



Youth Justice Board
Bwrdd Cyfiawnder Ieuenctid

Girls and offending – patterns, perceptions and interventions

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Executive summary

- A young female offender in England and Wales is most commonly White, most likely to receive their first Reprimand aged 13–15 years old and their first conviction aged 15–16 years old. In general, convicted girls have no previous convictions, and show a range of risk factors.
- The offence most frequently committed by girls in England and Wales is theft or handling stolen goods, and this is congruent with the traditional pattern for female offenders.
- However, the offence committed by most girls in the youth justice system in England and Wales is an offence of violence against the person; this appears to be a new pattern that should be monitored.
- There does not appear to be a rise in the number of girls committing offences, but more girls are entering the youth justice system. Girls are also being convicted at a younger age. These findings are congruent with concerns elsewhere, for example, in the USA (Steffensmeier et al, 2005). This pattern should be monitored as most offences committed by girls continue to be low-level.
- *Asset* analysis indicates that young female offenders in England and Wales can be placed into three overall groups, those who commit:
 - offences of theft and handling stolen goods
 - offences of violence
 - ‘other’ offences.

The girls in each group present with a different range of needs and criminogenic factors.

- Offences of violence by girls appear to have a common pattern – there is usually a relationship with the victim and it is most often perceived that the victim did something to ‘deserve’ the violence. These findings are congruent with other research (Batchelor, 2005; Pettersson, 2005; Ness, 2004; Phillips, 2003). In addition, the recent use of alcohol is often linked to the offence/offending pattern.
- Most offending continues to be perpetrated by boys and interventions have been designed to meet their needs. The indications are that risk and protective factors are broadly similar for boys and girls, but that those for adult female offenders are different.
- There is still little evidence about ‘what works’ with girls in the youth justice system. Nonetheless, qualitative data indicates that girls and boys prefer interventions which are stylistically different; girls prefer the building of one-to-one relationships and a female-only environment, whereas boys prefer more structure and rules. However, work directed at criminogenic needs appears to be of most value with both boys and girls, and this is congruent with research into effective interventions (Harper and Chitty, 2005).

- If gender-mainstreaming is to be taken seriously then staff developing and delivering gender-specific programmes require considerably more support than they currently receive. Much good work goes unshared or is unsustainable because it is reliant on the goodwill and energy of staff who deliver it in addition to their other tasks. Sustainability is a key issue in work with girls and for gender-specific programmes.

Introduction

Much political and academic attention has been paid to the 'problem' of youth crime as committed by young men. Research with the general and offending population suggest deviant and antisocial behaviour are activities engaged in more widely by boys and young men, and in recent years there has also been an increase in measures and interventions to tackle the perceived rising numbers of young people who offend; work supported by a proliferation of research studies investigating why young people offend. The relatively lower number of young women engaged in offending has meant, however, that most research and expertise has been developed in response to male offending. Nonetheless, concern has grown that the number of females involved in offending has risen (YJB, 2006; and for example, Chesney-Lind, 2001; Koons-Witt and Schram, 2003; Steffensmeier et al, 2005).

Theories seeking to account for this perceived change in behaviour range from those which suggest that as females become more emancipated they behave more similarly to men (Jackson, 2002), to others that suggest that net-widening is taking place, with females being prosecuted for offences which would not previously have been pursued (Steffensmeier et al, 2005). In addition, caution is urged because the real numbers of females in the criminal justice system are low, making them susceptible to what appear to be dramatic changes in percentage terms (Chesney-Lind, 2001).

According to Home Office statistics (Home Office, 2003), in June 2002 there were 117 young women and 2490 young men under 18 years old in prison. In the same year, criminal statistics showed that just 19% of known offenders were women (ibid). The *2004 MORI Youth Survey* (YJB, 2004) reported that 31% of surveyed young males and 20% of young females in mainstream education admitted having committed an offence in the past 12 months¹, and 65% of young men and 48% of young women attending projects for excluded young people had done so in the last 12 months. A Nacro youth crime briefing published in 2001 reported that between 1992 and 1999 there had been a rise in the number of girls convicted of indictable offences. Additionally, Home Office (2003) figures indicated that the average population of women in custody rose by 173% between 1992 and 2002. The male prison population rose by 50% during that same period.

Figures such as these have led to increasing concern about the involvement of young and adult women in offending, although the relatively small numbers can act to make the figures look rather more dramatic than they are. The apparent rise in female offending has, however, occurred in other countries (such as the USA) where it has also attracted attention. The new focus on female offending has highlighted that relatively little is known and, in particular, if and how it differed from male offending; a number of studies are now seeking to address the issue (for example, Batchelor, 2005; Eagle, 2005; Jackson, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 2001; Acoca, 1999). Additionally, it is suggested that interventions designed to prevent the onset of offending or encourage desistance

¹ These figures are supported by the 2006 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey.

from offending among young people may not meet the needs of girls² because they have been designed to meet the needs of boys (Bloom et al, 2005).

The aims of this research were:

1. to consider what is known about girls' offending
2. to describe the current female youth justice population using national trend data and sampled *Assets*³
3. to look at effective or emerging practice with girls.

The study was multi-modal and included three main strands of research, all of which focused on female offending and in particular, that by girls under 18 years old. The methods included:

- a systematic review of published literature from the UK and abroad
- quantitative analysis of original and secondary data sets from a number of sources, including YOTs, the YJB, the Home Office and the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research
- focused research on eight young women's interventions in the community and two within the secure estate in England, including in-depth interviews with practitioners working with young female offenders and focus groups with young female offenders themselves.

A methods section details how the research was undertaken and the sources of data used. The report is then divided into three sections:

- Section 1 discusses key issues emanating from the literature
- Section 2 presents the analysis of original and existing datasets to describe what is known about the population of young female offenders in England and Wales, and identifies trends in offending and sentencing patterns
- Section 3 focuses on current good practice with young female offenders.

This research solidifies the knowledge base around young female offending and highlights remaining gaps by drawing together what is known internationally, with specific and original data on young women currently in the youth justice system in England and Wales. Furthermore, this research, in drawing together information from a number of areas, provides a source document to be used by policymakers and practitioners in the community and the secure estate. It is intended that this research will inform the YJB's diversity strategy and contribute to their aims with regard to the Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP).

² Rather than refer throughout the report to 'girls and young women' and 'boys and young men' they will be referred to as 'girls' and 'boys'. Where this is done, it refers to the population aged under 18 years and subject to the youth justice system in England and Wales.

³ *Asset* is the assessment tool used by YOTs across England and Wales to assess the future risk of reoffending of all young people supervised.

Methods

As highlighted in the Introduction, the aims of this research were to provide an overview of knowledge about girls who offend, drawing on information from a variety of sources and to inform current policy and practice in this area.

The research took place between March 2005 and April 2007 and incorporated the following:

- gathering and collating original and existing data on the offending and sentencing patterns for young women in England and Wales
- analysis of these sources to provide national trend data
- a systematic review of existing literature across the academic, policy and practice fields in the UK and abroad
- focused research on specific provision in the community and the secure estate in England for girls at risk of, or involved in, offending.

Review of the literature

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken based on the YJB's specifications. The inclusion or exclusion of identified literature was then based on the use of a 'Critical appraisal checklist' (Greenhalgh and Donald, 2000). This checklist was used as the majority of studies identified were of a qualitative nature. The use of this checklist ensured that a systematic assessment of all identified literature was possible and studies were consequently excluded.

The literature emanated from both the UK and overseas, including the USA, Australia and Europe. It was accessed via a number databases – ASSIA, Psycinfo, NCJRS, Policy Hub, ISI web of knowledge, Home Office and Injenta journal search. Only published materials were used because of the timescales involved, thus no grey literature was searched/included.⁴ The search terms were generated to meet the needs of the research and were varied in order to ensure that the most relevant material was uncovered, thus for example, using girls and/or young women did return different results on occasions. The search terms included:

- girls and crime and abuse *and* interventions
- young women and offending
- girls and offending
- girls and offending *and* interventions
- girls and criminal activity
- young women and crime

⁴ One unpublished paper was included. This was made available to the research team as part of the research process. It was an unpublished Home Office document by Sheila White.

- young women and offending
- young women and criminal activity
- young women and offending *and* interventions
- young women and offending *and* abuse
- girls and crime *and* interventions
- young women and crime *and* interventions
- girls and crime *and* abuse
- young women and abuse
- girls and offending *and* abuse

The articles originally identified were then reduced to focus on key areas, for example those discussing girls and young women. Those on adult women, or just boys were rejected.⁵ The literature was then reviewed and refined according to three overriding criteria for overall selection and inclusion – whether it helped to understand/illuminate the following:

- describe current young female offenders – characteristics, risk factors, protective factors, environmental and social factors
- trends and in particular (where available) trends in the UK
- current practice/interventions with girls – especially gender-specific practice and indications of good/effective practice.

The literature was read by two researchers who worked together to ensure consistency of application.

Review of existing data/national trend analysis

A variety of sources of information were accessed to provide national trend data, including:

- Police National Computer (PNC) data provided by the Home Office (girls only, financial years 2000–05)
- Themis (boys and girls, financial years 2000–06) and SACHS (Secure Accommodation Clearing House System) (girls only, financial years 2000–05) data provided by the YJB
- *Asset* data collated and provided by the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research (n=3,321)
- Previously gathered data from the Persistent Young Offenders study (2005) for the YJB (n=19)

⁵ Those on adult women were retained in regarding desistance as there were no studies identified which focused on girls.

- Collation of a representative *Asset* sample across England and Wales for convicted and Final Warning young women from YOTs across England and Wales (n=213 full *Assets* and 72 Final Warning *Assets*).

The datasets were analysed with the intention of obtaining a demographic description of young female offenders, as well as providing a clear and accurate picture of offending and sentencing patterns between April 2000 and April 2006, and to provide a current and accurate picture of the young female offender population within England and Wales based on actual numbers, rather than disposals (September 2005–September 2006).

Police National Computer

Data from the Home Office PNC provided details of the age and case type of offenders between 2000 and 2005. PNC data includes information relating to offenders and crime in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, as well as some crime dealt with by the Ministry of Defence and British Transport Police, thus the figures presented are not restricted to the jurisdiction of the YJB. Additionally, data was provided for females aged from 10–20 years inclusive, some of whom would be outside the jurisdiction of the YJB.

The Home Office was reluctant to provide data relating to the ethnicity of individuals as it currently recorded using the Police Identity Code system and is not compatible with current Census categories. Despite these issues, PNC was the only data source that could provide data at an offender⁶ level rather than offence level.

Themis

The YJB collects data from YOTs and the secure estate with regard to offences, pre-court and post-court disposals as well as remand decisions. This data is gathered centrally by the YJB and held on the Themis database. This database holds information from each YOT and while reliable at the offence level, it is not collected at the individual level. Thus, for instance, while it is possible to tell how many and what type of offences are committed by young people each year, it is not possible to discern how many young people commit those offences. This data is published annually by the YJB in the form of the Youth Justice Workload Data. Although as it is a wide ranging document in the public domain, it omits detailed information on female offenders. Here, data on young female offenders relates to 10 to 17-year olds who receive a disposal of some sort. Themis data was provided for boys and girls for the period 2000–06.

SACHS

SACHS is a live database used by the YJB Placements and Casework Service to accommodate young people in secure settings. The database holds data on all young people accommodated by the YJB since April 2000. Data provided from SACHS relates only to those young females who were securely accommodated by the YJB, but provides some detail not available from Themis or PNC. SACHS data was provided for girls only for the period of 2000–05.

⁶ For the purpose of PNC data, an individual is classed as an offender if they have received a Caution, Reprimand, Final Warning or conviction, or have an impending prosecution.

Asset

Two sets of *Asset* were analysed. One dataset (n=3321) was provided by the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research, who provided *Asset* data gathered during two national studies of *Asset* for the YJB. This comprised risk factor variables, such as those relating to a young person being in care and age at first conviction. The second was an original dataset (n=285) gathered from YOTs for the period September 2005 to September 2006 especially for this study and discussed in full below.

Persistent Young Offender study data

The researchers were also able to make use of data gathered during the study into persistent young offenders commissioned by the YJB (Arnall et al, 2005). This study over-sampled for females (n=19) and provided some additional qualitative and quantitative data relating to risk factors.

