



Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

**The Offender Management  
Guide to Working with Women  
Offenders  
May 2008**

## Document Specification

Document purpose	Guidance to probation areas, offender managers and Regional Offender Managers / Directors of Offender Management, to improve service delivery to women in the criminal justice system to help them to reduce their offending the intention is to promote the best possible provision for this generally vulnerable offender group at all stages of their 'journey' through the criminal justice system, with the aim of breaking cycles of re-offending and, where appropriate, providing effective alternatives to custody for socially excluded women at risk of offending .
Other key reference documentation	The Corston Report. <sup>1</sup> The Government Response to the Corston Report. <sup>2</sup> HM Prison Service Orders 4800 – Women Offenders Probation Service National Standards (PC15/2005). The Offender Management Model. National Strategy and Service Framework Improving Services to Women Offenders, 2008 (MoJ). (a detailed list of references is available at the end of this document)
Authorship	National Offender Management Service (NOMS), Interventions and Substance Abuse Unit
Publication date	May 30 <sup>th</sup> 2008
Target audience	Chief Officers of probation areas; ROMs / DOMs, offender managers; NOMS managers and delivery partners; sentencers; police; local authorities; other government departments; HM Prison Service; Private Prison Providers; other providers of offender assessment and community supervision; YJB; other relevant service providers in custody and the community, including health and learning and skills; HM Prison Inspectorate; HM Probation Inspectorate; other Inspectorates (OfSTED; CSCI; CHI); and sentencers
Description	A revised guide to replace the National Probation Service 'Good Practice Guide on Delivering Effective Services for Women Offenders in the Community.' The guide will support the implementation of the Government's strategic aims and objectives as set out in the National Service Framework for Women, and will ensure the necessary changes are made to improve interventions and services for women in the community.
Actions required	Probation areas, ROMs / DOMs, offender managers, offender supervisors and delivery partners to use this guide to improve local provision and delivery of services to women. Probation areas should promote the use of this guide and the recommended good practice that is included in it.
Timings	For use from publication. The intended life span of this document is until May 2012.
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# 1. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 This document replaces the 2006 Guidance to Working with Women Offenders<sup>3</sup>. Its aim is to bring practice up to date and to ensure that it reflects the Government's commitment to improving service provision to women offenders.

## **The Corston Report**

- 1.2 Baroness Corston's Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System reported in March 2007. The Corston Report concluded that women are disadvantaged in the criminal justice system because policies and practice were based primarily on meeting the needs of male offenders. Her report highlighted that it was necessary to adopt different approaches that were more appropriate to women's needs and characteristics to achieve improved and equal outcomes for women.
- 1.3 The Corston Report recommendations focus on improving community based interventions and services to ensure that these are sensitive and responsive to women's needs. Achieving this could help reduce the use of custody for women so that it is only used for those who really need to be there, because of the seriousness of their offending, or the threat they pose to others. The Government agreed with the majority of Baroness Corston's recommendations and in its response, published on 6 December 2007, made a range of commitments to take forward those recommendations. This revised guidance fulfils one of those commitments.
- 1.4 The Corston Report suggested that an improved, multi-agency, cross-departmental approach is needed to meet the multiple and complex needs often presented by women offenders. The Government response contained a number of cross-government commitments intended to ensure that improvements are made not only in the criminal justice system but also in services and provision that will help address other factors such as mental health, drugs, childcare, housing, education, training, and social exclusion.
- 1.5 Probation areas, offender managers and other probation service practitioners will have a key role in making sure that women offenders have access to the right interventions, services and support. It is important they are aware of the range of resources available for women in their local area.
- 1.6 For some women the most appropriate services and support will need to be different from those provided for men and for some of these they will be woman specific.
- 1.7 Good links between probation areas, offender managers and their local providers of women's services will be key to developing the most appropriate package of measures, including any specialist provision, to give women offenders the best chance of successfully completing their sentences and avoiding re-offending. Probation areas, offender managers and other probation service practitioners will have a key role in making sure that women offenders have access to the right interventions, services and support.
- 1.8 This guide provides information and advice on what is currently known about how the needs and characteristics of women offenders differ from men's, and what this means for probation areas and practitioners in terms of identifying the best way to address those needs.

## **National Service Framework for Women**

- 1.9 The National Service Framework for Women (NSF)<sup>4</sup> sets out how the Government intends to implement the recommendations of the Corston Report. It includes:
- The Government's strategic aims and priorities for delivering services to women offenders;
  - The needs of women offenders;
  - Effective services and pathways to reduce re-offending; and
  - Service requirements for each phase of the offender journey, including service ambition, what success would look like, and where primary and associated responsibilities lie.
- 1.10 The headline and measurable National Service Framework **strategic outcomes**, which support the MoJ Departmental Strategic Objectives, are to:
- 1) Reduce the number of women entering the criminal justice system;
  - 2) Reduce custodial remands for women, and where such remands are required make them as short as possible;
  - 3) Ensure sentencers are better informed about the difficulties currently experienced by women offenders in the criminal justice system;
  - 4) Ensure that the needs of women who are sentenced are met in the community wherever possible,<sup>5</sup> and reserve custody for only the most serious offenders, usually serving more than 12 months;
  - 5) Ensure that for women who are sentenced to custody, the facilities and interventions are appropriate to their needs and that there is better continuity of provision of services on their release;
  - 6) Reduce levels of self-harm by women offenders;
  - 7) Reduce re-offending by women.
- 1.11 This guide is intended as a tool to assist offender managers and other probation staff in fulfilling the Government's strategic aims and objectives as set out in the NSF for Women Offenders, published concurrently with this guidance.

<b>Recommended Good Practice</b>
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<b><i>NOMS managers and offender managers should read the National Service Framework as the key underpinning document for this guidance.</i></b>
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### **The needs of women offenders**

- 1.12 The courts have been using custody more frequently for women in recent years - a woman in 2002 was three times more likely to receive custody compared to 1994. The nature and seriousness of their offending has not generally become worse but more severe sentences are being imposed for less serious offences. The reasons behind women's offending are often varied and complex, and a multi-agency approach may be required to reduce re-offending and to enable women to settle successfully in the community.

- 1.13 Currently, 75% of all sentenced women prisoners serve 12 months or less. 57% of women released in the first 6 months of 2001 were reconvicted within 2 years. The Government wants to end this 'revolving door' pattern by increasing the availability and use of credible and appropriate community based sentences for women who are currently sentenced to terms of imprisonment of under 12 months.
- 1.14 Since the publication of the 2006 guidance, knowledge about women's offending has increased, as has our knowledge of What Works. It is important to recognise that women are not a homogenous group and they will have different ethnic backgrounds, different sexual orientation, different cultural and religious beliefs, or have needs in relation to disability, or as carers. The needs of young adults and the way in which they engage can vary from those of older women. For some women one or more of these characteristics may be more important to how they experience service delivery than their gender. For some, making equality of outcome a reality may need differing support or intervention.

### **OASys data**

- 1.15 Analysis of OASys scores shows that for many sections the overall levels of need are similar for men and women. It is important to note that these figures neither provide a detailed assessment of their impact for many women nor the inter-relationships between the sections and the greater multiple needs for women. Whilst OASys identifies the problem it does not describe the different impact that this will have or the specific effects upon risk in an individual case.
- 1.16 For example the impact of homelessness for women with caring responsibility will be different from those experienced by those who do not, as will the solutions. Working with Social Services and the third sector to meet each person's needs will be important.
- 1.17 The data does, however, show significant gender differences in the numbers identified as victims of domestic violence, with nearly half of women being identified as such compared with only 6% of men. The data also highlights the importance that assessors give to the emotional and well-being sections for women.
- 1.18 Full understanding of the needs of women in the criminal justice system cannot be based upon OASys alone. An OASys assessment is not completed for all cases. In particular, those who receive less than 12 months in custody will not be subject to supervision and may not have had an OASys assessment before sentence. Women are over-represented in this group.
- 1.19 Chapter 3 provides detailed practice guidance against each OASys section in turn.

### **Survivors of abuse**

- 1.20 The Corston Report referred in detail to the impact of domestic or sexual abuse and work in the 'sex trade' on offending by women. It is crucial to consider the implications of these factors on the assessment, sentencing, and supervision of women offenders. In general these are issues which set women offenders apart from the vast majority of male offenders, and some of the challenges they generate for effective supervision are detailed below.

- 1.21 OASys national data in 2007 identified that 48% of women offenders on probation case loads have disclosed to the assessor that they have experienced domestic abuse. There may be many more who do not feel able to disclose. Women offenders may have also experienced sexual violence or childhood sexual abuse. This figure is not recorded on OASys and is likely to be disclosed even less willingly. In addition, over half of women in prison have suffered domestic violence and a third have experienced sexual abuse. It is common for victims to experience multiple incidents of sexual or domestic abuse, sometimes over long periods of time, before they seek support or report it to the police. Given the complex effects of abuse it is perhaps unsurprising that many women choose not to disclose what has happened to them. For some this difficulty may be exacerbated by additional and specific familial, social or cultural factors.
- 1.22 The legal definition of domestic violence now extends beyond intimate partners to include acts perpetrated by extended family members, as well as acts such as forced marriage, and other so-called 'honour' crimes. Probation staff should be aware of resources to draw on when such abuse is a potential issue. Reunite International (reuniteinternational.com) estimates that 1,000 British Asian girls are forced into marriage against their will each year. It is estimated that 74,000 women in the UK have been genitally mutilated and 7,000 girls under 16 are at risk of female genital mutilation. The needs of women offenders in minority ethnic groups must be carefully assessed to ensure that issues of abuse can be worked with in a non-discriminatory way. If necessary, probation staff should refer to an appropriate community organisation to gain a greater understanding of less familiar cultural contexts.

