

The Sustainability of Gender Specific Provision in the Youth Justice System

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Abstract

The original aim of this research was to examine the efficacy of the gender specific community based provision offered to young women by Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire youth offending services. It was also to consider whether girls responded more positively to a gender specific approach. During the preliminary preparations it became apparent that this would require research with a larger sample size. Accordingly, taking into account the limitations of the sample group, and without a matched cohort who had not attended the gender specific programmes, sustainability became the main focus of the research proposal.

Findings

The findings demonstrated that there were a number of interconnecting factors, each of which was equally relevant to the sustainability of gender specific provision, and in addition, points towards a level of evidence to indicate effectiveness.

In order to ensure that all young women receive an equitable, gender specific approach, it is essential that the Government Equalities Office becomes more proactive in ensuring that the Equality Act 2006 is implemented consistently throughout the criminal justice system.

The role of the YJB in the cycle of sustainability is two-fold. Firstly, it requires direction from the GEO in ensuring that the Gender Equality Duty is implemented throughout the system. Secondly, the YJB needs to be more proactive in ensuring managers and staff are aware of emerging evidence, in order that this can be transferred.

Girls will continue to be discriminated against in terms of receiving gender specific interventions whilst managers have conflicting approaches to service delivery. The argument that there are 'not enough' girls is not a sufficient justification to either ignore the needs of girls or fail to invest in gender specific training for staff, but this is likely to remain the norm without a mandate from the YJB who have the authority to steer YOTs towards addressing gender as a diversity issue.

Recommendations

- The YJB should provide a national policy on working effectively with girls. Those working within the youth justice system would then interpret the national policy according to local need and resources.
- The YJB should set up a Girls and Young Women's policy team, employing the 'Women's Policy Team' set up by NOMS as an example.
- It is essential that the findings of the YJB report, (YJB: 2009) are disseminated to all front line staff who work with young women.
- The YJB should make funding available to appoint a gender champion in each YOT and in the secure estate.
- Investment is required for more rigorous gender specific training and on-going support and supervision for all those charged with meeting the complex needs of girls and young women.
- Training should be prioritised for all those working with girls or women in the Criminal Justice System.
- All YOTs and the secure estate should use a gender specific assessment tool that identifies the strengths, and meets the needs, of the young women in its area. Information can be taken from ASSET and other assessment instruments regarding family relationships, mental health, basic needs, substance misuse, life skills, history of abuse and neglect, physical safety, peer relationships, school, social supports, parenting and health to create such a tool.
- More research should be commissioned to examine the efficacy of existing gender specific provision.