Analysis of Asset forms

In addition to the analysis of national trend data supplied by the Home Office and the YJB, we analysed an original sample of 213 full *Asset* forms and 72 Final Warning *Asset* forms relating to young women in the criminal justice system across England and Wales. The *Asset* data was requested from YOTs across England and Wales. They were asked to provide *Assets* on 15 convicted girls and five girls given a Final Warning. Ideally the *Asset* was to have been completed over the past 12 months.⁷ The sampling strategy was devised in order to ensure that the results were representative and generalisable across the population of young female offenders. The sampling strategy was agreed with the YJB:

- low, medium and high crime areas in England were identified from the crime component of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- YOTs with low, medium and high proportions of disposals given to female offenders were identified from Themis data (2003–04 data was used as it was readily available to the research team)
- YOTs where fewer than 75 disposals had been given to female offenders (from the 2003–04 Themis data) were excluded as it was felt that these areas would not have sufficient numbers of girls to provide 15 *Asset* forms
- 16 English YOTs were then chosen at random according the matrix below to ensure a range of areas was sampled.

Figure 1: Number of English YOTs in each category

		Deprivation		
		Low	Med	High
% girls	Low	15	12	6
	Med	28	9	2
	High	3	2	0

⁷ All sampled YOTs were sent emails requesting *Asset* forms relating the last 15 convicted girls they had supervised and the last five Final Warning girls, however, one YOT sent *Assets* that had been completed up to two years previously. It was unclear if these were the last girls who had been supervised by the YOT.

Figure 2: Breakdown of sampled YOTs according to matrix

	Low crime	Medium crime	High crime
Low % girls	3 YOTs sampled	2 YOTs sampled	2 YOTs sampled
Med % girls	5 YOTs sampled	3 YOTs sampled	
High % girls	1 YOT sampled		

The Welsh IMD differs from the English system with the scores provided being incomparable. Two Welsh YOTs were chosen, one with a high IMD score and one with a low IMD score.

In total, 16 YOTs were requested to provide 20 *Asset* forms each. Fifteen provided some/all of the requested information resulting in 286 *Assets*. One *Asset* was discounted as it related to a young woman given a Reprimand. The final sample of *Assets* consisted of 213 convicted young women and 72 Final Warning young women.

Focused research on specific provision for young female offenders

This element of the research included:

- semi-structured interviews with 13 practitioners across eight gender specific programmes⁸
- semi-structured interviews with the manager of one secure unit for girls and six members of staff across two secure units for girls
- semi-structured interviews with four girls attending gender-specific programmes in the community
- two focus groups attended by eight girls at each secure unit
- semi-structured interviews with two girls at one secure unit.

The intention of this element of the study was to focus on a number of programmes both in the community and in secure settings offering a specific intervention for young female offenders and to:

- access the views of programme practitioners on:
 - ‘risk’ and protective factors for young female offenders
 - issues of good practice in working with young female offenders
 - why and how gender specific interventions should be developed, structured and delivered
- access the views of programme participants to establish:
 - their views about how/why they became involved in offending
 - their experiences of interventions received.

⁸ Some of which were no longer running, in which case practitioners were asked additional questions about sustainability, etc.

Initially, four sites identified⁹ as offering a gender-specific intervention in the community were selected for study. The sites were chosen to reflect a 'spread' of provision, encompassing a variety of ethnic groups, a range of geographical locations and a mix of YOT-delivered and contracted-out programmes. However, of the initial four sites selected, only one programme was still active. After discussion with the YJB a further four sites known to be currently providing a young women's programme were approached. As a result, the community-based research has focused on eight sites, as detailed in Appendix A.

Interviews with practitioners focused on whether or not the girls programme was currently operating, what had affected that process and if the programme had changed substantially.¹⁰ The research team was provided with additional written information about the girls' programmes by three sites, although all sites were asked for written information where available. As will be discussed later, some sites were reluctant to share information. In addition, researchers observed sessions at three sites. Additional written information about gender-specific work at one secure unit was also supplied; the second unit did not provide information as it did not run a gender-specific programme.

Interview and documentary data were analysed and coded for 'themes' that emerged. The interview data presents a range of views and professional groups working in this specialised area.

Interviews with programme participants

As discussed above, the researchers intended to access the views and experiences of young women attending the programmes, in addition to interviewing practitioners. However, in the event, only a small number of participants from one community site could be accessed. In part, this was due to considerable difficulty and/or delay in obtaining permission from site practitioners to attend group sessions and speak directly to participants.

Due to the limited amount of data gathered from young women themselves, this report focuses largely on practitioner interviews only. However, where possible, the views of the young women have been incorporated but due to the small numbers involved these views are not intended to be representative.

Survey of YOT provision

As mentioned previously, the selection of suitable sites for study was based, to some extent, on previous research commissioned by the YJB (Owers, 2004). As it became clear that a number of sites no longer operated a gender-specific intervention, issues of sustainability and programme failure became a key interest.

Researchers surveyed by email each of the 45 YOTs identified as offering gender-specific interventions in the 2004 study to update information on the number of programmes still operating in 2005.

⁹ The sites were identified by a report to the YJB on gender-specific interventions (Owers, 2004).

¹⁰ In site G, the YOT no longer provided a YOT-based young women's programme but was still offering a gender-based intervention to young women in the community.

Subsequently, those YOTs who confirmed they were still offering gender-specific interventions were re-approached by email and telephone in 2007 to further explore sustainability.

Ethics and confidentiality

All study participants (programme providers and young women) were assured anonymity – as far as possible – throughout the research process and in the report. Thus, programmes studied as part of the focused research have been named A–H and the secure units visited have remained anonymous. However, participants were warned that where they were involved with the delivery of unusual or particular interventions, anonymity could not be guaranteed.

Participants were also assured of the confidential nature of all interviews and focus groups. However, the focus of this current study did not aim to explore overly sensitive or personal information with participants. In some cases, staff members were present at the focus group or interview (particularly in the secure settings) and so young participants were reminded that what they said would be held in confidence by both the research team and the staff member/s. Where this was true, it is possible that the participant may have provided different responses than had they been alone with the researchers.

Introduction

The literature on female offending is principally focused on adult women and is particularly skewed towards women in custody. The literature on juvenile or youth offending is principally focused on boys. There has been little definitive information on girls and young women, although there is now a growing body of recent literature. There is also a small amount written about gender-specific or planned interventions with girls. The importance of developing and reviewing a body of evidence on girls and offending is that it may be that girls and women are different in their criminogenic and other needs; for example, the factors which affect onset of delinquency or contribute to offending or persistence of offending.

The literature is divided on whether or not risk or predictive factors, with regard to offending, are the same for girls and women, and girls and boys. There is a considerable amount of focus in the new literature (particularly from the USA) that female risk factors are different (Bloom et al, 2005); the difficulty is that this piece of research and the body of work with which it is associated focus principally on adult women. However, some research suggests that for girls and boys the risk factors are broadly similar (Cauffman et al, 2004; Hubbard and Pratt, 2002) and that the risk factors identified may be better predictors of potential offending by girls than boys (Farrington and Painter, 2004). Practitioners interviewed during the course of this study tended to consider that many of the risk factors for girls' offending were the same or similar as those identified for boys, citing, for example, peer pressure, boredom, education, family issues and alcohol use.

The importance of risk factors is that they relate directly to whether or not girls can be worked with in correctional settings¹¹ on the same basis as boys and using the same programmes, or whether new targeted programmes should be developed. The argument currently emanating strongly from the USA is that, based on the research on women, new 'gender-responsive strategies' (Bloom et al, 2005) should be developed. Further, work undertaken in the state of Oregon (USA) also suggests the development of gender-specific programmes for girls, again based on a variety of developmental (rather than criminological) research studies indicating the importance girls and women place on relationships and on issues of negative self-esteem. The suggestion is that programmes should be developed to focus on these features and provide a holistic framework.

The literature emanating from the USA is heavily influenced by socio-psychological explanations, which may be more or less relevant in the UK, and may fit less well within our political understanding and culture. There has been some limited consideration of class factors and poverty issues and the indicative findings point to these being salient factors, particularly with regard to their impact on other factors and to the likelihood of 'being caught' (Smith and McVie, 2003:189). Further, the work of Farrington and Painter (2004), Hubbard and Pratt (2002) and Tuvblad et al (2006) on girls suggest that socio-economic status and poverty may be key factors.

¹¹'Correctional setting' will be the term used to indicate any programme of planned intervention with girls and young women around offending behaviour in a YOT, youth inclusion programme, custodial institution, or as a group provided by an independent provider on a similar basis.

The feminist movement and literature has expended much research time and much dialectic on critically reviewing assumptions that women are defined by their sexual identity and their relationships, and are genetically programmed to respond differently than men. Further, it is suggested that rational choice motivations are often ignored. The research, which suggests that many of those females who offend have been sexually and physically abused, that poor or negative relationships are often a key factor in their lives and that relationships are important to them when continuing, or desisting from offending, cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, it is also important to consider that such explanations have traditionally been used to account for 'inappropriate' or antisocial behaviour by women.

A critical review of current literature, particularly as it relates to predictions of onset of offending and desistance is considered, along with that available on interventions aimed at girls. The literature is briefly interwoven with original research undertaken with practitioners and analysis of datasets as appropriate.

Section 1: Why do girls offend?

Girls, offending and risk factors

The literature on female offending has, until recently, tended to present girls and women as homogenous, or to discuss ‘youth’ crime, when what was in fact investigated was offending by boys. More recently research studies have begun to consider the differences, principally between boys and girls offending; we posit however, that there is still too often an assumption that girls and women are the same when a close reading of the literature in fact suggests that this is not the case (for example, Bloom et al, 2005; Brewer-Smyth, 2004; White, 2004, and Byrne and Trew, 2005). In addition, there is a tendency, partly as the result of the small number of girls in the criminal justice system, to treat all girls and their offending as the same. However, partly as a result of the apparent rise in girls’ offending and violent offending in particular, there has also been some consideration of whether women/girls convicted of violent offences are ‘different’ to those convicted of non-violent offences. Overall, girls still appear to be involved in offending in general for a shorter period, to commit fewer offences than boys and, on the whole, to commit less serious offences (Smith and McAra, 2004; Arnull et al, 2005).

The literature relevant to this study¹² follows two major trajectories seeking to account for an apparent rise in female offending (for example Chesney-Lind, 2001; Chesney-Lind and Okamoto, 2001; Koons-Witt and Schram, 2003; Steffensmeier et al, 2005) or concerned with investigating the risk factors which might predict female offending (often compared to boys). The latter in particular is usually concerned with investigating the link between victimisation and abuse (see for example Smith et al, 2006; Chapple et al, 2004; Austin, 2003; Hubbard and Pratt, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 2001; Acoca, 1999) because of earlier retrospective studies on adult female offenders, which appeared to show high levels of past abusive experiences and seemed to indicate a link between abuse and offending in adult women (Acoca 1999). The literature has included all studies which met the criteria outlined in the methods section and the sample sizes of particularly relevant studies have been indicated.¹³

Abusive, unsettled or disrupted childhoods appear common for many girls who offend, although this is also true for boys. What is not clear is how much these are predictive risk factors and how much they coexist, or form one of a number of interacting or inter-related factors which affect onset of offending. Currently the literature indicates most strongly that it is the clustering together of a number of factors, such as the experience of abuse, the witnessing of domestic violence, poverty, lack of educational and/or familial engagement, personality characteristics such as impulsivity and pro-criminal associations – which may, in combination, contribute to offending behaviour (see for example Arnull et al, 2005; Farrington and Painter, 2004; Smith and McVie, 2003;

¹² There is a significant body of writing on adult female offending that forms both a research and theoretical base and platform. This literature review was, however, directly focused on girls in particular and literature seen as relevant to their offending; this report does not attempt to summarise the wider literature and theoretical positions.

¹³ The studies included met the selection criteria for relevance and robustness using a framework relevant to quantitative and qualitative studies and congruent with the YJB guidelines. The sample sizes of all studies have not been described as many of the studies are, as discussed in the methods section, qualitative. ‘Significant’ findings indicated are those which the studies suggested were statistically significant.

Smith and McAra, 2004; Hubbard and Pratt, 2002; Smith et al, 2006 and Tuvblad et al, 2006).

Girls and boys – risk factors

There are a number of studies on risk and the possible factors which affect the onset of offending behaviour. The key issue with risk factors is their ability (or not) to predict offending and the likelihood of them overestimating, or overpredicting, risk. The proliferation of studies does now, however, make it possible to begin to consider how different risk factors and life experiences might interact in order for one young person to become an offender and another in similar circumstances to not do so; however, some of the studies are contradictory and this can make it difficult to make sense of the literature.