***Recommended Good Practice: Women who are currently in abusive relationships should not be subjected to pressure to leave and offender managers must be aware that increasing levels of awareness and women's attempts to leave or assert herself may impact on her immediate safety. Instead, women should be assisted to develop realistic safety plans when they are at risk of current victimisation. These plans cannot be completely standardised and will depend on the particular situation of each individual woman. She is likely to be the best source of information regarding when she is most at risk but may not have previously planned for these occasions. This work is the specialism of most services dealing with women who have been abused and in particular 'Women Safety Workers', and 'Independent Domestic Violence Advocates' can be a valuable source of information. There is also a national domestic violence helpline (0808 2000 247) and local rape crisis helpline numbers (rapecrisis.org.uk).***

- 1.23 Owing to the relatively small numbers there is currently little research about female perpetrators of domestic abuse. The work undertaken in domestic violence programmes is generally geared to challenging and exploring the beliefs which support male violence towards women. As there are currently no accredited

programmes to tackle the behaviour of female perpetrators, work with these women will need to be undertaken through structured work as part of a supervision requirement or another accredited programme if the profile fits the targeting criteria.

## Foreign national offenders

- 1.24 There are specific issues relating to foreign nationals, including those who have been trafficked into the UK, and are subsequently used in organised crime and the sex trade. These women are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The offender manager needs to take into consideration these abusive circumstances when assessing the reasons for offending. This group is particularly vulnerable to drug misuse. OMs can enhance the effectiveness of their supervision of foreign national women through partnerships and links with local women's organisations. There are a small number of organisations who specifically work with refugee women or foreign national women prisoners, who have knowledge, skills and credibility which can be harnessed to reduce the risk of re-offending. When foreign national women offenders are sentenced to custody OMs should work closely with prison staff on the re-settlement needs of each individual offender.

***Recommended Good Practice: Many foreign nationals are likely to experience difficulty in accessing support due to language barriers. It is important that the CJS guidance 2007<sup>6</sup> is followed as it is designed to safeguard the offender by the use of professional services. It maybe of particular importance for a women offender not to make use of an interpreter from their immediate community.***

## Children as Victims

- 1.25 It is likely that children within a household where abuse is taking place are at some level of risk even if they are not the immediate victims of violence or sexual assault. Estimates of the link between the incidence of domestic violence and physical child abuse ranges from 30% to 65% dependant on the study. This is usually either from the child intervening to protect the mother, or from a violent man presenting a direct risk to children within the household.

***Recommended Good Practice:***

- ***The risk to children must always be considered, and links made with social services as appropriate.***
- ***When working with young adult offenders it is important to consider whether they are a child of abusive parents. We know today that increasing numbers of 17-20 year olds are remaining in the parental home for economic reasons; this should be a consideration when looking at women offenders in understanding their criminogenic environment. Additionally many especially those who have been in care, may still fall under the terms of the Children Act.***

## Self Harm

- 1.26 There are well researched links between abuse with self harm and suicidal behaviour, mental health, and emotional problems. A recent study of female offender

population reports 31% of female offenders in the community and 46% in custody have depression and overall 67% suffer from anxiety. Further to this, 38% of women in this study had attempted suicide, usually outside of prison. Women in custody are at risk (more than half of all recorded incidents of self harm are within the female prison estate), but it is also worth remembering that women recently released from prison are 36 times more likely than the average population to commit suicide. There are additionally links between experience of abuse and substance misuse. This can be used as a means of escape from emotional distress. Many will need to offend to support this drug misuse. Issues of self harm should be recorded within the Risk of Harm section of OASys.

- 1.27 The majority of self-harm is to relieve feelings of anger, tension, anxiety or depression and, in most cases, is without suicidal intent. Intent varies between individuals and also from incident to incident for the same person. Methods of self harm can vary, with cutting being the most common, although a substantial number of incidents involve self-strangulation, hanging or poisoning. Other methods include head banging/wall punching, wound aggravation, ligature making, burning and suffocation.
- 1.28 Research in 1997<sup>7</sup> found that 10% of women had self harmed without suicidal intent during their current prison sentence. The prevalence of self harm is higher amongst women with neurotic disorders, with 20% having self harmed during their current prison term and post traumatic stress disorder with 25%. The prevalence of self harm also increased with time spent in prison, with only 3% of women who spent less than a month in prison having self harmed compared to 23% for those who spent 2 years or more in prison.<sup>8</sup> Analysis of self harm data conducted by the Safer Custody group made similar findings. Additionally they found that women who self-harm did so more than 5 times each time they were in custody and for many the number of incidents far exceeds this figure.

***Recommended good practice: Probation staff, in addition to using the guidance on emotional well being and health included in chapter 3 should look at Prison Service Orders 2700 and 4800 to gain a detailed understanding of the way self harm is managed in prison and to consider the role they can play in supporting prisons with early identification as well as gaining relevant post release support.***

### **Self Inflicted Deaths**

- 1.29 Women prisoners report higher levels of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts than their male prisoners. For example in a group of remand women prisoners surveyed 25% had attempted to kill themselves during their current prison sentence (O'Brien *et al* 2001)<sup>9</sup>.
- 1.30 Pratt *et al* (2006) found that prisoners have a greater risk of suicide during the first 12 months after release than the general population, with the risk for women being significantly higher than for men. The risk of suicide is particularly high during the first 28 days, during which about a fifth of all suicides occurred. Assistance with access to

the services on release from prison, such as housing, money, food, social support, physical and mental health care, can go a long way towards reducing this risk.

## Drug Related Deaths

- 1.31 A study by Marsden and Farrell (2005) looking at drug related deaths in newly released prisoners found that the key cause of death for women in the first week of release is drug related, with opiates being involved in 97% of cases in the first week and 87% of cases there after<sup>10</sup>. Overall, newly released women prisoners account for 12% of drug related deaths for women. PC 23/2007 Reducing the Risk of Drug Related Deaths gives further guidance.

***Recommended Good Practice: Women with substance misuse needs should be assessed to determine motivation to change and, if suitable, referral to a community drug treatment team. Substitution treatment should be available as part of IDTS and 2007 UK Guidelines on Drug Misuse and Dependence recommends that practitioners should consider re-induction prior to release for anyone with a history of injecting opiate use<sup>11</sup>. Additionally all CARAT services provide advice and information on avoidance of overdose to all of their clients.***

## Wider context

- 1.32 Offender managers and those providing interventions for women offenders should be aware of the range of resources available for women in their local area. Whilst Women Safety Workers (employed to support the domestic violence programmes) can often assist with this, they may not be aware of the full range of support. Some probation areas report that having a designated 'Women Offender Liaison' officer in a team or unit has proved useful, gathering and disseminating relevant information about local resources, and acquiring and sharing knowledge about women's experiences of the various community sentences and related requirements. Other areas have created semi-specialist offender managers, who work with partnership agencies to achieve the aims of the community order. Other probation areas may consider these as potential useful options.
- 1.33 An awareness of gender issues is crucial to the achievement of good practice in relation to women offenders. Gender awareness is integral to the diversity awareness training that Trainee Probation Officers undergo, and to the training of staff taking NVQ level 3. Diversity awareness training, provided by local areas to their staff, routinely includes issues of gender. As domestic abuse, self-harm and a history of abuse are issues that may be relevant to many women offenders, all frontline practitioners should be enabled to develop knowledge and understanding of these areas.
- 1.34 For accredited programmes, the recently revised training materials, developed as part of the learning process for programme facilitators, have a conscious emphasis on inclusion and on the importance of creating a safe learning environment. Achieving an inclusive culture has obvious benefits for all programme participants, including women. NOMS has developed a set of 'Facilitator Development Workshops' all of which have been equality impact assessed to ensure their relevance to working with a diverse group of offenders, including women. The NOMS

has undertaken to create a further Facilitator Development Workshop (which would include additional resource material), specifically to focus on 'Understanding the Needs of Women Offenders'. Although the workshop will be prepared with the context of accredited programmes in mind, the principles and resource material will also apply to the wider environment.

