and Later Life*, London: Sage Publications
- Baird, V. (2003): 'Women and Justice', article in Vol. 59 no.7 of *Magistrate*, The Magistrates' Association
- Bernard, M. and Phillips, J. (eds.) (2000): *Women Ageing: Changing Identities, Challenging Myths*, London: Routledge
- Bernard, M. and Meade, K. (eds) (1993): *Women Come of Age*, London: Edward Arnold
- Carlen, P. (1990): *Alternatives to Women's Imprisonment*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Catholic Agency for Social Concern (1999): *Women in Prison*, London: CASC
- Clean Break (2002): *Prospectus*, London
- Clean Break (2002): *Student Handbook*, London
- CPS Conference 7 November 2002: *London & You – Working with the Community*
- Department of Health (2001): *National Service Framework for Older People*, London: Dept. of Health
- Devlin, A. (1998): *Invisible Women*, Winchester: Waterside Press
- Dowling, C. (2001): *Making the Education Connection, Women, Prisons and Education*, publ. Women In Prison
- Farrall, S. and Gadd, D. (2004): 'The Frequency of the Fear of Crime', article in *British Journal of Criminology* 44
- Fawcett (2003), *Women and the Criminal Justice System*, London: Fawcett Society
- Fawcett (2004), *Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System*, London: Fawcett Society
- Frazer, L. (2002): *Ageing Inside: A Study of Older Prisoners in England & Wales: Prevalence, Profile & Policy*, School of Policy Studies, University of Bristol
- Friedan, B. (1992), *The Fountain of Age*, Jonathan Cape, London: Sage
- Help the Aged (2004): *Policy Update Edition 55* (1 in 5 pensioners live in poverty), London: HtA
- Help the Aged (2002): *Tackling Older People's Fear of Crime*, Help the Aged Policy Team report, London:

HtA

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, (2004), *No Problems - Old and Quiet, Older Prisoners in England and Wales, Thematic Review*

Home Office, (2002): Home Office Development & Statistics Division – personal communication

Home Office, (2002): *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, Report by the Social Exclusion Unit

Home Office, (1990): *The Sentence of the Court*, London: HMSO

Home Office (2002): *Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System*, Section 95

Home Office (2004): *Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System*, Section 95

Home Office (2004): Home Office: *Criminal Statistics England & Wales 2003*

Home Office (2003): *Together - Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour*

Home Office (24 July 2003): Women's Estate Policy Unit – Liaison Forum

Howse, K. (2003), *Growing Old in Prison*, London: CPA

Irvine, Lord of Laing (26 October 2002): The Lord Chancellor as President of the Magistrates' Association addressing AGM 26/10/02

Malloch, M. (2000): *Women, Drugs and Custody*, Winchester: Waterside Press

NACRO (2001): *Women Beyond Bars – A Positive Agenda*, London: NACRO

Newman, C. (1989) *Home Tutor Scheme for Housebound Elderly in W14 Report of a Pilot Project*, unpublished

Prison Reform Trust (2002): *Annual Report*, London: PRT

Prison Reform Trust (2004): *Factfile*, London: PRT

Prison Reform Trust (2000): *Justice For Women: The Need for Reform, Report of the Committee on Women's Imprisonment*, London: PRT

Wahidin, A (2002): *Life in the Shadows: A Qualitative Study of Older Women in Prison*, PhD thesis, Keele University

Women's Estate Policy Unit – Liaison Forum, London

Appendix One

Age Concern England (ACE)

is a Federation of Age Concerns throughout England. ACE provides policy direction, an extensive information service and a support and developmental role to the smaller Age Concerns. ACE has undertaken some policy work on older prisoners. The organisation put out an Internal Briefing Paper on 'Older Prisoners in Prison and Older Prisoners Preparing to leave Prison' and convened a Seminar on older prisoners that I attended.

Better Government For Older People (BGOP)

is a movement of older people, local and national government and voluntary sector organisations to change attitudes and services in order to achieve an improved society of older people across the UK.

CAST

provides education, advice and support to women from a variety of backgrounds, particularly ex-prisoners, ex-offenders, and women recovering from alcohol/drug addictions or with a history of mental health issues. The essence of CAST is to empower women to grow and achieve through unconditional support and guidance. The students gain self-awareness and build confidence through a variety of classes, support groups and one to one sessions. The organisation helps women to rehabilitate within the community. At the time of the interview there were three women over 50 attending classes. No upper age limit.