Research undertaken in the UK for the YJB and concerning persistent young offenders looked retrospectively at the case files of 100 young people supervised by YOTs and youth inclusion programmees (YIPs), and interviewed those young people and their key workers; the study over-sampled for girls. Of the 50 young people supervised by YOTs, 10 of those looked at were girls. The findings indicated that traumatic life events were high for girls and boys in this group (Arnull et al, 2005), although the girls' experiences of abuse and mental health problems appeared elevated in relation to the boys. As a group at least half of the boys and girls had:

- family or carers involved in criminal activity
- conflict within the family
- lived in poor or unstable housing
- been looked after at some stage by the local authority
- been in contact with social services
- been the victim of violence or abuse
- been difficulty/violent at school
- anger management problems
- committed acts of violence or aggression (over 80% of boys and girls in this sample).

The small sample size meant that the findings could be no more than indicative. Noteworthy differences between boys and girls were found in just two areas, the age at first conviction (girls were older at just over thirteen and half years) and with regard to suicide attempts, 50% of the girls had attempted suicide on at least one occasion compared to 7.1% of the boys. The apparent vulnerability of all of the young people was noticeable and that of the girls even more so; the findings also prompted this review of current literature, data and practice.

The risk factors that 'predict' possible offending have been identified for some time and in two studies have particular relevance having been undertaken in the UK by Farrington (1997) and more recently by Smith and McVie (2003). The study by Farrington (1997) focused initially on men and boys, but work has been done, both by Farrington and others, to develop these in relation to girls. The risk factors cover a large

group of characteristics.¹⁴ These have the ability to ‘over-predict’ who might commit offences; thus those who have been abused do not necessarily or automatically commit offences, nor those who are poor, from large families, from single-parent families or those who have misused substances. Given this it is important to understand how a range of factors might interrelate.

Work by Smith and McVie (2003) in Edinburgh has sought to consider how risk factors might interrelate. They have done this using a longitudinal prospective study design looking at 4,300 young people drawn from a one-year school cohort for the whole city. Their early indications are:

- that boys offended at twice the rate of girls (aged 11–12-years)
- that those who had ever been in care offended two and a half times as much as the whole sample
- that those living with a mother and stepfather, or single father, had more elevated offending levels than those who lived with a single mother
- that those with experience of victimisation were more likely to offend
- that those who received little parental supervision were more likely to offend
- there was a strong relationship between impulsivity and offending
- there was a relationship between self-esteem¹⁵, alienation and moral disengagement and offending
- there was a strong relationship between offending and having friends who offend
- boys were more likely to be caught than girls (9.7% compared to 2.3%)
- those from social class 5¹⁶ were more likely to be caught by the police than those from social class 1 (13.1% compared to 1.3%)
- there was a close relationship between the use of alcohol and illicit drugs and offending.

Protective factors¹⁷ were:

- living with both parents
- being subject to parental supervision
- low levels of conflict with parents.

¹⁴ Covering, for instance, school and community issues, family-related issues and personal factors (Farrington, 1997).

¹⁵ Practitioners in six of eight sites reported that self-esteem was a key issue for the young women they worked with and thus, it appeared a focus of several of the studied young women’s interventions.

¹⁶ The Registrar General’s Social Scale defined those in social class 5 as in unskilled occupations and those in class 1 as in professional occupations. This system of classification has since been replaced by the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classifications.

¹⁷ The term ‘protective factors’, like risk factors, is not uncontroversial. The use of the term is usually related to factors which are either not the ‘risk’, or which minimises the risk; work in this area may attempt therefore to look at both areas and/or the interaction between them. Smith and McVie (2003) do attempt to look at both risk and protective factors, while others such as Farrington and Painter (2004) only at risk factors.

Parental supervision was associated with low conflict between parent and child.

The indications from the work of Smith and McVie are that there is a complex web of interactions for each young person with regard to offending, but that these do follow patterns and it might be possible to use this during assessment or planning interventions with young people at risk of offending or who are offending.

Other reports on this work (Smith and McAra, 2004) have considered the gender pattern and are indicative but not definitive at this stage of their research. They suggest however that ‘there is a substantial difference between boys and girls in levels of serious delinquency, but a relatively small difference in levels of broad delinquency’ (ibid, p.3). Boys committed a wider range of serious delinquent acts than girls and did so more frequently. Girls’ delinquency ‘peaks’ between the ages of 12–14 and falls off by age 15. They suggest that the explanatory factors can account for the differences in behaviour with regard to broad delinquency and that these are attributable to moral beliefs, victimisation and mixing with friends, especially of the opposite sex and in risky situations. Also important were a ‘risk-taking’ personality and lack of parental supervision. However, they suggest that these factors do not adequately account for the differences concerning serious delinquency and that ‘the explanatory model for girls was ...more substantially different’. Their work supports other studies suggesting that factors particularly important to girls’ delinquency were:

- socio-economic factors (material deprivation)
- weak attachments to school
- low self-esteem
- having friends of the opposite sex.

And to a lesser extent situational factors such as:

- ‘hanging about’
- risky spare-time activities.

Their study is supported by Piquero et al (2005) although that study found that delinquent peer association was predictive of delinquent behaviour, but that the association was stronger for boys than girls. It also supports some of the findings with women, namely that weak or weakened social links and relationships with boys/men who are involved in delinquent or offending behaviour indicates delinquent or offending behaviour. Anecdotal evidence from practitioners working with young women reported that the young women were, on occasions, involved in offending, substance misuse or violence as a result of their boyfriend’s criminal behaviour. The exact mechanisms by which the risk and the delinquent behaviour interact requires further investigation. For example, it is not yet understood how the relationship between an association with delinquent males and/or delinquent females affects a girl’s own delinquent behaviour.

However, much female offending principally takes place with other females and analysis of *Asset* undertaken solely on girls for this study (and reported in Section 2) supports this. Thus, while mixing with boys appears to be a factor seen to influence onset, the girls largely offend on their own, or with other girls – raising questions about the impact of mixed gender peer groups on girls’ delinquency. Other studies have also suggested that criminology can over-focus on the negative aspects of relationships with peers and that there can be positive ‘beneficial aspects of youth friendship’ which deter other young people from crime. McCarthy et al (2004) found that while ‘friendship

networks dominated by people with a history of offending increase involvement in crime, others – such as those dominated by females – discourage it’. Thus social attachments with other youth may also have protective benefits and it is important to assess the risk and protective factors of peer relationships.

Smith and McAra (2004) also suggested that there are factors which might explain the differences in serious delinquency between boys and girls that their study had not measured. They considered that their findings might support the work of Moffat (1990) who, they suggest, argued that these explanatory factors may be ‘psychological disabilities ... associated with specific neurophysiological deficits’¹⁸. This inter-links with the work of Brewer-Smyth (2004). However, a recent study by Brennan et al (2003) to look at the relative impact of biological risk factors as indicated by Moffat (1993) and social risk factors as indicated by Patterson (1982) suggested that biological and social risk factors were ‘found to significantly interact in the prediction of early-onset persistent aggression in both boys and girls’ and that this relationship was strongest where the risks in both areas were high. They therefore concluded that a ‘combined focus on biological and social risk factors’ was required. However, although they found that some girls with high risk in both categories displayed the same patterns as boys, there were differences between girls and boys such that ‘cumulative social risk factors alone... differentiated early-onset persistent aggression from adolescent-onset aggression in girls’ and that biological factors did not ‘significantly differentiate these aggressive behaviour patterns’.

Additionally, other studies have found that multiple traumas help predict delinquency for girls, but that a diagnosis of post-traumatic disorder did not (Smith et al, 2006). Other work by Dixon et al (2005) found that having four or more psychiatric diagnoses and a history of sexual abuse were predictive indicators of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) amongst female juvenile offenders and that this model predicted 83% of the cases. However they could not account for why PTSD was not developed by 62% of offenders who were exposed to trauma and 40% of those who had been sexually abused. In this study, the mechanisms at work were not fully understood; it was hypothesised that coping strategies, personality factors, intelligence and other protective factors could have an impact on the outcomes. Along with other studies however, the findings indicate that multiple traumas or risk factors are predictive indicators of the onset of delinquency.

Fagan and Western (2003) found that delinquency appeared to have a more negative impact on girls’ mental health than it did on boys, while Cauffman et al (2004) have suggested a complex relationship between distress and restraint in predicting deviance which was ‘invariant across gender’. However, within gender groups and particularly those associated with more serious offending, different patterns emerged. Serious offending girls were likely to show more distress and less restraint. This appeared to suggest that these girls might internalise distress (as other studies have argued) but that they were equally likely to externalise it.

Farrington has developed his work on the Cambridge study cohort to look at the sisters of the male sample (Farrington and Painter, 2004). This work has indicated that socio-economic and child-rearing risk factors which had been highlighted originally for boys ‘predicted offending by sisters more strongly’ (ibid, p.5). Key risk factors were:

- low family income

¹⁸ They did not specify in that research what those ‘neurophysiological deficits’ might be.

- large family size
- parental conviction
- low levels of parental supervision
- separation from a parent.

A more recent study by Tuvblad et al (2006) has suggested that there is an interaction between socio-economic factors and other risks, to the extent that 'socioeconomic status moderates the influence of genetic and environmental effects on antisocial behaviour'. A meta-analysis undertaken by Hubbard and Pratt (2002) appears to offer further support for this view, suggesting an interaction between biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. They found that predictors of delinquency for girls are not too different from those for boys and can best be understood within tiered stages:

- the most predictive being a prior history of anti-social behaviour and peers
- the next, antisocial personality, poor school relationships and experiences of abuse
- the third, antisocial beliefs and attitudes, age, poor family relationships, self-image and social adjustment and low IQ
- fourth, low socio-economic status and high anxiety.

As can be seen from above, the understanding of how risk factors influence the onset of delinquency has become more sophisticated and more complex, with research suggesting that a number of overlapping or cumulative disadvantages and traumas appear to be involved.

However, while risk factors can identify those young people at risk of offending they do produce false positives, i.e. they suggest that more young people will become delinquent than do. The work of Farrington and Painter (2004), for example, was more likely to produce false positives for girls, with just over a third of the highest risk sisters actually convicted. The ability of risk and protective factors to over-predict future offending in any risk category group is a recognised issue (Austin, 2003). Nevertheless, Farrington and Painter suggest that risk-focused prevention could create a 'much greater proportional reduction in female offending...because risk factors are much more strongly related to female offending...' (ibid, p.38)¹⁹. There are now a number of large quantitative studies, particularly emanating from the USA, which 'tested' for relationships between a number of different factors, and these can be found to be contradictory and/or to prove relationships between different factors. Many studies test for relationships between a small range of factors. This means that it is possible that other factors, not tested for, may also be influential. For example, there are studies which suggest that early onset of puberty is predictive of girls' offending, however it seems probable that this is linked to other resultant social or environmental factors, rather than a simple causal physiological link.

In a study undertaken by Obeidallah et al (2004), early menarche was most predictive when combined with a girl living in a neighbourhood with 'high concentrated disadvantage'. Furthermore, witnessing domestic violence appears related to girls' onset of offending (particularly violent offending), more strongly than for boys (Herrera & McCloskey, 2001). Herrera & McCloskey (2001) showed that the relationship was

¹⁹ Farrington did not record instances of abuse.

particularly strong where girls had been the subject of violence within the home themselves. This is not true for all girls who offend, or commit violent offences, or for all girls who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence, and it was not supported by the *Asset* analysis undertaken for this study on girls convicted of violent offences in England and Wales.

As the foregoing discussion highlights, the body of work on risk and predictive factors may take some time to fully emerge and for relationships between differing factors to be fully understood. At present what seems most clearly indicated is that the presence of a number of factors across the social, environmental and neuro-physiological ranges would appear to be the best indicator that a girl may be at risk of offending (Smith et al, 2006; Tuvblad et al, 2006; Brennan et al, 2003; Hubbard and Pratt, 2002). As Bailey (2003:589) has argued, it is imperative:

...to differentiate between risk indicators and risk mechanisms in order to demonstrate more than an association between a particular factor and an outcome but to uncover the way in which a factor of interest operates to produce its effect.

Girls, offending and abuse

Smith et al (2006) suggest that there is a relationship between traumatic experiences and delinquency, to the extent that where one is present the other appears more elevated than for the general population. This is also true, as we have seen, of a number of other social, environmental and neuro-biological factors. However, research on female offenders, and particularly that with adult women, has appeared to indicate a high coexistence of abuse experiences (especially sexual abuse) and delinquency/offending and to suggest that this was higher than for boys (Austin, 2003; Chesney-Lind, 2001; Acoca, 1999). This has provoked significant debate focusing on the fact that male offenders also show elevated incidence of abuse (including sexual abuse) experiences in comparison to the general population (Hubbard and Pratt, 2002), which is often not the subject of significant focus. This is an area which may require further investigation with research by Hollin and Palmer (2006) for example, suggesting that while many criminogenic needs may be similar between men and women, some, such as physical and sexual abuse, may have a different impact. Other writers argue that by focusing on abuse, female offenders are presented as victims, rather than self-determining, or simply delinquent (Philips, 2003) and finally, that it appears to imply a causal or linear link.