**Recommended Good Practice:**

***Chief officers should ensure an action plan is developed on working with women offenders that addresses the issues included in the National Service Framework, this guidance. It should reflect the needs of women offenders in their local area.***

***Chief officers should ensure that a digest of their area's services to women and those provided by others is compiled, including those by other statutory and third sector providers, and ensure that all offender managers and court staff have been asked to read and understand its contents by December 2008. This digest could also usefully be made available to the courts.***

***Chief officers should report their local area provision of services to women offenders and potential gaps in provision to their probation boards by December 2008 and how gaps will be addressed in subsequent business planning.***

***ROMs / DOMs should discuss with chief officers local provision of services to women offenders and how these can be implemented through the Service Level Agreements.***

***Training managers should include skills and awareness training on working with women within their annual training plan.***

***Chief Officers should review and update the guidance and support offered to officers working with self harm, and ensures that it provides detailed links to appropriate agencies in their area.***

## 2. The Offender Management Process for Women Offenders

### **Offender assessment and pre-sentence reports**

- 2.1 The assessment and planning stages will be most effective if the woman is involved and actively engages in planning and controlling her own future. It is vital that sentence planning and reviews during the custodial element of a sentence or community order involve the comments and views of all relevant providers and interventions staff involved.
- 2.2 OASys is the assessment tool used by prison and probation to determine the levels of needs and risk for any given offender. The first assessment stage, the pre-sentence report, is critical for determining the number and complexity of an individual's needs. As such it is important to consider the type of report prepared (Fast or Standard Delivery Reports). As women will often present multiple and inter-connected needs this may mean that the proportion suitable for Fast Delivery Reports will be lower. This does not represent a shift in the Fast/Standard Delivery Report threshold but aims to encourage appropriate application of it through better screening at adjournment. When deciding on the most appropriate type of report to prepare factors to consider include<sup>12</sup>:
- Being a primary carer
  - Being a victim themselves
  - Higher levels of self-harming
  - Different levels of, and reasons for, alcohol and drug dependency
  - Mental health issues
  - Physical needs (e.g. pregnancy)
- 2.3 Report writers should, where appropriate, put forward a credible case for the use of community sentences when making proposals to the courts. This may include provision of suitable placements for unpaid work with access to appropriate childcare - the available OASys data suggests that women are six times more likely to be carers than men, and twice as likely to live in a house with children.
- 2.4 It is important to avoid an overemphasis within the report of the needs of the women being assessed. Women should not receive a more stringent or demanding sentence as a means of accessing support. All sentencing proposals should be consistent with the principle that the sentence is commensurate with the offence, and that resources should follow risk. Instead, proper consideration of these needs may lead to a greater focus within the sentence upon appropriate support to address the needs, rather than upon any punitive component but be consistent with overall tiering guidance. This focus should lead to a greater level of success in terms of both completion and long term reductions in offending.

2.5 The NOMS Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource<sup>13</sup> identifies that in addition to being offence focused, risk management plans for women will often need to take account of :

- Abuse and trauma history of women as victims;
- Inappropriate relationships (often involving abuse);
- Substance abuse
- The health and emotional needs of women (valid OASys assessments indicate that 27% of women self-harm and 27% are assessed as being a suicide risk).

<b>Recommended good practice:</b>
<b><i>Areas should take action to ensure that women's needs are not being under identified owing to failure to assess appropriately at pre sentence stage.</i></b>
<b><i>OMs need to balance the benefits of an SDR with the risks of this leading to a custodial remand, giving appropriate attention to public protection. Where possible the use of fast delivery reports should be subject to careful consideration so as to ensure that complex and inter-connected needs are not overlooked.. At the same time the impact of either SDRs or FDRs on custodial remands and on sentence proposals should be locally monitored to inform decisions about the 'best mix'.</i></b>

2.6 Remand female prisoners make up about 20% of the female prison population and spend an average of 4-6 weeks in custody. However only 34% get a custodial sentence. This remand period may have had detrimental effects, including loss of accommodation for the woman and her dependents. Utilisation of bail support schemes (such as the Bail Accommodation and Support Service -BASS) needs to be improved so that courts have appropriate alternatives to remand. Probation areas can play a significant part in encouraging their use.

2.7 At all levels, NOMS needs to continue to promote services that offer appropriate alternatives to remand in custody. Ensuring that existing bail information schemes in local prisons and where possible in courts are adequately resourced and that staff are appropriately trained is an essential part of this approach. Good links with health service diversion schemes, including forensic mental health teams, and with arrest/referral officers where they exist, need to be in place.

2.8 Offender managers should actively discourage the use of remand or short custody sentences as a means for detox or engagement with drug treatment services. This can be best achieved by being able to refer to local community based provision.

<b>Recommended Good Practice:</b>
<b><i>Chief officers of probation should ensure that courts and court staff have accurate and up to date information on bail provision and support, specifically that identified for women offenders. Additionally they should work with other agencies to promote the provision for mental health assessment and diversion for courts.</i></b>

2.9 To address issues of potential disclosure of abuse, as discussed earlier, women offenders should, where practicable, be given the choice of having a male or female

offender manager at the PSR stage. Many women offenders have been victims of abuse from men as adults and children. For some this may affect the experience of working with a male supervisor. The woman may feel more able to disclose such experiences and how these have impacted on her behaviour and physical and mental health to a female member of staff. In addition some women from particular cultural and religious backgrounds may find difficulties in being alone with a man. However, other women offenders may find it beneficial to have positive and safe contact with male practitioners. These considerations are of particular importance at the first points of contact, especially at the PSR stage.

<b>Recommended Good Practice:</b>
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<b><i>Where possible and where indications suggest this would assist, women offenders should be offered the option of having a female offender manager at the PSR stage</i></b>
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### **Achieving compliance and successful completion of supervision**

- 2.10 The woman offender and her offender manager must have as their first shared objective the successful completion of the period of supervision. Successful completion reduces the chance of re-offending and offers better public protection. Supporting this, for all offenders there is a need for consistency in the method of working, as set out in the sentence plan. Although it may be challenging, offender managers should seek to co-ordinate the approach of a range of professionals and volunteers working with an individual woman offender. This would enable appropriate support to be provided within the overall priorities of risk management by offender managers.
- 2.11 Continuity of the same offender manager is desirable if possible in all cases. Preferably this will run from PSR preparation stage and continue throughout the sentence until completion unless there are situations outside of the control of the probation service provider. This is particularly important for the relationship element of the supervision process.
- 2.12 Probation areas have the responsibility to meet their gender equality duty. This has a particular bearing on the application of **national standards**. Offender managers should be aiming to promote compliance. Care should be taken so that compliance with any sentence does not expose the offender to personal safety risks, and different considerations may apply to male and female offenders in this respect.

***Recommended Good Practice: The offender manager should consider ways to overcome issues such as transport, travel, child-care or other domestic caring challenges, family finance, etc. This may include scheduling a different balance between office and home visits, and a sensitively designed pattern of appointments.***

2.13 How the offender manager deals with failures to comply with the requirements of supervision is particularly important. They must take account of all of the circumstances when deciding whether an excuse given for failing to comply is “reasonable” (the term “reasonable excuse” is used in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and refers to community orders, suspended supervision orders, but not necessarily licences). This includes not only the direct circumstances of the failure itself, but also the wider circumstances of the offender. Offender managers may give weight to any or all of the following in deciding whether any excuse for failing to comply is deemed as reasonable :

- travel and transportation difficulties
- distance
- childcare or other domestic responsibilities
- financial hardship
- employment or religious or cultural commitments.

Some of these considerations will apply more particularly for women than for men.

2.14 Women offenders will be asked to attend probation premises which are also used by male offenders. Areas should take steps to minimise the risks of harassment and intimidation by groups of men in areas such as waiting rooms or common spaces. Some men may be attending for violent or sexual offences against women and others may have, as yet, unidentified or un-convicted behaviour that poses a risk to women. Probation waiting rooms are not suitable places for children. Such personal safety considerations should apply to decisions about where and at what times offenders are required to report.

***Recommended Good Practice: offender managers and office managers should consider setting aside periods or sessions when particularly vulnerable women offenders are given preference for particular reporting time slots.***

## **Unpaid Work**

2.17 Unpaid Work can be particularly successful as a disposal due to its flexibility; it can combine delivering an appropriate punishment as a sentence of the court with accommodating the circumstances and needs (including access to training and opportunities for employment) of individual women offenders.

2.18 The priority criterion in allocation is always the proper management of the risk of harm posed by the offender, but the views of individual women offenders must be sought at the outset and taken into account. Some women’s ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds may make it unacceptable for them to be alone with men who are strangers and some women, particularly those who are victims of abuse by men, may find the experience of having to work in a group of men so intimidating that it is equally unacceptable.