Clean Break

is the UK's only women's theatre company primarily for ex-offenders, but also for women with experience of the mental health system. Clean Break has a commitment to theatre and arts as media which open up possibilities for their clients to develop personal, social, professional and creative skills. Alongside education provision is a support system. At any time there are women of 50+ recruited from inside prisons, as well as from bail hostels, homeless projects and the probation service. Clean Break builds up the women's self-esteem and enables them to enter the labour market. The organisation helps older women become more confident by giving them a space where they are not judged on their crime. Evidence of success is demonstrated by women going on further courses or into work.

Help the Aged (HtA)

now undertakes policy work leading to practical help on issues of concern to older people. One of their campaigns is a HtA Senior Safety Campaign. Fear of crime is a major issue for older people, particularly women, which daily weakens the confidence required to live happy and independent lives. In their report HtA proposes a 10 point action plan for older people and those who assist them aimed at reducing both crime and the fear of crime (HtA, 2002)

National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (Nacro)

undertakes work with women offenders. NACRO runs a national resettlement telephone line. Housing services provide supported housing projects of various kinds – about 2,000 beds/places.

North Lambeth Day Centre

caters for homeless and rough sleepers, men and women. Over 50s only attend one day a week.

The Prison Reform Trust

aims to create a just, humane and effective penal system. It does this by enquiring into the workings of the system; informing prisoners, staff and the wider public; and by influencing Parliament, Government and officials towards reform.

Providence Row

is a Charity working with homeless people around the East End of London. It has developed its own services at a Day Centre. Part of its remit includes face to face works with vulnerable women, including over 50s, in the Brick Lane area.

Turning Point

is a charity helping offenders, including older women, to rehabilitate away from drugs and alcohol. A local area worker that I spoke to works in partnership with the local Drug Action Team. He helps people to get off drugs through assessment, creating a care plan and setting goals. He assists offenders to learn to talk to friends and family and avoid situations that could lead to using drugs or alcohol. He can refer people to more specialist centres or counselling. It is very difficult to find rehabilitation accommodation.

Women In Prison (WIP)

provides welfare and education to women in prison and also campaigns for women prisoners. It works across the entire women's estate. Most referrals to WIP are made via word of mouth from one prisoner to another. WIP is committed to a reduction in the number of women being sent to prison and to more compassionate and effective programmes for the women who are sent to prison. For older women the responsibilities of caring for older parents become an issue, especially, for example, for Asian women whose older parents may speak no English at all. There are students over 50 in a number of prisons.

The Griffins Society

The Griffins Society is a voluntary organisation working for the care and resettlement of female offenders, including those with a history of mental illness and violent behaviour. The Society was set up in 1966. At that time there was little residential provision for women offenders and the Society concentrated its efforts on filling that gap by providing specialist hostel and move-on accommodation. Those residential projects were transferred to another voluntary organisation in 1997 and the Society decided to alter the focus of its activities. This change of emphasis included establishing the Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme in the Social Policy Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2001.

The Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme

The aim of the Fellowship Programme is to provide ‘thinking space’ for those working in the criminal justice system or allied fields who wish to study a particular aspect of the circumstances or treatment of women offenders. Applications are welcomed from anyone with an interest in female offenders, such as magistrates, probation officers, staff of supported accommodation, drug/alcohol counsellors. In keeping with its origins, the Griffins Society welcomes applications from the voluntary sector, as well as statutory organisations. Fellowships are not awarded to people in academic employment, or studying for a degree. Each Fellowship runs for one year and Fellows are awarded a grant. Academic support and supervision is provided by Dr Judith Rungay, Director of the Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme. Fellows have full access to all facilities at the London School of Economics.

The views expressed in this Research Briefing are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of The Griffins Society or the London School of Economics and Political Science.

© The Griffins Society. This Research Briefing can be reproduced as long as the author and The Griffins Society are acknowledged. All Research Briefings and the full text Research Papers are available on the Griffins Society website.

For further information about the Fellowship Programme and its publications, or to correspond with the author, please contact the Griffins Society:

The Griffins Society
77 Holloway Road
London, N7 8JZ

020 7607 2304
admin@thegriffinssociety.org
www.thegriffinssociety.org

The Griffins Society is a Registered Charity (Reg. No. 1034571)