There are a number of studies undertaken internationally which have looked at the relationship between abuse experiences and delinquency (Smith et al, 2006; Chapple et al, 2004; Austin, 2003; Hubbard and Pratt, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 2001; Acoca, 1999). It is also important to add a cautionary note, however, that many of those studies emanate from the USA and were based on different populations of girls in the juvenile justice system; for example, many girls in the USA become involved in the justice system as the result of status offences, such as running away. Many other studies have looked at adult women whose experiences of abuse have often occurred as adults and are not therefore transferable to girls. Additionally, many studies focus on girls and/or women in custody and this may give a skewed picture of the female offending population as a whole. Most female offending is, and continues to be, low-level and thus those who are in custody are unlikely to be representative of the overall female offending population.

Early work in the USA on young female offending, undertaken in the late 1990s by Leslie Acoca, has become influential and is now heavily quoted. The study involved the

retrospective review of 1,000 case files on young female offenders and 200 interviews with those in 'juvenile halls' (Acoca, 1999). The study indicated particularly high rates of victimisation, which reportedly paralleled those found in adult women offenders. The study found that:

- of the girls interviewed, 92% had 'been subjected to some form of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse'²⁰
- a correlation between drug misuse and victimisation and other high risk behaviours
- the girls came from families with histories of poverty, death and an 'intergenerational pattern of arrest and incarceration' (ibid, p.2)
- 85% had been suspended, or expelled
- 81% had experienced serious physical health problems, 53% psychological services and 21% hospitalised in a psychiatric facility
- 29% had been pregnant and 16% while in custody
- girls who committed serious offences (robbery and homicide) did so with co-defendants.

Acoca (1999) found that the girls were, on the whole, charged with less serious offences and that a high proportion (36%) were in custody for probation violation. Of these, many had come into the system for status offences such as running away (which is not applicable in the UK); what the US-based research might indicate is that running away may highlight important issues that should be examined and that may mean the individual is, or has been, at risk of harm and of offending.

Her research indicated that for this sample of young female offenders, experiences of victimisation were high, their young lives had often been disrupted and included many negative, traumatic or abusive experiences. They committed offences which were, in general, of a less serious nature, misused substances, were out of school and behaved in a high-risk way. When they committed more serious offences it was usually with someone they knew or against someone with whom they had a relationship (such as a parent). In all of these ways they were similar to previous studies on the adult female population, except violent offences by adult women were most likely to be perpetrated against an intimate partner.

Research by Brewer-Smyth (2004:837) on 123 adult women in custody in the USA indicated that:

...those currently convicted of violent crimes had significantly higher childhood physical and sexual abuse scores, and more recent abuse perpetrated against them than those convicted of non-violent crimes.

Further, her research suggested that those women had also 'accessed the health-care system significantly more frequently for abuse-related injuries predating the most recent crime than those convicted of non-violent crimes'. And that overall there was a higher than normal rate of traumatic life experiences within the overall female sample of offenders, such as witnessing violence and experiences of neglect (2004:838).

²⁰ Schaffner (2005) reports that this compares to 7% for the general population. Cawson (2000) looking at the experience of sexual abuse of those under 16 years in the UK estimated a total of 16% had such abusive experiences.

Brewer-Smyth (2004) details the neurobiological impact of abuse on women and its relationship to women offenders.²¹ She indicated in her study that 95% of her sample had ‘abnormal neurological histories’, which predated their offence or were apparent on examination. She argued that it was well known that stressful life events ‘play a role in the pathogenesis of anxiety and mood disorders and are well established as acute precipitants of psychiatric illness’, but acknowledged that although ‘increased evidence indicates that childhood experiences such as abuse precipitate adult vulnerability to psychiatric illness’, and both ‘are frequently found in female prison inmates’, that it is hard to explain or account for the causal link (2004:842). She suggested that the neurological damage might contribute to the women subsequently behaving in a violent or abusive way (2004:847). However, she has also indicated how abuse might be a demonstrable risk factor predicting possible future offending. She found in interview with her sample that ‘poor educational preparation (was) often related to abuse during childhood and associated decreased cognitive abilities early in life precluding educational attainment’ (2004:844). Further, she cited a study by Barnett et al (1996), which found that while poverty was a key factor in ‘motivational orientations to scholastic tasks’, there was an effect of abuse over and above poverty which was ‘found to disrupt the psychological processes accounting for children’s scholastic performance’.

The implication is therefore that abuse has both the potential to remove the child from school (because they wish to hide injuries or are kept away) and that the psychological effect might also be to affect or suppress motivation and performance in school. Subsequently, because school attendance is problematic and performance hindered, educational attainment is affected and may lead to less legitimate work opportunities being open to them.

A nine-year study by Swanston et al (2003) in Australia found that ‘a history of child sexual abuse is clearly associated with self-reported criminal behaviour’, although not with actual convictions; she suggested this might mean that it was predictive of low-level offending. The finding was particularly strong with regard to girls and was found when controlling for other factors such as socio-economic status.²² A history of sexual abuse was also predictive of aggressive behaviour. Her findings indicated, however, that ‘family functioning and recent negative life events’ were also significant with regard to problematic or delinquent behaviour (2003:743). Her work supported a longitudinal study undertaken by Widom (2000), which found that abused and neglected girls were twice as likely to be arrested. A study by Thornberry (1994) showed that young people exposed to family violence in multiple forms were twice as likely to be violent as those from non-violent families.²³ However, the girls in the *Asset* analysis undertaken for this study fall into two groups, those who show lower levels of abuse experiences – in general for those convicted of violent offences rather than for theft and handling stolen goods, or ‘other’ offences, and the second group who have been accommodated by social services and who have experienced some form of abuse; the picture appears therefore too complex, perhaps even within offence ‘categories’.

²¹ This is why this study was retained although it focuses on adult women. It explores an area suggested by Smith and McAra (2004) of potential interest regarding more serious offending and the link between victimisation and other factors.

²² More girls than boys were sampled.

²³ Both studies cited by Schaffner (2005).

As Austin (2003:59) has argued ‘surveys of adult criminal offenders leave researchers unable to determine the proportion of sexually abused children who do not become adult offenders’ and thus the relationship between experiences of abuse and subsequent delinquency cannot be adequately tested. This is also true of the population of young people who are victimised and who do not become offenders. Austin (2003) suggests that ‘derailment theory’ is not proven; this proposes a link between female offending and sexual abuse as a result of learned social behaviours through which the victim seeks to protect themselves following abuse but that leads them into deviant social networks. Further, his study suggested that the patterning of victimisation and offending was complex, but that victimisation experienced as a child through sexual abuse actually suppressed adult offending. This finding is at odds with other work already considered in this area, but adds a cautionary note at this point when exact and contributory mechanisms are not understood. Additionally, Odgers et al (2005) have argued that victimisation or maltreatment (defined as child physical and/or sexual abuse, psychological abuse or exposure to domestic violence) (2005:747) is best understood as a ‘non-specific risk factor embedded within a complex developmental course’ and that it can be used ‘as a proxy for a cluster of broader and environmental relationship variables’ (2005:757). Interestingly, they found that psychopathy was not predictive of recidivism, but that victimisation was, particularly when related to physical abuse and psychological abuse by the primary maternal figure; although the latter had been found to be insignificant in a UK study by Farrington and Painter (2004).

The picture with regard to the relationship between abuse experiences and offending, especially onset, is therefore unclear. Abuse experiences among girls and boys who offend are elevated in relation to the general population; they do not appear, in most studies, however, to reach the levels shown for adult women and therefore this evidence would not appear applicable to girls and onset of offending. There may be a relationship between victimisation and offending but this appears to be mediated by other factors and so how victimisation experiences influence offending behaviour is unclear and so far unexplained. Further, not enough is known at this time to be able to suggest that victimisation is in itself a predictive indicator of offending.

Girls and violent offending

Acoca (1999) found that some young females had been prosecuted for offences of violence that had occurred within the family. She suggested that this might have led to the prosecution of a young person who was a victim and/or that the prosecution may not have been brought in the past, but was now prosecutable. This accorded with other work undertaken by Schaffner (2005) and Chesney-Lind (2001). It also relates to our current research, where practitioners have reported concerns that girls are currently being prosecuted for incidents at school which the staff think would not have been prosecuted in the past; this is particularly related to incidences of violence. The suggestion is that it is not the behaviour of girls which has changed, but the reaction of institutions and individuals within those institutions which come into contact with them (Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Chesney-Lind, 2001). In addition, it is suggested that western societies have become less accepting of low levels of violence in which females are more likely to be engaged. This area has been the subject of further study and it is suggested that it is possible to identify a ‘net widening’ effect which is currently in operation with regard to girls’ offending. Steffensmeier et al (2005) have referred to this as ‘artefactual’; their study looked at self-report and victimisation studies alongside convictions for girls in the USA and found that more girls were being arrested. They found that this was occurring although self-reported behaviour and experiences of victimisation did not

appear to have risen. Thus it appears that net-widening may be more general, but particularly related to violent offences.

There are a small number of qualitative studies which have looked at girls attitudes to offending and thus sought to 'bring the voices of young women to the centre of theoretical and methodological debates' (Batchelor, 2005:361). The studies report strikingly similar findings with regard to girls' attitudes to violent offending and the use of aggression (Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003; Batchelor et al, 2001).

Batchelor found in her interviews with the young women (n=21) that²⁴:

- half of the women had not lived with both parents and there were high levels of family disruption
- three-quarters had previous social work involvement
- two-fifths had been sexually abused
- four-fifths of the offences were committed while they were intoxicated with drugs or alcohol
- four-fifths had previous convictions and half had served a prior custodial sentence
- two-fifths had regularly witnessed 'serious' violence in the home and there was a high level of witnessing violence in general
- eight out of 21 had attempted suicide and 12 had deliberately injured themselves
- four-fifths had truanted regularly, half had received special educational provision and a third had no formal level of qualifications
- one-quarter were homeless and/or living in a drug project or homeless accommodation before custody.

The young women were a group involved in offending at the more serious end and in custody; they were not, therefore, typical of young female offenders in general. The rates of victimisation, while high, were lower than those reported in other studies on young women, such as Acoca (1999) in the USA and more similar to those found in the PYOs study by Arnull et al (2005). Like Arnull et al, Batchelor's study showed that most of the girls had had previous professional input to the family, which had presented opportunities for engagement. Further, Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1998) have suggested girls' violent offending onsets later and peaks earlier than boys and that this is in part a response to their higher thresholds for risk factors, thus suggesting that they require higher exposure to risk factors than boys to become deviant and/or violent.

DiNapoli (2003) found that the biggest predictor for girls' violent behaviour was a previous experience of victimisation by violence, although a range of other factors such as drug use, other delinquency, delinquent friends and having friends who fought were also associated. She concluded that normative behaviours were particularly influential on girls' use of violence, such that those with 'large friendship networks of largely older friends who also engage in violence' (DiNapoli, 2003:146) were those most likely to use violence. She further suggested that this group of girls lacked a sense of competency to make other decisions and that interventions should therefore focus on developing those skills and supportive, positive relationships. Hirschinger et al (2003:1102) found

²⁴ Batchelor used fractions, not percentages to report her results.

moreover, that women who were violent to other women were similar to men, with risk factors being 'low socio-economic status, illicit peer behaviour and involvement with violence in a variety of relationships'. She found no correlation with depression, medication or childhood abuse. Jarman (2005) also found that socio-economic status was a factor in girls' experiences of violence, with those from poorer socio-economic groups experiencing higher levels of violence. Additionally, a study by Pettersson (2005) found that girls' violent offending was similar to that of boys in that it was directed mainly at the same gender and motivated by status and hierarchy; this work has been directly corroborated by qualitative studies with girls and the *Asset* analysis undertaken for this study. Finally, Chapple et al (2005:378) also found that 'gender matters for rates of offending' but that girls and boys were 'far more similar regarding their social bonds and sensitivity to social control than they are different', and that this held true for violent, as well as other offending.