**Recommended Good Practice: as women offenders are more likely to have responsibilities as carers it is also important to ensure that a constructive approach is adopted to meet these needs. This may be through the provision of child care places or a variation to the number or timing of hours worked in a day (the National Standard for Unpaid Work requirement for an average of 6 hours work a week currently requires the work to be all in one session).**

**Recommended Good Practice: The offender manager has a critical role in ensuring that the right information is available for Unpaid Work staff to make the most appropriate allocation to a work placement. Where a full OASys assessment is completed section 13 is intended to provide the opportunity to elicit information to make the most rounded decisions about suitability. However, in all cases the Unpaid Work Assessment Form should be used to bring together all of the issues that need to be taken into account in the allocation decision. This needs to be made available to Unpaid Work staff in a timely fashion as the expectations of National Standards and the Manual on the Delivery of Unpaid Work place considerable demands on staff to allocate offenders to work quickly.<sup>14</sup>**

- 2.19 The Children and Adoption Act 2006 makes unpaid work available in the County and Family Proceedings Courts as a penalty for breaching a contact order. Since it is usually the parent with residence of the child who is most likely to breach a contact order, it might be anticipated that this provision will result in more women being subject to unpaid work requirements. Particular attention will need to be paid to the needs of this group who may feel particularly intimidated or unhappy by having been subject to what was previously only a sentence of the criminal courts.
- 2.20 In general, stable employment is understood to be a significant contributor to reducing reoffending. Although this may be less significant among women, the access to a range of skill development and possibilities for employment that Unpaid Work provides can expand the choices that a woman has. The positive role models provided by Unpaid Work staff, particularly supervisors who spend so much time in direct contact with offenders, has been shown to have a positive impact on the attitudes of offenders.
- 2.21 These issues have been responded to in very thoughtful, innovative and productive ways in a number of probation areas through the development of women only projects (for example in the West Midlands), individual placements and female

supervisors. Attention should also be paid to collecting and analysing routine management information to establish whether these responses have an impact on attendance and completion rates.

***Recommended good practice.***

***Where there is inadequate information, Probation areas should secure better knowledge about when and why women offenders fail to comply with their Supervision Requirements and seek to achieve improvements.***

## **Approved Premises**

- 2.22 The use of approved premises are “a criminal justice facility where offenders reside for the purposes of assessment, supervision and management”, in the interests of protecting the public, reducing re-offending and promoting rehabilitation.”<sup>15</sup>  
Approved Premises (APs) provide supervised accommodation and support for higher risk offenders. They should be viewed primarily as an offender management resource whose use is generally short-term. However, historically, the problem has been balancing the number of premises and beds for men and women, and the low occupancy levels in the women’s estate.
- 2.23 There are currently seven women-only APs in England providing 141 beds. They are located in Bedford, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Reading. At the moment there is also a mixed AP in Bristol with 6 beds for women.
- 2.24 The first and most vital condition for women residents is the provision of a safe environment in which they can live without undue concern for their physical and mental well being. Although the national criterion for accepting an offender into an AP is that they pose a high or very high risk of serious harm, the threshold is often lower for female offenders and can be based on an assessment of medium risk and a high propensity to re-offend.
- 2.25 NOMS is currently examining ways of allowing more women offenders to be accommodated in APs and this is likely to mean further use of a lower threshold for women offenders. Occupancy across the AP estate averages 90% but in women’s APs is 75% (with some as low as 60%). During 2008-09 NOMS also plans to analyse the need for women’s AP accommodation and where it should be located, with a view to making proposals regarding new provision.

<b><i>Recommended Good Practice:</i></b>
<b><i>Offender Managers should ensure that they are maximising the appropriate use of the Approved Premises estate for women offenders.</i></b>

## **Accredited Programmes**

- 2.26 Accredited programmes represent some of the best ways to provide interventions in both the prison and community settings. They are based upon cognitive behavioural principles. Their use, to address specific needs, is described within the relevant sections of chapter 3.

### 3 Specific OASys sections and guidance

3.1 OASys (and its electronic version eOASys) is the major tool used by the probation and prison services for assessing the criminogenic needs of offenders, and to evidence the identification, management and reduction of risk. It also provides a means for communicating those needs between staff working in custody and the community. The OASys manual comes supplied with detailed guidance on its use, and this guide does not seek to repeat this guidance. This guide instead supplements that guidance with the additional information that may be relevant when working with a female offender.

#### **Section 1: Offending information**

3.2 This section contains static information which does not involve any differences in recording practice between men and women.

3.3 OGRS 3 risk of proven re-offending scores take into account of gender differences at different ages, to reflect the different offending profile for men and women and offer reliable predictors for both men and women.

3.4 To improve compliance we need to understand better when and why women offenders breach their supervision requirements. Data about individuals and aggregated information should enable probation providers and those working alongside them to identify areas for improvement.

3.5 *Practice issue: question 1.8. In terms of compliance (using accredited programmes data) early contact with the police is associated with increased rather than decreased compliance in women. It is therefore important to consider older first-time female offenders as being at greater risk of failing to comply so they may require additional support. An offender manager should also be aware that the number of types of offence is also particularly strongly associated with non compliance.*

#### **Section 2: Analysis of offences**

3.6 Women's motivations for offending are often different from men's and are less likely to be due to peer pressure. Care must be taken to evidence if the woman has been coerced, bullied or manipulated into offending by an abusive partner. They are more likely to identify offending as a way of resolving practical difficulties than as part of either a status gaining or thrill seeking lifestyle than male offenders.

3.7 Women offenders generally have fewer previous offences than men and also less serious patterns of previous offending. However there is often a complex set of underlying factors which have contributed to the offending and these have also often developed over time and led to the woman offending. This section should, if appropriate, be used to summarise the background to the woman's offending.

### **Section 3: Accommodation**

- 3.8 The majority of women receiving custodial sentences are subject to short sentences, for mainly six months or less, which is long enough to lose accommodation but often too short to gain another home. Home Office research in 2005 found 38% of women leaving prison did not have any identified accommodation for them on discharge.
- Around one-third of women prisoners lose their homes and often their possessions whilst in prison.
  - Women prisoners are less likely than men to have accommodation arranged for them on discharge from prison
  - Approximately two-thirds of women in prison have dependent children under the age of 18 years
  - At least a third of mothers are lone parents before imprisonment.
  - Over half of women in prison have experienced domestic violence or other abuse
- 3.9 The Homelessness Act 2002 made some important changes to parts of the Housing Act 1996<sup>16</sup>. These changes can make a significant difference to how homeless offenders and particularly prisoners are treated by local authorities. The act was further clarified through a revised Statutory Code of Guidance in 2006<sup>17</sup> which strengthened a number of issues in relation to offenders especially emphasising that there should be no 'blanket bans' on groups of people, e.g. offenders, and that the circumstances of each applicant should be considered individually.
- 3.10 Local authorities are only by statute required to house homeless people who meet certain criteria and are assessed as being in priority groups. These include:
- A pregnant woman;
  - A person with dependant children<sup>18</sup>;
  - A person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability;
  - People who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing violence.
- 3.11 Offender managers should ensure that they are maximising the use of the Approved Premises estate for women offenders.

### **Section 4: Education, training and employability**

- 3.12 Getting offenders into appropriate sustainable employment is one of the most important factors in helping to reduce re-offending. Employment can provide purpose and structure and enables offenders to become economically independent which is of benefit to them, their families and their communities. The specific issues surrounding women and employment are well known and include, low wages, low self esteem, child and dependant care. They may wish to focus on increasing employability in the short term, to fit around parenting or other caring responsibilities, with employment being a longer term goal. A lack of previous employment and low self esteem can mean that some women may need additional support to engage in this process.

- 3.13 An appropriate assessment for employability should be used to identify, for each individual, the barriers that block progress. Barriers can be anything from personal motivation to lack of experience/qualifications, which need to be addressed in their own right as well as improving the chances of employment. Some women offenders require access to education or basic skills development before being able to enter employment. Enhancing literacy and numeracy skills are key, both to improving the employment prospects of offenders and to their engagement with a range of services. An accurate appraisal of exclusionary factors and barriers will help identify potential methods for addressing and resolving these problems. This will enable individually tailored employment support to be provided to women offenders.
- 3.14 Probation Areas should develop and implement effective local arrangements that ensure women offenders are appropriately targeted, according to risk and need. The aim is to gain access to a range of Education Training and Employment (ETE) interventions, options and partnerships that recognise the different needs of women offenders and the employment opportunities in their area.
- 3.15 The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) has been established to facilitate an increase in development opportunities and wider access to employment for offenders. OLASS provides the means to integrate learning and skills provision for offenders in custody and the community with all offender learning and skills provision planned and funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Offender Managers should ensure that they utilise OLASS to support the interventions for women wherever possible.
- 3.16 *Current Good Practice:*
- *The Preparation for Employment Programme (PEP) is a women only outdoor pursuits programme delivered by Merseyside Probation Area staff and partners. The programme uses outdoor activities to develop the self-confidence and motivation of female offenders to take up Skills for Life learning and to prepare for employment.*
  - *West Mercia Area works in partnership with the Asha Centre in Worcester.<sup>19</sup> The centre offers a wide range of provisions including:*
    - *A safe women-only environment with crèche and transport support;*
    - *In-house courses, provided through local colleges, designed to build confidence, improve skills and facilitate access to mainstream opportunities;*
    - *The Women's Programme, a two-part group work programme specifically designed to support transition to employment, training and education;*
    - *Advice and support in seeking employment*

## **Section 5: Financial management and income**

- 3.17 From OASys 28% of women offenders supervised by the probation service (21% of men) identified finance as an issue contributing to their offending. For prisoners this percentage is higher. In addition more women offenders than men justify their offending behaviour as a response to lack of money and debt. Debt, disrupted access to benefits, insufficient funds on release from prison, low incomes and poor

financial literacy all contribute to financial difficulties that can be a barrier to effective rehabilitation.

