

# 'Double invisibility': Recalled and female - and forgotten in the Criminal Justice System?

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Research Paper 2009/03

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## Abstract

This research looked at the reasons that women return to custody following a breach of licence (recall). Its purpose was to find out more about why women come back to custody; to see if there were discrepancies in the reporting; and to find out whether there were certain women more at risk of being recalled than others. The research also asked whether women who had been recalled had particular difficulties resettling into the community.

## Findings

The increase in number of recalls is due to legislation, government attitude, pressure from the media, changes in probation culture and ethos, and greater emphasis on risk avoidance.

Offenders, who have chaotic lives are more likely to find it difficult to comply with their licence conditions so they are returned to custody more quickly than offenders who are more organised and have stronger support structures.

Offender Managers are less likely to address the welfare needs of these offenders directly because of recent changes in ethos. They are less able to respond to particular difficulties offenders face during the transition from prison to community or their general resettlement needs. Women with complex needs are more disadvantaged by these changes.

It is harder to secure accommodation for female than male offenders. This means that when women are recalled they may be held in prison longer than men.

A trusting relationship between offender and Offender Manager may contribute to the successful completion of a licence period; however there are practical and emotional obstacles making it more difficult for some women to establish this kind of relationship.

Professionals have less experience of working with women released from custody than men and possibly have less understanding of women's specific needs.

## Recommendations

- Simplify the language used on licences, the number of conditions routinely used, and make the most subjective conditions clearer and offender-specific.
- Record accurate and detailed statistics about the numbers of male and female offenders recalled; how quickly post-release breach occurs; and which conditions are breached.
- Review the risk-avoidance approach which impacts most harshly and unfairly on offenders who are most needy.
- Use the powers of immediate recall only in the case of serious risk to the public.
- Ensure that offenders who do not pose immediate risk to the public have opportunities to make representation against recall before they are returned to custody.
- Ensure that professionals involved in the process of recall have greater understanding of the needs of complex women offenders, and allow them more discretion in applying rules of breach and recall.
- Target interventions and support for offenders most at risk of recall, through multi agency work, pre- and post-release.
- Provide consistent support for those most at risk of recall, especially female offenders, so that they can develop trusting relationships with an individual whilst in prison and after release, and use the model of welfare support when it is considered appropriate to do so.
- Encourage additional research into this subject - to compare male and female offenders who are recalled, and to gather quantitative data about the characteristics of offenders who are recalled as opposed to offenders who successfully complete their licenses.
- Increase the 'visibility' of recalled women.