In the qualitative studies (Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003; Batchelor et al, 2001), girls' own accounts for their behaviour included needing to be self-reliant and wishing to protect others they cared about. They often demonstrated great loyalty to their families and considerable anger as a result of their experiences. Many expected to be let down and did not have close friends, although they took 'disloyalty' hard. As Byrne and Trew (2005) found, young women would also justify their offending and, in this case, violence, on the grounds that the victim had committed a 'sick' crime or on the basis of protecting other family members (ibid, p.367). Girls also linked their behaviour to feelings of control, self-respect, self-protection and 'an attempt to pre-empt bullying or victimisation through the display of an aggressive or violent disposition' (Byrne and Trew, 2005:369). This finding has been replicated by other studies in which girls appear to justify their offending, and particularly, the use of violence (Jarman, 2005; Smith-Adcock and Kerpelman, 2005; Ness, 2004; Batchelor et al, 2001). This too is borne out by the analysis of *Assets* undertaken for this study and the apparent absence of remorse among girls convicted for violent offences. Jarman (2005) in fact found that girls viewed the use of violence as more acceptable than other types of offending, such as joyriding.

Like the research undertaken with a small number of young women offenders in conjunction with this study (Eagle, 2005) and also work by Phillips (2003) and Ness (2004), Batchelor reports that 'exposure to routine violence' appeared common. She argues that the young women had learned to respond to situations with violence because that was what they witnessed occurring frequently throughout their own lives and thus it was 'a rational response to past and potential victimisation' (op cit, p.370). The qualitative studies suggest that there has been a tendency to play down the use of violence by women in certain cultural contexts throughout history (Philips, 2003), that violence is more 'commonplace' in the lives of girls than generally thought (Ness, 2004) and thus violent behaviour on the part of some girls may be less unusual than often portrayed. However, Burman et al (undated) has reported that although girls' overall experiences of violence were quite high (for example, witnessing violence), just 10% described themselves as 'violent' or engaging in seven or more types of violent behaviour; this group were, however, also most likely to have been violently victimised. A study by Clark et al (2003) has also suggested that aggression may have differential impacts for girls and boys within a school setting, and that for girls it had a particularly negative educational affect, especially on girls from higher socio-economic groups who were recorded as aggressive.

Some studies are now suggesting that it is important to consider female offenders as a heterogeneous group and that the trajectories for violent girls may be different from those for property offenders, for example. This has focused particularly on the

expression of 'covert' or 'overt' behaviours as they affect offending, with the latter particularly seen to be related to violent offending (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998). As they acknowledge, this is not straightforward because the most prolific offenders engage in both sorts of offending (also Arnall et al, 2005). However as the *Asset* analysis undertaken for this study (and discussed in Section 2) shows there appear to be real differences in practitioners' assessments of criminogenic factors and other needs with regard to girls convicted of violent offences and those convicted of property or other offences. These findings appear to be in line with emerging findings elsewhere.

Girls, offending, desistance and continuance

There are few studies on women and girls' likelihood of continued offending or desistance from crime and Rungay (2004) suggested that those that existed showed 'more similarities than differences in desistance processes of men and women', although those differences 'are not unimportant'. Our original research with YOT practitioners, girls and the analysis of *Asset* did not focus on why girls continue to offend, but in terms of desistance has considered programmes designed to encourage this. Certainly the work of Smith and McAra (2004) suggests that delinquent behaviour for girls and young women is a transitory experience to which there should be 'no drastic response' (2004:21). The suggestion is, however, that serious delinquent behaviour is different and does require intervention in order that it does not continue. Smith and McAra suggest that it 'springs from deep-seated psychological deficits' (2004:21) which need to be addressed and should be tailored to the specific needs of girls. It should be recalled, however, that girls rarely commit serious offences. The literature on desistance focuses overwhelmingly on adult women and therefore this has been included, but it should be noted that this may be of limited relevance to girls' continued offending; although they may, of course, at some point become adult women who continue to offend.

A review of research undertaken by Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1998) has suggested that desistance, particularly from physical aggression, was affected by the seriousness of the delinquency. Those who had early onset of aggression were more likely to continue, although a proportion desisted; this was true of girls and boys. Further, those who committed more serious offences were less likely to desist and although the least deviant ceased their involvement in fighting during adolescence (by age 12 years), the more deviant became more violent.

Work by Sheila White (2004)²⁵ reviewed current evidence on women's criminogenic needs²⁶ and concluded that 'it is clear that women have multiple and interconnected needs in the areas of financial situation, family and relationships, and drug misuse'. These criminogenic needs for women include some similar risk factors seen as contributory to the onset of offending in females and which may remain relevant and contribute to continued offending. However, some risks, such as substance use, appear

²⁵ This was an unpublished working paper which reviewed evidence on 'what works effectively for women in offending behaviour programmes and other interventions'.

²⁶ Criminogenic need is defined as those needs which are related to offending and to the likelihood of future offending – derived from White (2004) in reference to Andrews and Bonta (1994). A difference is established between static factors (and not subject to influence) such as past criminal offences and dynamic factors (and subject to influence) such as education and substance misuse – derived from Harper and Chitty (2005) in reference to Bonta (1996).

to become more relevant with regard to the continuation of offending, than they are with regard to onset.

White (2004) suggests that, for women, criminogenic needs have been shown to be (ibid, p.12):

- criminal history
- past victimisation
- substance misuse
- anti-social attitudes
- unemployment
- financial difficulties
- personal/emotional issues
- education
- mental illness
- family/relationships.

She suggests that these can be clustered into three groups of ‘needs’:

- social variables, such as education and housing
- personal situation variables, such as family and relationships
- ‘problem’ variables, such as substance abuse, mental disorder and victimisation.

White (2004) argues that victimisation ‘is not predictive of offending per se’ (ibid, p.13), studies such as Brewer-Smyth (2004) and Swanston et al (2003) would suggest that it is predictive of an elevated risk of low level offending (though not necessarily of continued offending). Odgers et al (2005 – discussed above) did find, however, that experiences of victimisation might be predictive of recidivism, particularly with regard to aggressive behaviours. The *Asset* analysis undertaken for this study shows that girls who committed offences of theft, handling stolen goods and ‘other’ offences were more likely to have recorded experiences of abuse/victimisation than those convicted of violent offences.²⁷

Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1998) reviewed studies that suggested a ‘gender paradox’ – that women, who in general have lower levels of offending and anti-social or personality disorders, were, once they received a formal mental health diagnosis, ‘at a substantially higher risk of developing other serious outcomes’ than were equivalent males. Not all studies have found this relationship, but they argue that findings that suggest a higher relative risk are noteworthy.

The relationship between risk variables is so far unclear, but it is known that females who appear to be more likely to continue in delinquent and anti-social behaviours, such as girls who continue to offend, those in custody and adult female offending populations, do show a clustering of risks and needs across a range of social, psychological and environmental factors. Further, that their offending might lead to

²⁷ Discussed in detail in Section 2.

relatively worse outcomes for them socially (and with regard to their mental health) than for comparable males.

There is extensive research which shows co-morbidity of drug misuse and offending in adult women offenders (White, 2004). Brewer-Smyth (2004:845) found 80% of her sample had been under the influence of alcohol or street drugs at the time of the offence and the remainder of the sample reported dependency problems. Women said ‘they had used alcohol and drugs to feel better and forget about pain from past traumatic events’. It was also associated with other high risk behaviours. The suggestion is that the two interact and so influence continued offending or anti-social behaviour patterns.

However, while substance misuse does appear to be a predicating factor of continued offending in women, it does not appear clearly related to girls offending (Arnall et al, 2005; Smith and McAra, 2004). It has been suggested that where there is a relationship between substance use and offending, it may be related to girls’ violent offending (Batchelor, 2005). The use of drugs did not emerge as a priority issue for any of the practitioners surveyed, nor was it recorded as a significant factor or a criminogenic need in the analysis of *Assets* on girls within the youth justice system in the UK undertaken for this study. Further, the use of Class A drugs appeared to be relatively uncommon among the young women who had participated in the various programmes. Observations of sessions (including one focusing on substance use) supported this finding. In common with other research (Arnall et al, 2005), most of the young women observed appeared either to have very little knowledge or experience of Class A drugs or to view them negatively²⁸.

Girls, offending and alcohol

Some practitioners interviewed for this study considered that ‘binge drinking’ and the use of alcohol, particularly risky use, was more generally a cause for concern, especially among some girls. In addition, our analysis of girls’ *Assets* sampled specifically for this study, found a significant relationship between recent use of alcohol and a conviction for a violent offence. However, in the study of persistent young offenders, analysis of qualitative data showed that girls and boys might offend and misuse some substances (usually cannabis and alcohol), but that they did not suggest a causal relationship between their use of substances and their offending behaviour (Arnall et al, 2005).

Currently within the UK there are more general concerns about the levels of alcohol consumption among young people. In a brief review of the key issues Truman (2006) has suggested that binge drinking is a problem for 29% of girls aged 15–16 years old and that it is most common in the poorest socio-economic groups. Further, that one-third of female prisoners are reportedly ‘hazardous drinkers the year before being admitted to prison’ and approximately 14% of pupils are excluded from school as the result of drinking alcohol at school. The links between alcohol use and other risky behaviours among young people have been substantiated by other research across the more general population (Talbot and Crabbe, undated). Further, a Home Office study in 2003 (Richardson and Budd, 2003) suggested that among a slightly older age group of ‘18–24-year-olds (binge drinking) is statistically related to offending behaviour’. Female binge drinkers were more likely to engage in all forms of criminal or disorderly behaviour (except theft) after drinking. In addition, it is suggested that risky alcohol use

²⁸ For example, talking pejoratively of Class A drug users as ‘smackheads’ or ‘crackheads’.

and offending behaviours may be correlated for adolescents and this appears to involve in particular personality and social adjustment factors.

There are a small number of recent studies which have looked at the issue of alcohol use, youth and delinquency. Conrod et al (2006) suggested that particular personality factors (sensation seeking, anxiety sensitivity and hopelessness) are associated with 'risky drinking' among adolescents. Their research tested interventions which sought to address risky drinking behaviour and found that it was possible to modify it through the use of brief, targeted intervention. Another study by Eklund and Klinteberg (2005) also found associations between adolescent risky drinking, self-reported violent behaviour and personality factors, such as impulsivity, a stronger need for change, along with less social adjustment/conformity. Their findings considered girls and boys separately and those for girls appear to fit well with those from the *Asset* analysis on girls undertaken for this study and with a study by Pirkle and Richter (2006). Eklund and Klinteberg (2005) showed that girls with violent behaviour had significantly higher scores on personality scales for characteristics such as impulsiveness and monotony avoidance, as well as higher scores for verbal and indirect aggression and suspicion, and lower scores for socialisation. Risky alcohol use was also associated with impulsiveness, monotony avoidance, verbal and indirect aggression and irritability, lower socialisation, social desirability and inhibition of aggression. Where risky alcohol use and violence were combined the girls had a clustering of factors (of significant levels) around impulsivity and monotony avoidance, as well as lower levels of socialisation, inhibition of aggression and guilt. They found that boys and girls who combined risky alcohol use and violent behaviour had 'more pronounced' personality scores and were more likely to engage in these behaviours more frequently or seriously.

Byrne and Trew (2005) report that a qualitative study of 18 adult offenders indicated differences in male and female accounts for their offending behaviour in that women would give largely pragmatic accounts of their offending behaviour 'taking place in the context of negative pressures, needs and personal problems', with all of the women suggesting that personal or financial problems were key factors and their actions justifiable. Further, women were more likely to be concerned about being caught and to experience the criminal justice process adversely (ibid, p.194) and to have negative and problematic close personal relationships and informal social bonds. The negative social relationships appeared to be connected to other problematic areas in their lives such as alcohol and drug misuse (ibid, p198) and for women in particular they were related to their offending behaviour. Byrne and Trew concluded that:

...the apparently gendered nature of crime orientation implies that offending might contradict important aspects of femininity whilst reinforcing aspects of masculinity.

(ibid, p.195)

The research implies that adult women's offending is closely interrelated with their relationships and life experiences and where these are particularly negative or abusive they may be interrelated with offending and drug or alcohol use. Further, where substance use and offending are coexisting in adult women this appears to indicate continued offending and anti-social behaviour. However, girls' offending in the UK does not appear to be related to drug misuse. There does appear to be an indicative finding from this study and others suggesting a relationship between risky, or binge drinking and offending by girls. Further, this seems to be related in particular to violent or disorderly behaviour. It is not clear if this affects the continuance of offending behaviour as further research is needed. It may be that there are different elements

which affect offending behaviour and risky or problematic drinking and/or substance use between girls and adult women.