- 3.18 Some women offenders with young children may decide they are unable to consider employment until the children are older and will be reliant on benefits for many years. Some women are dependant on others for income for example if a partner is claiming benefit or may be paying fines or debts which are the responsibility of a partner. Long term poverty, debts and loans with high interest are the reality for many women offenders. In addition, the family finances may have been managed by the partner with the woman not even having a basic bank account. Having an individual financial identity may be important for some women. It may be an important step to address low self-esteem and to gain confidence and stronger sense of identity as well as greater financial independence.
- 3.19 Areas should make use of existing resources in the community or through local partnership arrangements to seek to advise and support women offenders with low incomes and debt. The Women's Programme (formerly called Women's Acquisitive Crime Programme) focuses on issues which may reduce acquisitive offending.
- 3.20 *Practice issue: In addition it is important to ascertain how financially independent women offenders have been and if required assist them in opening a basic bank account and to signpost them to courses on financial literacy so enable them to manage their account and any other products such as loans and savings accounts. This may be through direct support or through the referral to those able to provide this type of support.*
- 3.21 NOMS, working with the Financial Services Authority (FSA), has produced guidance on financial matters for practitioners entitled - "Signposting Offenders to Financial Capability, Debt Advice & Financial Services". This guide gives advice on who to contact for assistance with specific needs, including:
- Debt problems – referral to Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) in most cases
  - No bank account – contact with banks and building societies to support offender in opening basic account. For women in custody, a letter from a prison governor should be accepted as ID in order to open an account. Similarly a letter from the offender manager can assist an offender in the community.
  - Poor financial literacy – courses available to teach money management are listed in the guide
  - Access to benefits – Access to Jobseekers Allowance speeded up through Freshstart process (Jobcentre Plus). Jobcentre Plus can also offer advice on other benefits and on access to loans and grants from the Social Fund.
  - Access to loans – Other than from Social Fund, can also come from credit unions. Information available through Jobcentre Plus
  - Access to Insurance – important for women wanting to go into self-employment but offenders in general face difficulties buying insurance.
- 3.22 Women offenders with children may also need advice on how to access tax credits.

## **Section 6: Relationships**

- 3.23 OASys data suggests that women offenders have more problems with their relationships than men who offend (about 62% of women offenders had this as a criminogenic need compared to 40% of men). This difference is important because stable relationships have long been recognised as a factor in reducing re-offending, and having family ties is positively linked to successful prisoner resettlement and reduce re-offending.
- 3.24 Offender managers must also consider the needs of any dependant children when working with women offenders. Offender managers must take account of the Children Act 2004 which requires inter-agency co-operation to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people.
- 3.25 Most women in prison, have been the subject of abuse by partners and a high number of them are lone parents. 18% of female prisoners are single and living with dependent children (including step-children) aged 17 or under, compared with 3.5% of men.<sup>20</sup> In one Dublin study, the children of imprisoned mothers seemed to be worse off than children of imprisoned fathers.<sup>21</sup> The fact that they are sole carers may in part explain the slightly higher levels of need in managing their finances. One study found that women's priorities upon leaving prisons revolved around finding accommodation and resolving child custody issues, in the shadow of a potential relapse into drug misuse.<sup>22</sup> Similar priorities are likely where women are serving sentences in the community.
- 3.26 Women's relationships are also less likely to survive imprisonment than men. Of those prisoners living with a partner before custody, more men (63%) than women (36%) were likely to be living with a partner on release. There is some evidence to suggest that the most effective interventions with young women include promoting positive family relationships and communicating with partners and family members. This suggests that sentence plan for women offenders should take account of not just their childcare needs, but their relationship needs as well.
- 3.27 When interpreting the questions in section 6 of OASys 'family' does not simply mean married and non-married partners with children, as the family can be both broader and generationally longer than the traditional family unit and includes 'carers' where a child is looked after. The term 'family' should therefore be interpreted in the widest sense encompassing step relationships, siblings, lesbian, gay and bi-sexual and transgender partners or extended family members where appropriate. Support networks may also include friends, neighbours and faith communities, who can play a critical role in giving offenders a sense of belonging in the local community.
- 3.28 Offending behaviour, or a perceived lack of motivation for change, may be linked to abusive relationships. Evidence shows that intimate relationships are an important influence on women's offending and are likely to interact with other factors. This may mean making opportunities to focus on relationship issues when addressing other offending related difficulties, such as drug misuse.

- 3.29 Where an assessment shows a women offender has family relationship problems or parenting problems, Offender managers should consider what financial or emotional support can be offered to alleviate those problems. They also should consider the needs of children in the household, including:
- the impact on children when making home visits,
  - the need to work with safeguarding or support services for potential child victims;
  - the impact on children when working with domestic violence or sex offender perpetrators or survivors, linking them up with support agencies, such as Women's Aid<sup>23</sup> or in-house equivalents;
  - how drug use can affect children in the home and the potential to access family support mechanisms for children or younger siblings; and,
- 3.30 Where a Young Adult Offender is still living with their parents the Offender Manager should also consider the most appropriate means of engaging with those parents depending on the specific circumstances.

### ***Section 7: Lifestyles and associates***

- 3.31 Generally, women offenders identify fewer problems with their life style and associates than men: OASys data suggests 35% of women have a criminogenic need compared with 41% of men. Where a need is evident, offender managers should consider whether there are suitable offending behaviour programmes for women as part of any planned interventions.
- 3.32 One difficult life-style issue which some women face is the problem of finding a route out of prostitution. Once an individual becomes involved in street prostitution it can be difficult to find a route out. The long-term damage, both emotionally and physically, can be significant. The Government's Coordinated Prostitution Strategy<sup>24</sup> recommends that integrated approaches can address the multiplicity of issues that often face women who are involved in prostitution. This includes outreach work to make initial contact, and advocacy and support to enable them to address their problems, find routes out of prostitution, and ultimately move on with their lives. Suitable supported housing and access to drug treatment are crucial to establishing the kind of stability that enables a woman to leave prostitution.
- 3.33 A range of accommodation is required to meet the differing needs at each stage of the exiting process:
- crisis intervention: specialist high-level support refuge-type accommodation, equipped to take in substance misusers and those who may still be active in prostitution
  - stabilisation: at this stage there is a need for 'move on' accommodation such as cluster flats, with the provision of continuing support
  - aftercare: independent tenancies with floating support to help women with their life skills, to help them sustain their tenancies, to provide emotional support and to prevent a relapse into drug use and prostitution.
- 3.34 Women involved in prostitution often also have varied and complex mental health support needs (see health section), and may need support through counselling to deal with the wide range of personal issues. These can include the loss of children

into care, family breakdown, loss of a partner, or childhood sexual abuse. Low self-esteem is common and it is vital to address this if women are to recognise that their lives are worth changing.

- 3.35 Support for women who have been involved in prostitution has been integrated into the reducing re-offending pathways for women, and local resettlement strategies and women's prisons have identified leads to carry this forward. Offender Managers should refer to the strategies and liaise with the leads as appropriate.
- 3.36 *Current Good Practice: Safe Exit at Toynbee Hall was set up in partnership with London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Metropolitan Police and Providence Row.<sup>25</sup> It brings together voluntary and statutory agencies that have developed services to reduce the impact of prostitution on the community. Safe Exit set up the Diversion Scheme in June 2006 to provide a practical, supportive alternative to the criminal justice system for women who are arrested for soliciting and loitering in the borough. If a woman engages with the scheme her case is discontinued so avoiding a court appearance and a fine which would result in the woman returning to prostitution in order to pay it off.*
- 3.37 *The partnership is based on good information sharing between the police, Safe Exit, a network of referral agencies and the prosecutor at Thames Magistrates' Court. Referral agencies offer women practical and emotional support focusing on exiting prostitution along with assistance in relation to debt, physical and sexual health, substance misuse, housing training and education. The scheme is funded by the Tower Hamlet's Partnership and the David Isaacs Fund. In 2007-2008, 66% of the women arrested in Tower Hamlets for soliciting and loitering completed the Diversion Scheme and had their cases discontinued as a result.*

### **Section 8: Drug misuse**

- 3.38 Research from 2003<sup>26</sup> 72% of women reported using at least one illicit drug in the 12 months prior to prison. 56% of the women reported using cannabis during this time period, with heroin use reported by 44% and crack use by 43%. 20% of women were using a combination of different drugs. 27% of women offenders misuse both drugs and alcohol. It is also worth noting that young women tend to have a more chaotic and experimental approach to drug use and a binge drinking pattern of alcohol misuse than older women.
- 3.39 Women are frequently the main carers of children and consequently child protection issues may have more of an impact than they do for men. Offender managers should also consider the impact that substance misuse can have on the child of a substance-misusing parent. Women may hide or underplay substance misuse for fear of losing their children. Offender managers need to be sensitive to these issues but at the same time be aware of the potential risk factors involved with drug-misusing parents. Building good working relationships with local social and health services will enable better informed and joint working on relevant cases.
- 3.40 The support of pregnant drug misusers should be given specific attention and offender managers are encouraged to establish what support is offered in their area and to consider PSO 4300 that sets out the support offered in custody. Provision of drugs interventions will need to take into account any childcare responsibilities.

- 3.41 Accessibility of services due to child care, and location of services also need consideration. Some women may benefit from a greater outreach type of work rather than an expectation that they attend appointments at a particular service at pre arranged time. Offender Managers should consider the opportunities and potential benefits for this approach and look for any partnerships that might assist this.
- 3.42 There is some evidence that pathways into substance misuse may be different for women than for men. It is important that drug treatment services are sensitive and appropriate for the diverse range of clients who need it including women. Female substance mis-users face distinct issues and there may be links to:
- Sex working;
  - Past traumatic experiences including sexual and physical abuse;
  - Self harm; and,
  - Mental health needs.
- 3.43 The target group for the Drug Rehabilitation Requirement (DRR), the principal community sentence intervention for drug mis-users, encompasses all the community sentencing bands from low to high seriousness which may make it more accessible to women than the previous Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO) sentence. Offenders with an OASys score of 4 and above on the drug assessment section should be referred for a DRR assessment (such a score generally indicates that they are currently using a class A drug on at least a weekly basis). It should be noted, however, that a score of 4+ is only one method of selection. Those offenders with a score below 4 could also be suitable, as could those already accessing treatment through the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) or another treatment provider.
- 3.44 The relationship between the offender manager and the offender supervisor is especially important to ensure continuity of treatment and that appropriate conditions are in place prior to release for women, as there are relatively few women's prisons and each release's to a large number of probation areas, and health authorities. The period post release is a time of particular vulnerability to unintended overdose. Women are more likely than men to be returning to a pre-existing relationship, when this is with a drug user this represents a challenge to the success of the licence and potentially raised risk of overdose. Where relevant, Offender Managers should ensure that the licence conditions for a woman with identified drug misuse are appropriate.
- 3.45 If the offender has been classified as a Prolific or other Priority Offender (PPO), is over 18, and is released on licence for committing a trigger offence and who has a class A drug problem, they are required to have a licence condition to be tested for class A drugs (heroin and cocaine/crack cocaine). There is specific guidance in the PPO Toolkit that identifies issues relating to the testing of women.<sup>27</sup>
- 3.46 Women with substance misuse problems should have equal access to a DRR and be able to achieve equal outcomes. This may mean provision of additional support to enable them to succeed.

## **Section 9: Alcohol Misuse**

- 3.48 The first national alcohol needs assessment<sup>28</sup> in England found that, although the prevalence of alcohol use disorders was lower in women than in men<sup>29</sup>, there was a high level of alcohol related need across all categories of women drinkers. 15% of women were classed as hazardous or harmful alcohol users<sup>30</sup>; 9% as binge drinkers and 2% as alcohol dependent, with considerable overlap between those drinking above sensible daily and weekly benchmarks.
- 3.49 Evidence suggests that the proportion of women drinking above low risk levels has increased in recent years. 3.6 million women (17%) reported drinking in excess of 14 units a week in 2002, an increase of 70% since 1988. This is significant given the large body of evidence linking alcohol misuse with serious offences, particularly violent crime in which women are increasingly seen in the role of perpetrators as well as victims. In a 2003 MORI poll, 69% of male binge-drinkers and 45% of female binge-drinkers reported at least one violent incident in the last year compared to 34% of regular male drinkers and 18% of regular female drinkers.
- 3.50 Psychological risk factors that trigger problem drinking in women include a history of drinking in the family; depression; sexual problems and poor coping responses to stressful life events e.g. adolescent development issues or drinking as a result or cause of separation or divorce. Low self-esteem among women, particularly young women who have experienced sexual or physical abuse, may be a trigger to heavy drinking. Childhood problem behaviours related to impulse control and early use of nicotine and/or alcohol and poly-drug use are other associated risk factors. Research suggests that individual triggers play a greater or lesser role at different stages in a woman's life cycle.<sup>31</sup> Understanding of these risk factors is essential to developing appropriate forms of treatment targeted at women.
- 3.51 Women have different substance using careers from men. Generally, they start later and respond better to treatment. Female alcohol misusers may value the personal responsibility involved in self-initiated change and may be more motivated to change than men due to the greater stigma attached to problem drinking by women. Less-intensive treatment (condensed form of cognitive behavioural therapy) seems especially suited to female service users with a mild or moderate level of alcohol dependence, who are suitable for a moderation drinking goal if they wish to pursue it.<sup>32</sup>
- 3.52 Alcohol misuse is strongly associated with domestic violence<sup>33</sup>. For partners who are abusive and violent, confronting the drinking will not be sufficient to adequately address the full range of behaviours which encompass domestic violence. This is important in terms of women's safety – for many women the period of detox/recovery can be the most dangerous time for them and they may remain in a relationship because they think their partner's abuse will stop when the drinking has been addressed. Research also tells us that women who report that their partners are violent and abusive when drunk also report that their partners are violent and abusive when sober. The Respect phonenumber is the national phonenumber for men who wish to seek help for their abusive behaviour<sup>34</sup>

- 3.53 The evidence of the effectiveness of different approaches in reducing alcohol related harm to health is strong<sup>35</sup> but there is significantly less evidence relating to offending. However, we know from OASys data that a large number of offenders under statutory supervision have a current alcohol problem (c 40%) and a similar proportion have a criminogenic need relating to alcohol misuse, potentially linked to their risk of reconviction. Therefore, reducing the alcohol consumption of this group to low risk levels through evidence based and appropriately targeted interventions should have a significant impact in reducing their likelihood of re-offending.
- 3.54 The Alcohol Treatment Requirement (ATR) (the only specific alcohol treatment component of a community order) is targeted at those offenders who are dependent on alcohol and require intensive, specialist treatment. Therefore, probation areas' ability to deliver ATRs is largely dependent upon the nature and extent of provision commissioned by local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) as part of NHS provision. As identified in a recent National Audit Office report<sup>36</sup>, alcohol treatment is limited in many parts of the country with the result that not all offenders eligible for the ATR are able to receive it. The Home Office and Department of Health recently published the Alcohol Strategy Toolkit to assist local areas to assess the needs of their populations, including those involved with the criminal justice system, and encourage PCTs to address any identified shortfalls in treatment capacity. In some areas, for example Surrey, this shortfall has been addressed by the ATRs being managed by the DRR teams this can also enable greater responsiveness to the needs of women offenders.
- 3.55 Most offenders under probation supervision with alcohol misuse needs will have lower level alcohol problems better addressed through the provision of accredited programmes or identification and brief advice (which are available in all probation areas) and will not need an ATR.
- 3.56 *Current Good Practice: An alcohol information pack for offenders under probation supervision was issued in February, which contains a specific section on women and alcohol. The pack contains a self-assessment tool, advice about triggers for drinking and coping with cravings, and information about the type of services that are available and how to access them. It is primarily intended as a resource for offender managers to improve the identification of alcohol misuse and deliver brief interventions through the use of specific sections on a "pick and mix" basis based upon offender need. The pack is presently being revised to make it even more appropriate to the needs of women offenders.*

## **Section 10: Emotional wellbeing**

- 3.57 Women offenders have higher levels of criminogenic need in this area than men: 65% of women have problems recorded against emotional well-being compared with 39% of men. In many cases, low self esteem is a result of a history of victimisation, and in these cases women offenders are likely to need the help of services ranging from the personal therapeutic, such as abuse counselling (see the sections on health and domestic violence as well as guidance on self harm), to the highly practical, such as learning and skills provision and access to help with childcare or managing their finances. In cases where they are being victimised by ex-partners, or their families and friends, they are likely to need considerable support to break away from their influence and re-build their lives. Wider, trusted, family members and community support networks can also provide support on these cases.

- 3.58 There are a range of services available within the community which can be engaged, including substance misuse, health and social care, children's services (and the universal parenting support being developed through children's centres and extended schools), learning and skills, and housing and debt advice. Women offenders with low self-esteem may have difficulties in accessing these services, and feel isolated from community support because of their personal and social problems. It is equally likely that they are failing to access victim support services. Young women are particularly under represented in the client groups of such services.
- 3.59 Sign-posting services is unlikely to work without other support. Third sector organisations can play an important role in helping women access these services and in providing mentoring and other support which may be necessary to help them engage.
- 3.60 There is also some gender specific provision to change offending behaviour through tackling low self esteem, along with issues such as abuse, and drug misuse, for example, the Women's Programme run by the Asha Centre. Local women's centres and third sector organisations may be able to help in identifying and deliver significant support to women offenders in other parts of the country.
- 3.61 It will be in this section of OASys that offender managers will identify and record any issues of self harm. Working with offenders who are displaying self harm, or other disturbing behaviour can be stressful for all who work with them. It is important that Offender Managers feel supported and confident in their role and that they have the guidance to assist the identification of this, and related issues, and the processes for referral and assistance from other agencies and support organisations. The relationship between the Offender and Offender Supervisor in prison can be critical to the management of this issue. Given the high prevalence of self harm by female offenders. It is important that areas have clear guidance on staff development and procedures for managing the issues.
- 3.62 Women on release or community sentence may have an increased risk of self harming behaviour. If a woman is self harming and under the care of a psychiatrist, she should be referred back to the community mental health team. If she does not have a psychiatrist, she should be referred to a GP on possibility of referral for psychiatric assessment.
- 3.63 Support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence has been integrated into the reducing re-offending pathways for women, and local resettlement strategies and women's prisons have identified leads to carry this forward. Offender Managers should refer to the strategies and liaise with the leads as appropriate.