Interventions with girls

It has been argued that the needs of women who offend appear ‘multiple and interconnected’. It is this apparent difficulty in disentangling the interconnections which have led for calls for girls and women’s offending behaviour programmes to be ‘holistic’ (Patton and Morgan, 2002). Certainly, as we have seen, the evidence for risk factors for onset and persistency of offending in girls suggest that they involve multiple social, environmental, biological and personality factors, and that it is the clustering of factors which appears most predictive, along with the absence of significant protective factors. However, this is not wholly dissimilar from the needs, criminogenic or otherwise, of boys or men who offend. It has been suggested that there is a need for gender-specific programmes to be developed for offending girls, although there is little research evidence, or publication of programmes in this area, and much of what exists comes from the USA. As discussed, the profile of girls in the juvenile system in the USA is not directly comparable to that in the UK because of significant differences in ethnicity and as a result of the prevalence of status offences in the US population. The recommendations for programme interventions should therefore be treated with some caution, although they have been influential on the development of gender-specific programmes in the UK.

There is very little research that has looked at how programmes can help young people to desist from offending, or how effective they are at doing so. Generic summaries of research undertaken in an institutional setting suggest that ‘the full range of individual offenders’ criminogenic needs must be addressed if their propensity towards crime is to be successfully reduced’ (Harper and Chitty, 2005). The difficulty is that it is not yet clear specifically which needs of young women are criminogenic and which other important needs are not necessarily related to their offending.

Hipwell and Loeber (2006:221) found that ‘evidence of effectiveness of treatments for girls with disruptive and delinquent behaviours is extremely limited’. They suggested that the little there was indicated that multi-modal programmes that ‘target interacting domains of risk also show most promise’. These findings are supported by research by Hay et al (2000) and Bailey (2003:590), who also suggested that ‘multiple interventions and multiple points’ might be the most effective way to ‘overcome the problems of those at highest risk’.

McIvor et al (2004) have argued that in order to meet the needs of girls who wish to desist from offending it is necessary to target both attitudinal and behavioural factors. They based this on their findings which suggested that girls who desisted from offending were more likely to cite moral rather than utilitarian rationales and to ‘emphasise the relational aspects of this process’, such as the views of parents, no longer mixing with delinquent peers, experiences of victimisation, and becoming a parent (2004:194). However, they found that girls who were desisting from crime still had more in common in their behaviour with offending, rather than resisting peers – such as ‘hanging about’ in public places, contact with the police and having pro-criminal friends. For this reason they suggested that programmes that sought to engage with them needed to work both on moral engagement and behavioural aspects. A focus on moral judgements and cognitive distortions is also supported by the research findings of Larden et al (2006), which found that girls and boys were, on the whole, similar with regard to the relevant risk factors for developing delinquent behaviour, but that in

general girls made more mature moral judgements and had less self-reported anti-social cognitive distortions. They found that self-esteem was not an area which could be usefully affected by programme content and that it bore too complex a relationship to offending to attempt to treat in a programmatic way.

A small number of programmes have been developed which have sought to be 'gender-specific' and to respond to multiple needs. The criticism of these programmes is that they can often appear to have little direct relationship to offending behaviour, which is the reason for their existence. There is a general pattern to these programmes; Peters (2001) has described them as seeking to assist 'those who have been traumatised to overcome their pain and develop positive healthy relationships'. As a result, it is suggested that groups should be structured but nurturing and include therapeutic interventions aimed at the individual, family or group, and focusing on areas of self-esteem, a positive self-concept as a female, and the development of pro-social skills. Chesney-Lind and Okamoto (2001) have also argued that girls need to be able to build relationships with staff in order to engage and thus programmes should have low client to staff ratios.

Work by Rungay (2004) suggests that:

...certain observations of desistance from crime closely resemble accounts of withdrawal from drug-using careers in identifying crucial alterations in individuals' sense of self'.

(ibid, p.407)

How exactly programmes can intervene with young women and girls to achieve this is obviously the key factor.

Lanctot's (2003) research on the issue of gender-specific programmes looked at both boys and girls' responses (229 youths) and those of practitioners (n=131) to programmes which the youths had participated in and practitioners had run.²⁹ She described her approach as one in which 'males and females' needs were assessed on an individual basis' and 'not gender membership'. She found that:

- girls rated the development of social skills slightly less highly than boys in general
- girls rated the importance of preventing victimisation as very important, significantly more highly than boys
- girls rated the development of autonomy more highly than boys, but the development of parenting skills and taking responsibilities less highly
- girls rated finding a job as very important at a much higher rate than boys (43% of girls compared to 27% of boys).

Lanctot suggests her research shows that 'similar programs' would be applicable to both genders, but that although the programme structure/content might be similar, the ways of working with boys and girls might be different. This is demonstrated by other research as a part of her study that looked at the 'non-programmatic' needs of participants, which found that:

²⁹ The research took place in Canada with young people confined to a rehabilitation centre; their mean age was 15 and that of staff was 35.

- girls wanted to be worked with on in a more personal way and on a one-to-one basis, building an empathetic relationship with their practitioner
- boys attached more importance to rules.

Again, these findings have been supported elsewhere and as such are potentially important indicators of both programme content, which might be found to be relevant to young people who offend, and to styles of working and engaging with them. This is important in a field where there is little research that looks directly at practice with young women and which also takes into consideration what they say.

Other specific work in this area is the Oregon Guidelines (Patton and Morgan, 2002), which suggest how to implement gender-specific work. These have been developed in connection with US research on girls' needs more generally, including the impact on girls' physical and mental health, welfare needs and offending behaviour. As discussed earlier, some consideration should also be given to how accurately US research represents the needs and experiences of young women offenders in the UK at this time. It is, however, one of the most substantial documents looking at gender-specific programmes and as such has been influential in the UK. This is highlighted by the obvious influence of the Oregon Guidelines on UK programmes' content and structure.

The guidelines suggest that it is important for programmes to create a safe physical and emotional environment; one that values females and takes a holistic approach to their needs, builds significant relationships with caring adults in a girls-only environment and seeks to teach new skills by building on existing strengths, teaches personal respect and allows girls some control. They argue that programmes should address victimisation and trauma, physical and sexual health, emotional and mental health, substance use, spiritual health and rites of passage.

Florida (2006) and Alameda County (2001) have both published substantial reports using research based on their extensive gender-specific programmes, which may be of value to practitioners. Neither are able to show significant treatment effects, but do highlight some core areas for inclusion; this includes interventions focusing on education, training and employment and thus targeting women's socio-economic needs which are strongly related to offending. Further, the Florida study highlighted that interventions should be matched to the needs of the individual girls and gives three different examples of how this can be done by focusing on the risk factors and offending behaviour of the girls. This includes, for example, 'Selective Intervention' suggested for 'girls who are generally pro-social but have experienced an abrupt onset of misbehaviour' in response to external factors (such as bereavement). The guide then goes on to suggest how interventions with such girls might be planned.

The document offers specific guidance and is undoubtedly helpful to practitioners and managers, enabling them to think through the implications of their recommendations and the nature of gender-specific work. We would suggest, however, that in this sense it may be helpful to continue gender mainstreaming work in this area, but that further developmental work will need to be undertaken to be clear about how programme design interacts with the criminogenic, as well as other needs of girls, in order to assist them to stop or reduce their offending. Hubbard and Pratt (2002) have argued that the generic literature indicates that 'the most effective treatment programmes target those areas of offenders' lives that are most related to criminal behaviour' and they suggest that this means targeting anti-social behaviour, attitudes and relationships, as well as educational and family factors and victimisation. In line with this we would suggest that there is little yet which can offer robust evidence of effective gender-specific treatment programmes

for girls, but that those which are developed must retain a focus on offending behaviour and risk factors. Oregon does not deal specifically with this area and research indicates that programmes are most successful where they are directly tackle offending-related behaviour (Harper and Chitty 2005); this content should therefore be explicitly included in any programme design.

Section 2: Is offending by girls and young women rising?

The analysis in this section was undertaken especially for this report. Section 2a is based on analysis of secondary data sets from the Home Office PNC and of Themis and SACHS from the YJB. Home Office PNC data and SACHS data were provided for girls only and for financial years 2000–05. Themis data was provided for both girls and boys for financial years 2000–06. Section 2b is an analysis of an original data set based on a sample of 285 *Assets* from YOTs for this research.

Section 2a: PNC, Themis and SACHS analysis

*How many young female offenders are there in the UK?*³⁰

The number of young female offenders in the UK remained fairly constant from 2000/01 to 2002/03 at just under 50,000 individuals a year. This increased slightly in 2003/04 to 52,101 before increasing by approximately 12% to 58,234 in 2004/05. The population of young females over this time period has seen year-on-year rises, leading to the expectation that there will be a corresponding rise in the number of young female offenders if all else is equal. The data³¹ (see Figure 3a) shows a statistically significant rise in the number of female offenders as a percentage of their peer group. Just over 1% of the UK female population aged 10–20 years received a conviction, pre-court disposal or had an impending prosecution against them each year. The slight increase in offenders in 2001/02 was not statistically significant³², however the decrease in 2002/03 and subsequent increases in 2003/04 and 2004/05 were found to be statistically significant. The number of young female offenders has risen by approximately 18% over the past five financial years. This is approximately equal to a further two in every 1000 girls (0.17% of 10–20-year-old females) entering the criminal justice system. The number of young female offenders as a proportion of their peer group is illustrated in Figure 3b.

Figure 3a: Numbers of young female offenders as a percentage of the young female population

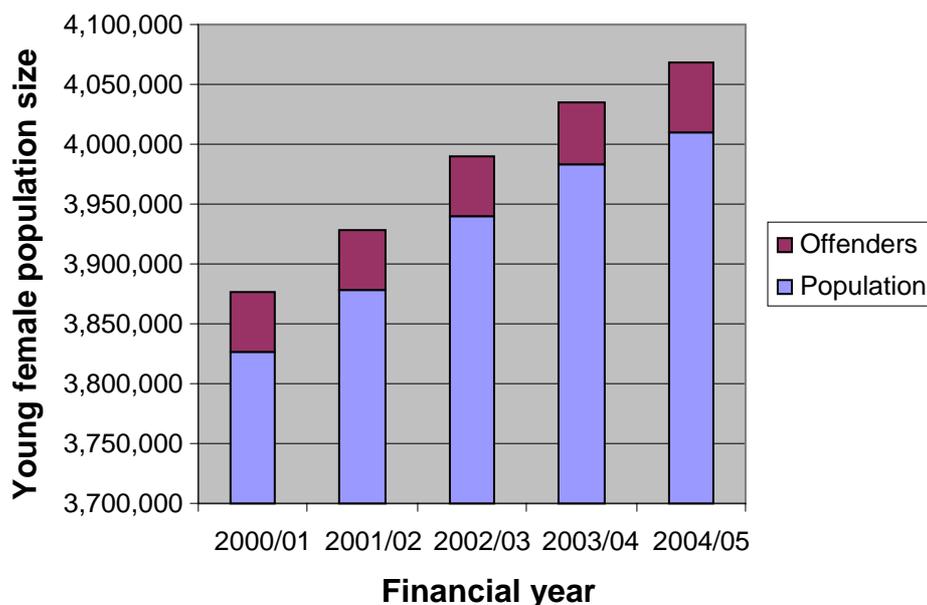
Year	Population	Offenders	Offenders as % of peer group population	Offenders per 1000 peer group population
2000/01	3,826,540	49,341	1.28%	13/1000
2001/02	3,878,199	49,998	1.28%	13/1000
2002/03	3,940,555	48,961	1.24%	12/1000
2003/04	3,983,600	52,101	1.30%	13/1000
2004/05	4,009,300	58,234	1.45%	15/1000

³⁰ It should be noted that due to the nature of the data the same girl could be counted in each case type for each year but would only be counted once. For example, if an offender received one Caution and two convictions within a year, they would be counted only once for a conviction that year but also once for a Caution – this causes the totals to differ between different parts of this section although it is all derived from the same PNC data.

³¹ Data from the Census is not a precise match to the PNC data in that PNC data relates to girls aged between 10 and 20 years in the UK for financial years 2000/01 to 2004/05 while Census population data relates to the sum of all girls in Great Britain aged 10–19, plus an estimate of the number of 20-year-old girls plus all girls in Northern Ireland aged between 10 and 20 years, and relates to calendar years 2000–04. Census population data for some years are based on projections. As such, the results of these significance tests should be treated with caution.

³² Statistical significance was measured using the Wilson Score method for fitting confidence intervals to proportions. A 95% confidence level was used.

Figure 3b: Young female offenders as a proportion of their peer group (2000–05)



The majority of the young female offenders highlighted received a pre-court disposal rather than a court conviction. Pre-court disposals are comprised of Cautions, Final Warnings and Reprimands. As can be seen from Figure 4, the number of young women receiving Cautions³³ has fallen by about 35% from a peak of 13,225 in 2000/01 to a relatively constant figure of between 8,600 and 9,300 for the past four financial years.³⁴ Conversely, as to be expected, the number of girls receiving at least one Reprimand or Final Warning has increased by approximately 50% over the past five years. In 2004/05, 24,209 girls received Reprimands and 8,192 girls received Final Warnings.

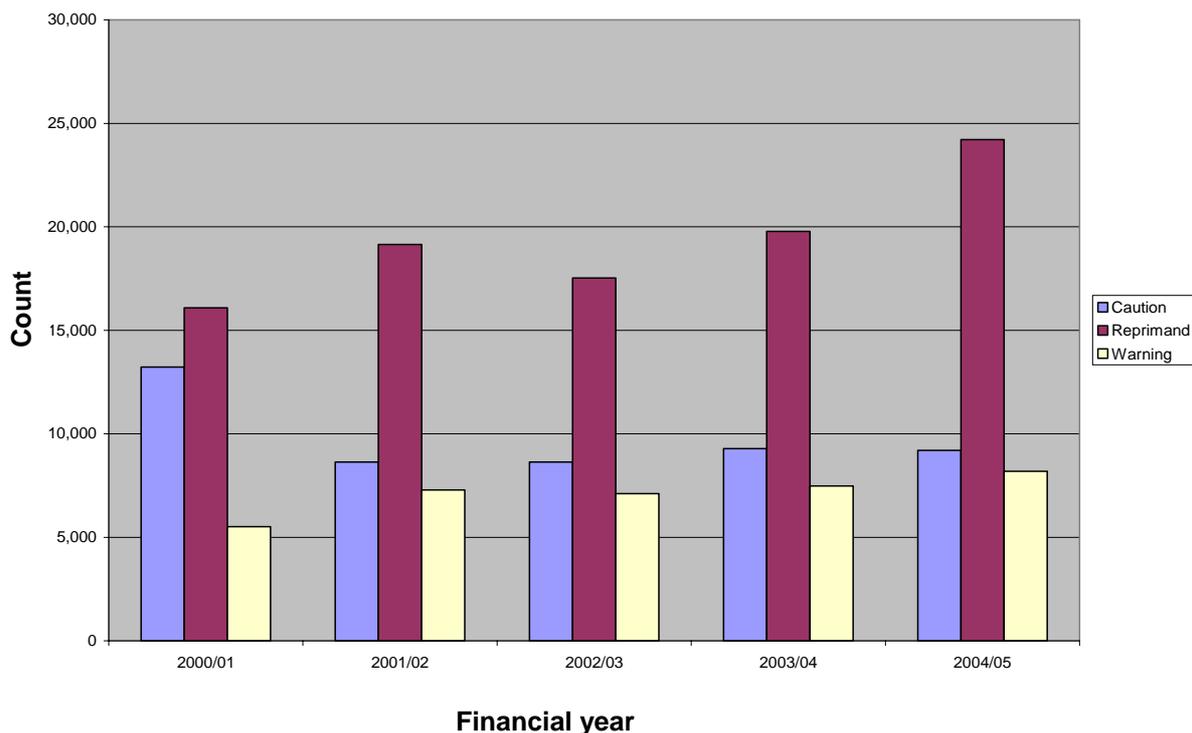
There is evidence that more young girls are receiving Reprimands as a percentage of their peer group. Approximately six in every 1000 girls received at least one Reprimand in 2004/05; this is an increase from four in every 1000 girls in 2002/03 and five in every 1000 girls in 2004/05. The rate for Final Warnings has remained relatively unchanged between 2000 and 2005 with approximately two in every 1,000 girls receiving a Final Warning. Similarly, approximately two in every 1000 girls received at least one Caution during 2004/05, down from a high of four in every 1,000 girls in 2000/01.

During 2002/03 there was a small decrease in the number of girls receiving both Reprimands and Final Warnings.

³³ The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 replaced Cautions with a system of Final Warnings and Reprimands for under-18s in England and Wales. This system was fully implemented in June 2000.

³⁴ While the use of Cautions has been phased out for under-18s in England and Wales, they are still an applicable sanction for those aged over 18 and are still used in Northern Ireland. As explained previously, the data used in this analysis included young women aged 18–20 and those sanctioned in Northern Ireland.

Figure 4: Number of young female offenders receiving at least one pre-court disposal (by disposal type)



The number of young women being convicted each year displays a modest yearly increase of between approximately 1.1 and 2.6%, equating to approximately 200–500 people. Figures in 2004/05 grew at the lowest rate with a 1.1% increase in young women being convicted – a rise of 213 individuals on 2003/04 to bring the total number of women convicted during 2004/05 to 19,341. The number of girls receiving at least one conviction rose by approximately 8% between 2000 and 2005. However, when this is calculated as a percentage or rate of the wider 10–20-year-old female population, the increases were very small and not statistically significant. The percentage only increased from 0.47% to 0.48% of the peer group population from 2000–05, which is the equivalent to approximately five in every 1000 girls receiving a court conviction each year. Thus, acknowledging the caveat regarding approximated Census data, it appears that the increase in the number of girls being convicted each year can be explained by the natural rise in population for that age group.

Figure: 5: Number of young female offenders receiving at least one conviction

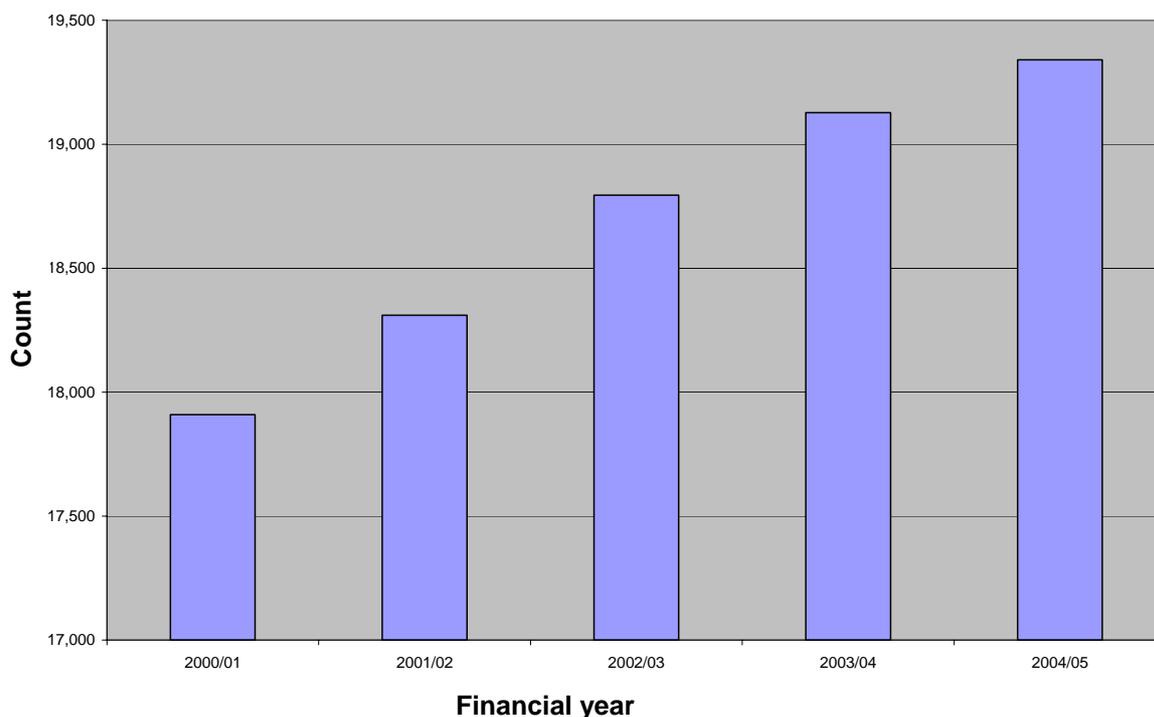
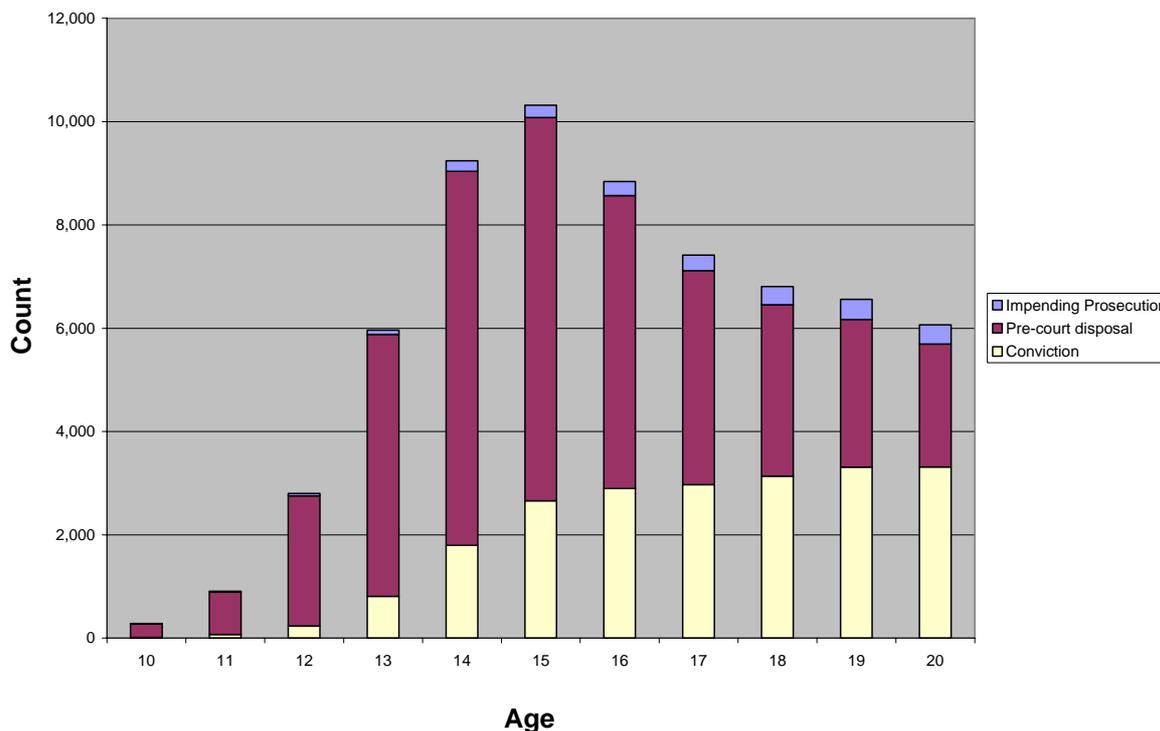


Figure 5 illustrates that there has been an increase in the number of girls entering the criminal justice system each year; however, there is no evidence of an increase in the rate of court convictions each year, the actual rise being accounted for by an increasing population. Instead, the increase in girls in the criminal justice system occurs at the pre-court disposal stage, particularly those receiving Reprimands. Whether this trend represents a real increase in the criminality of girls or rather an increase in either the effectiveness of the police to identify them or their willingness to use the Reprimand where before they would have taken no action is difficult to tell from this data alone. Data from the *MORI Youth Survey 2004*, which shows no significant change in self-reported offending for young people (though does not provide data specifically for females), indicates that girls' level of criminality has not changed. This adds weight to the theory that it is a change in the policing of girls that is either capturing more first-time low-level offenders or formally reprimanding such offenders where previously no further action would be taken.

Age of young female offenders

The age profile of young female offenders changed little between 2000 and 2005, with 15 years being the peak age for offending each year. As can be seen from Figure 6, which presents data for 2004/05, this profile is comprised largely of offenders receiving a pre-court disposal. In fact the age profile of convicted young female offenders is considerably different to those who receive a pre-court disposal. The number of female offenders being convicted rises rapidly until the age of 15, after which the rise is at a much more gradual pace.

Figure 6: Age profile of young female offenders in the 2004/05 financial year



As previously noted, the number of girls receiving Reprimands increased significantly between 2000 and 2005. This increase was witnessed across both younger and older girls. However, the rate of change was greater in 14–17-year-olds where there was a 58% rise in the number of girls receiving Reprimands between 2000/01 and 2004/05 in comparison to 10–13-year-olds, where there was a 35% rise. A similar trend is apparent in the use of Final Warnings, where the number of 10–13-year-old girls receiving at least one Final Warning rose by 32%, from 1,176 in 2000/01 to 1,552 in 2004/05, while over the same period the number of 14–17-year-olds receiving a Final Warning rose by 53%.

The age trend for girls receiving at least one conviction is quite different to that of those receiving reprimands or Final Warning over the same period of time. There was a 28% increase in the number of 10–13-year-old girls receiving at least one conviction. The increase was less for 14–17-year-olds; an 18% rise over the same period. There was a decrease of 3% for 18–20-year-olds over the same period. There appeared to be no change in the number of girls being convicted, however it appeared that they were being convicted younger.