### ***Section 11: Thinking and behaviour***

- 3.64 There is increasing evidence of links between changes in thinking and behaviour with rates of reoffending for both men and women. An analysis of reconviction data of those on programmes (Hollis, 2007) encourages the focus upon this area of an offender's life, and it being an important area of work for achieving desistance.<sup>37</sup> Women who complete a thinking skills programme show a 15.5% reduction in their reoffending (compared with 12.8% for men).
- 3.65 The current evidence suggests that, in terms of compliance on programmes, there is no significant difference between men and women's scores in section 11 of OASys.

For both, the presence of thinking skills deficits tends to reduce compliance and those that do not comply are at greater risk of reoffending. It is therefore important for offender managers to offer or access greater support for offenders with the greatest thinking skills deficits.

3.66 *Practice Issues: It is important for each offender manager to consider to what extent underlying social inequalities may influence their assessment. It is important that each case is assessed individually and the needs are identified particularly:*

- *the implications of the assessment of the 'adequacy for their background and normal circumstances'. It is necessary to consider what changes in circumstances have been identified as being beneficial for reductions in reoffending – for example, if retraining or employment are identified as being appropriate then identification of a deficit in the inter-personal skills that could hinder access should be addressed. It is also important that the assessor recognises cultural and social issues, including those associated with gender that might be relevant, for example in assessing 'shyness or lack of eye contact' (OASys 11.1).*
- *whether different descriptions of the offence and levels of planning might have occurred based on gender, particularly when considering offences of violence.*
- *recognition that many women may have had less control over their situations and be subject to specific pressures to offend. Therefore care is needed to unpick any statements that blame others before completing this section and this question may highlight important areas of work for sentence planning and co working with community provision.*

3.67 Provision to address this offending need has been nationally led through the development of Accredited Programmes in both prison and the community.

3.68 Accredited programmes have been subject to separate approval for men and women by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel (CSAP). Therefore programmes approved for use with women can be accessed with confidence that issues about theory, learning styles and needs of women have been considered. The current general offending programmes represent some of the best and most evidenced based approaches to reduce re-offending. It is important that women are both referred to and supported through programmes and that provision for women is seen as a core activity to interventions providers, including consideration of their need to offer equality of outcomes.. There are a number of issues that are relevant to consider and that specific facilitator training has been developed to address.

- **Access.** Community programmes need to be delivered at times and locations that do not hinder attendance. Issues may include childcare commitments (Q 13.3 in OASys) which are seven times as likely to exist for women compared with men. The provision of appropriate childcare facilities is important, but this needs to be tailored to meet individual needs. Offender managers should also assess what other support should be accessed either by them or through community links to assist attendance and their wider needs.
- **Mixed groups.** Currently there is only limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of mixed gender groups and single gender programmes; this tentatively concludes that overall, women can do as well in groups that are mixed gender as women only groups. What has been highlighted is that the importance of the style of delivery of the intervention is responsive to the

members of the group, as is addressing relevant deficits, subject to an assessment of the woman's wishes and concerns. It is generally considered poor practice to have a lone female in a group. The offender manager should consult with the programme provider about any concerns they may have about a female offender attending a group programme. They will be able to help identify additional support that will assist the offender's attendance and participation. For some women a mixed group will not be appropriate; an offender manager may wish to consult with the programme manager to assist in making this assessment. This includes recommendations for programmes attached to DRRs or ATRs.

- **Alternatives.** The One to One programme offers a valuable alternative to the group programmes that address general offending. Its ability to respond to the individual needs of the offender makes it particularly relevant to addressing women offenders' needs. Where there is not a suitable programme, offender managers should design a PSR and sentence plan that addresses thinking and behavioural needs in other ways, either within a supervision requirement or a specified activity, and look to community resources that can support this. For those that receive a custodial sentence, full use of women-only provision whilst in custody should be made. Licence conditions that direct them to appropriate provision in the community should also be considered. It is very important that the offender manager is aware of the resources available both inside prison and in the community when making sequencing decisions.

## **Section 12: Attitudes**

- 3.69 Emerging evidence shows that this section of OASys is particularly important for offender managers working with women. In particular, poor scores (6+ in this section) are associated with a 33% percentage reduction in completion rates on programmes (compared with women who score less than 6), for men there is no such reduction. This highlights the importance of building good working relationships and engagement with women offenders.
- 3.70 The attitude section is not only important in highlighting different methods for attaining engagement for men and women. It also highlights differences in the way men and women offend. The relative low levels of women in the criminal justice system suggests that pro-criminal attitudes are less prevalent amongst women and that they turn to criminal solutions less often and later than their male equivalents. This may be reflected in the attitudes of women who offend. It will be important to consider these issues in deciding both the design and delivery of offence focussed work.
- 3.71 *Practice Issue: Addressing poor attitudes early in any sentence plan is essential to successful working with women offenders. It is appropriate to consider additional support such as mentors that can help achieve this.*
- 3.72 There is some emerging evidence that suggests, that under current sentencing practice women, who have previously attended a programme, are much less likely to complete a second time compared with their male counterparts. Offender managers should pay attention to OASys Question 12.7 and incorporate additional support and adjust sentence plans accordingly.

- 3.73 Mental health issues and personality disorders do not automatically prevent successful use of cognitive behavioural interventions. These issues are often identified in women offenders and it will be important in these cases that there is not systematic exclusion of such women from group programmes. However, in some cases responsibility issues may not be met through programme delivery and suitable alternatives for the woman should be sought.

### **Section 13: Health and other considerations**

#### Health

- 3.74 This section of OASys does not contribute to the OASys scoring matrix. Nevertheless, it can reveal a number of important issues that may not otherwise have been identified. These may be relevant to understanding the causes of the offences, and the barriers to successful completion of a sentence. As such it is an important section that should be fully recorded. The information in section 13 may cause further review of earlier sections of OASys. The information in this section of the guidance will be of particular relevance to the earlier emotional wellbeing, drugs and alcohol section.
- 3.75 Women offenders generally have high levels of both physical and mental health care needs, and many of them have not accessed relevant services. The Offender Health and Social Care Strategy (due later this year) will map the health needs of all offenders through the complete pathway of: police, court, prison and resettlement. A key strand of the Offender Health Strategy will address the specific needs of women, and thus support the Corston Report findings. The Strategy will integrate primary, social care, self-harm, substance misuse and mental health care. Social exclusion and poor health for women requires a coordinated multi-agency approach, supported through National Health Service primary care trusts and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) with strong governance arrangements.
- 3.76 *Practice Issue: One of the most important interventions offender managers can probably make is to ensure that women offenders have a GP and access the normal mainstream health services. Health and social services will need to be alerted when women are presenting with mental health problems in order to intervene earlier, to improve and promote the health of women whose situations might lead them to offend further.*
- 3.77 Section 13 of OASys requires the assessor to consider whether health or any other issues are likely to affect an offender's availability and suitability for the proposed requirements. Whilst a largely factual section, it does require the assessor to make decisions about what is likely to constitute an obstacle in the context of an individual's particular circumstances and this requires sensitive engagement with the offender. Except in cases where there are very serious health issues, an assessor will normally be reliant upon the offender's account. It is important to be sensitive to the fact that it might be difficult for a woman to discuss physical health problems, especially if interviewed by a male assessor and the alternative of talking to a female member of staff should always be offered if there are indications that there are problems the offender is reluctant to discuss.

- 3.78 Mental illness may be a factor in many offences committed by women. It is important to remember that OASys is not a mental health assessment tool and that if issues are identified it will probably be necessary for the offender manager to seek a more in depth, specialist assessment. Female offenders are vulnerable to attempting suicide and causing self harm. Therefore, if mental illness is identified here, it is important that this has been reflected in the Risk of Serious Harm Screening and, where appropriate, the Full Analysis of Risk of Serious Harm.
- 3.79 The Criminal Justice System can act as a gateway to health services for women who find it hard to access appropriate mainstream health and social care services. These women may not have previously engaged with health or social services and have only accessed services when in crisis. This is often too late for any significant preventative health intervention or to help prevent family breakdown.
- 3.80 Women within the CJS or those that may be at risk of offending within the community are less likely to access conventional health or health screening services and may not be registered with general practitioners. This makes access to primary health care services for women very difficult. The reasons for this are many, but it could be that there may be difficulty in registering, travelling, finance, or carer duties. The physical health issues for women may be compounded by their role as a carer, for elderly relatives or children and are often from socially excluded groups. Registering upon release from custody may be a problem but help from an offender manager or supervisor may assist.
- 3.81 Within mental health services, there is significant development around the need for gender specific care and services<sup>38</sup>. Guidance is available to support the development of services which meet the needs of women<sup>39</sup> across the age ranges .
- 3.82 Women need to be sign-posted to primary mental health care services via GP surgeries or alternative voluntary sector providers. There are services which are being developed to provide more 'talking' approaches to support mental health needs in the community<sup>40</sup>. Women's self-esteem and confidence can be markedly improved through peer support and recovery approaches.
- 3.83 Women with more enduring mental health problems should be referred to secondary mental health services via GP to community mental health teams. An assessment will be made whether to place women on the Care Programme Approach. The recently issued 'Refocussing the Care Approach' (DH March 2008) provides useful supportive guidance.
- 3.84 Women with a diagnosis of personality disorder or borderline personality disorder have multiple needs and require approaches which are empathic, non-judgemental and therapeutic. Many women with this diagnosis have been rejected by services and yet their need is great. It is important that mental health services provide specific services to support this group of women<sup>41</sup>.
- 3.85 A high proportion of offending women have been victims of childhood trauma and violence. Experiences of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, including domestic violence, have long-term effects on mental health<sup>42</sup>. It is important to work with voluntary sector partners who have a wealth of experience and expertise and have developed excellent resources<sup>43</sup>.

3.86 *Current Good Practice:*

- *Calderdale Women's Centre, ASHA and The Together Women Programme, which is funded by the Ministry of Justice are important examples of community-based centres working with criminal justice agencies. Each centre is a 'one-stop shop' through which a range of services are accessed which include crèche facilities, women's peer support groups, counselling, health services and short courses which address self-esteem, confidence and anger management. The majority of the provision however is determined by the needs of the individual women that come through the doors.*
- *There are a number of examples delivery of health care to vulnerable groups within community already existing within the community that offer a full range of health services to vulnerable women, a good example of this is the Maple Access Centre in Northampton<sup>44</sup>*

Electronic Monitoring.

- 3.86 Women in contact with the Criminal Justice System often have unmet accommodation needs on release from custody which can lead to them being considered ineligible for electronic monitoring.
- 3.87 Where there is domestic violence, the perpetrator usually exercises strong control over all aspects of family life. It might therefore not be possible for a woman experiencing abuse to exert control over the domestic space sufficiently to ensure the availability of a dedicated telephone line for electronic monitoring purposes.
- 3.88 A curfew requirement in a household where there is violence could place a woman at additional risk. It could also be that a woman subject to electronic monitoring would feel under pressure to stay on the premises despite being at risk of imminent violence, through fear of violating her curfew requirement. If she were a carer of children or others within the household, the fear of being imprisoned as a result of breaking her curfew, thereby leaving vulnerable people at risk of violence, could also contribute to a decision to remain in a dangerous situation. Even in households where there is little risk of violence, a woman is likely to bear the major caring responsibility for vulnerable family members. This carries a disproportionate degree of risk of breaching curfew requirements, if she had to seek emergency medical help or respond to a call from an elderly relative living outside the home. Any decision about the reasonableness of a curfew infringement should take these factors into account.

## **Glossary**

APs	Approved Premises
ATR	Alcohol Treatment Requirement
CARAT	Counselling Assessment Referral Advice Throughcare
CJS	Criminal Justice System
DH	Department of Health
DOMs	Director of Offender Management
DRR	Drug Rehabilitation Requirement
EPIC	Electronic Probation Information Centre
FDR	Fast Delivery Report
IDTS	Integrated Drug Treatment System
LAA	Local Area Agreements
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NSF	National Strategy Framework
NTA	National Treatment Agencies
OASys	Offender Assessment System (e- Electronic)
OGRS	Offender Group Reconviction Score
OM	Offender Manager
PCT	Primary Care Trusts
PSR	Pre Sentence Report
ROMs	Regional Offender Managers
SDR	Standard Delivery Report
ONS	Office for National Statistics

## **Appendix 1.**

### **References**

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- <sup>1</sup> 'Corston Report'. Baroness Corston's Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System. March 2007.  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/corston-report/>
- <sup>2</sup> The Government's Response to the Report by Baroness Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System  
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/gov-resp-corston-review.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> Delivering Effective Services for Women Offenders in the Community: A good practice guide NPS 2006
- <sup>4</sup> National Service Framework Improving Services to Women Offenders 2008 - MOJ website
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.smartjustice.org/indexwomen.html>
- <sup>6</sup> National Agreement on the use of Interpreters, translators and language service professionals in the CJS 2007 - available on EPIC
- <sup>7</sup> ONS data from Survey of Psychiatric Morbidity Among Prisoners in England and Wales
- <sup>8</sup> O'Brien, M. et al (2001) Psychiatric Morbidity Among Women Prisoners in England and Wales; Further analysis of data from the 1997 ONS survey of psychiatric morbidity among prisoners in England and Wales. London: Office for National Statistics.
- <sup>9</sup> Pratt, D. et al (2006) Suicide in recently released prisoners: a population-based cohort study. Lancet 2006; 368: 119-23
- <sup>10</sup> Farrell, M. & Marsden, J. (2005) Drug related mortality amongst newly released offenders 1998 to 2000. Home Office Online Report 40/05
- <sup>11</sup> Department of Health (2007). Drug Misuse and Dependence: UK Guidelines on Clinical Management. London: Department of Health.
- <sup>12</sup> As identified by the NOMS Estates Planning and Development Unit through consultation with women in prison, prison staff and representatives from the voluntary sector
- <sup>13</sup> NOMS Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resources. Version 2.06. May 2007. Available on EPIC.
- <sup>14</sup> A Manual on the Delivery of Unpaid Work. October 2006. NOMS. Available on EPIC.
- <sup>15</sup> PC 37/2005 'The Role & Purpose of Approved Premises' – May 2005
- <sup>16</sup> Homeless legislation is largely contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996
- <sup>17</sup> Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, DCLG, 2006
- <sup>18</sup> Normally up to 16 years of age or up to 18 if the child is in full time education.
- <sup>19</sup> [http://www.smartjustice.org/36\\_alt\\_asha.html](http://www.smartjustice.org/36_alt_asha.html)

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<sup>20</sup> *Resettlement. Outcomes on release from prison in 2003*. RDS Findings Paper 248. Home Office Publication.

<sup>21</sup> King D 2003 *Parents, Children and Prison : Effects of Parental Imprisonment on children*

<sup>22</sup> McMahon, G. and Seemungal, F. (2003). *The employment and education needs of women prisoners*. Univ of Oxford Centre for Criminological research and probation studies.

<sup>23</sup> (<http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-paying-the-price/ProstitutionStrategy.pdf?view=Binary>

<sup>25</sup> [www.toynbeehall.org.uk](http://www.toynbeehall.org.uk)

<sup>26</sup> ‘Differential substance misuse treatment needs of women, ethnic minorities and young offenders in prison: prevalence of substance misuse and treatment needs’, Borrill *et al*, Home Office Online Report 33/03.

<sup>27</sup> PC 34/05 and 30/06 plus PPO Toolkit in EPIC for further information.

<sup>28</sup> The Alcohol Needs Assessment Research Project (ANARP) (DH 2005)

<sup>29</sup> 38 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women (age 16–64) were found to have an alcohol use disorder (26 per cent overall)

<sup>30</sup> The World Health Organisation’s tenth revision of the *International classification of diseases* (ICD-10) defines:-  
hazardous use of a psychoactive substance, such as alcohol, as an “occasional, repeated or persistent pattern of use which carries with it a high risk of causing future damage to the medical or mental health of the user but which has not yet resulted in significant medical or psychological ill effects”; and harmful use of a psychoactive substance, such as alcohol, as “a pattern of use which is already causing damage to health. The damage may be physical or mental.”

<sup>31</sup> Thom, B. (1997). *Women and Alcohol. Issues for prevention: A literature review*. Health Education Authority, London.

<sup>32</sup> Review of the effectiveness of treatment for alcohol problems. (NTA, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> *Domestic violence offenders: characteristics and offending related needs (2003)*. (it found that alcohol had been consumed prior to the offence in nearly three quarters (73%) of domestic violence cases and was a ‘feature’ in almost two-thirds (62%). Furthermore, almost half (48%) of these convicted domestic violence offenders were alcohol dependent.)

<sup>34</sup> [www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net), tel 0845 122 8609.

<sup>35</sup> *Review of the effectiveness of treatment for alcohol problems DH, 2006*

<sup>36</sup> National Probation Service: Community Orders in England and Wales. January 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Hollis, V. (2007). *Reconviction Analysis of Programme Data using Interim Accredited Programmes Software (IAPS)*. RDS NOMS Research and Evaluation, December 2007.

<sup>38</sup> DH (2003) *Mainstreaming Gender and Women’s Mental Health*

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<sup>39</sup> DH (2006) *Supporting Women Into the Mainstream* – commissioning women-only community day services

<sup>40</sup> DH (2006) *Improving Access to Psychological therapies (IAPT)*

<sup>41</sup> DH (2005) *Personality disorder – not a diagnosis of exclusion*

<sup>42</sup> DH (2006) *Tackling the Health and Mental Health Effects of Domestic and sexual violence and Abuse*

<sup>43</sup> See for example, *Sane Responses* – toolkit for mental health workers, Greater London Domestic Violence Project  
[www.gldvp.uk](http://www.gldvp.uk)

<sup>44</sup> [www.mapleaccess.org.uk](http://www.mapleaccess.org.uk). Tel. 01604 250969