While there was an increase in Final Warnings between 2000 and 2005 there was a steady decrease in the use of those that do not have interventions attached to them. There was a decrease of 57% over that period and in 2004/05 just 1,005 were issued in England and Wales; this is in comparison to Final Warnings with interventions attached, which increased by 87% over the same period: 5,814 were issued. Where Final Warnings without interventions are used they tended to be applied to older girls with the peak age being 16, as opposed to 15 years old for Final Warnings with interventions. The peak age for receiving a Reprimand was 14 years old.

Offences³⁵ committed by young female offenders

The YJB collects data from YOTs and the secure estate with regard to offences, pre-court and court disposals, as well as remand decisions. This data is gathered centrally by the YJB and held on the Themis database, although holding data from all YOTs is limited by the fact that information is recorded at the offence or disposal level rather than the offender (individual) level. Thus, for instance while it is possible to tell how many and what type of offences are committed by young people each year, it is not possible to say how many young people commit those offences.³⁶

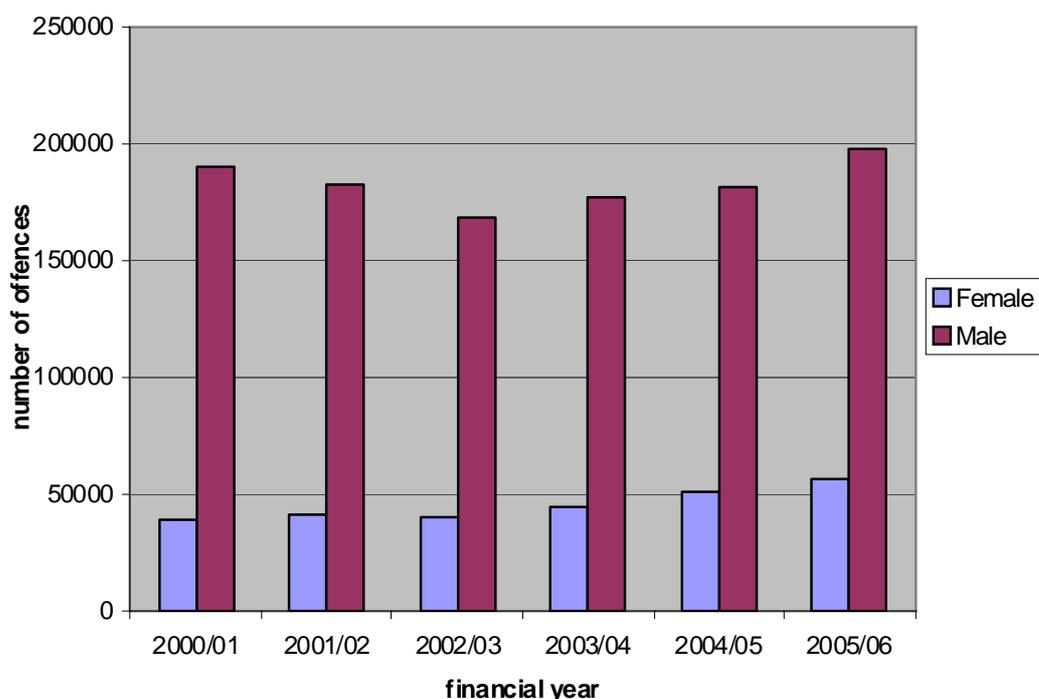
Young women are responsible for an increasing percentage of all youth offending, as recorded by Themis. It can be seen from Figure 7 that in 2000/01 offences committed by females accounted for 17.2% of the total committed by 10–17-year-olds; this has subsequently risen each year and in 2005/06, 22.2% of all offences were committed by a young female. However, the gender split varies widely by offence category, for example in 2005/06 girls were responsible for:

- 2% of sexual offences
- 8% of deaths by dangerous driving convictions
- 8% of vehicle thefts
- 7% of burglaries
- 9% of drugs offences
- 15% of robberies
- 15% of breaches
- 16% of criminal damage
- 24% of public order offences
- 26% of racially aggravated crimes
- 28% of violent crimes against the person
- 33% of fraud offences
- 34% of theft and handling stolen goods offences.

³⁵ There was a change in data recording practice at the beginning of 2002. Domestic and non-domestic burglary, which had previously been combined, as had arson and criminal damage, would appear as separate fields from January 2002 onwards. In addition, the category of 'motoring offences' was omitted from analysis.

³⁶ This data is published annually by the YJB in the form of the Youth Justice Annual Workload Data, although as it is a wide-ranging document in the public domain it omits detailed information on female offenders. Young female offenders refer to 10–17-year-olds who receive a disposal of some sort.

Figure 7: Number of offences committed by 10–17-year-olds by sex and financial year



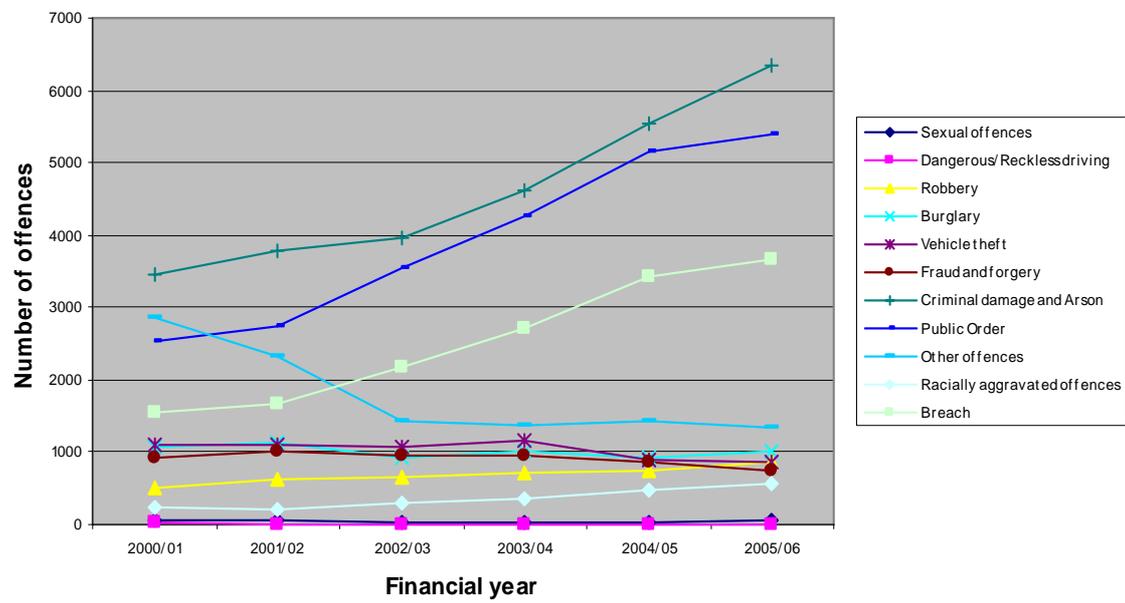
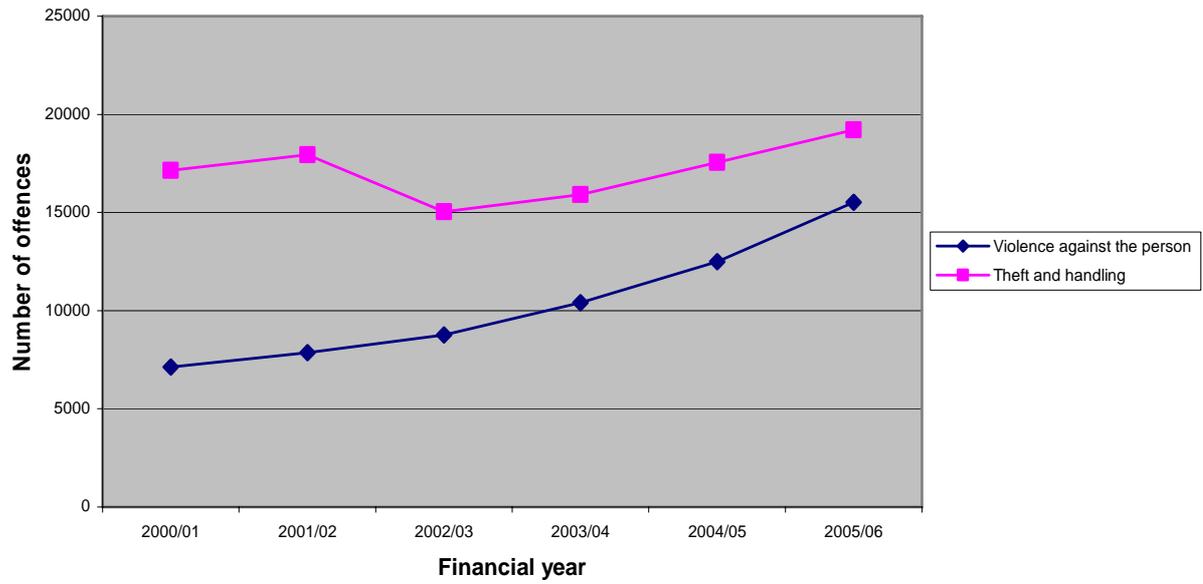
These trends can be explained both in terms of an increase in the number of offences committed by females, especially in the last two financial years, as well as a decrease in some areas of male offending compared to 2000/01 such as vehicle theft, burglary and theft and handling.

Figures 8a and 8b, and 9a and 9b show that patterns of offending for boys and girls are somewhat different, generally showing more consistent rises across the offence categories for girls between 2000 and 2006.

Figures 8a and 8b show that among girls, five offence categories (violence against the person, robbery, criminal damage and arson, public order and breach) have risen consistently between 2000 and 2006. The offence category of theft and handling has also risen over five of those six years, dropping significantly in 2002/03. Theft and handling remains the most common offence by disposal for young women who offend (see *Asset* analysis in the following section for offence categories by person, which shows a different picture). Only the offence category of ‘other’ has fallen significantly; the other offence categories have seen smaller (percentage) variations over the period in question. The sizeable difference in the scale of different offences should be noted; Figure 8a highlights that young women have committed in excess of 7,000 violent or theft/handling offences each financial year between 2000 and 2006, but less than 7,000 offences for all other offence types (Figure 8b). The scale of the axes of Figures 8a and b and 9a and b illustrate that girls commit a far lower number of offences than boys.

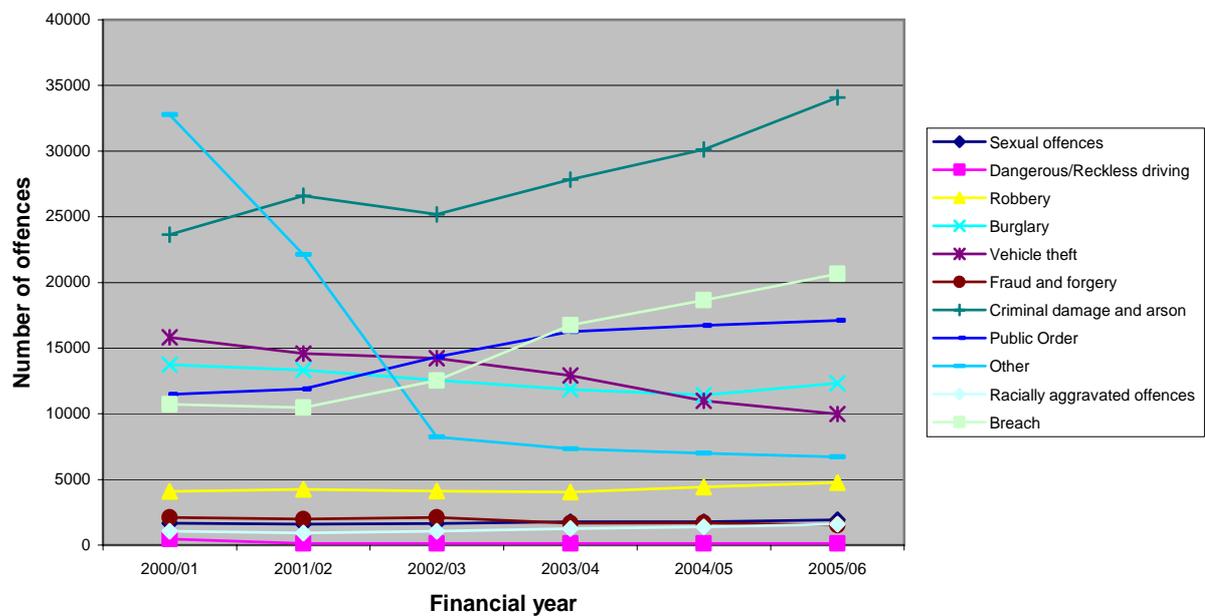
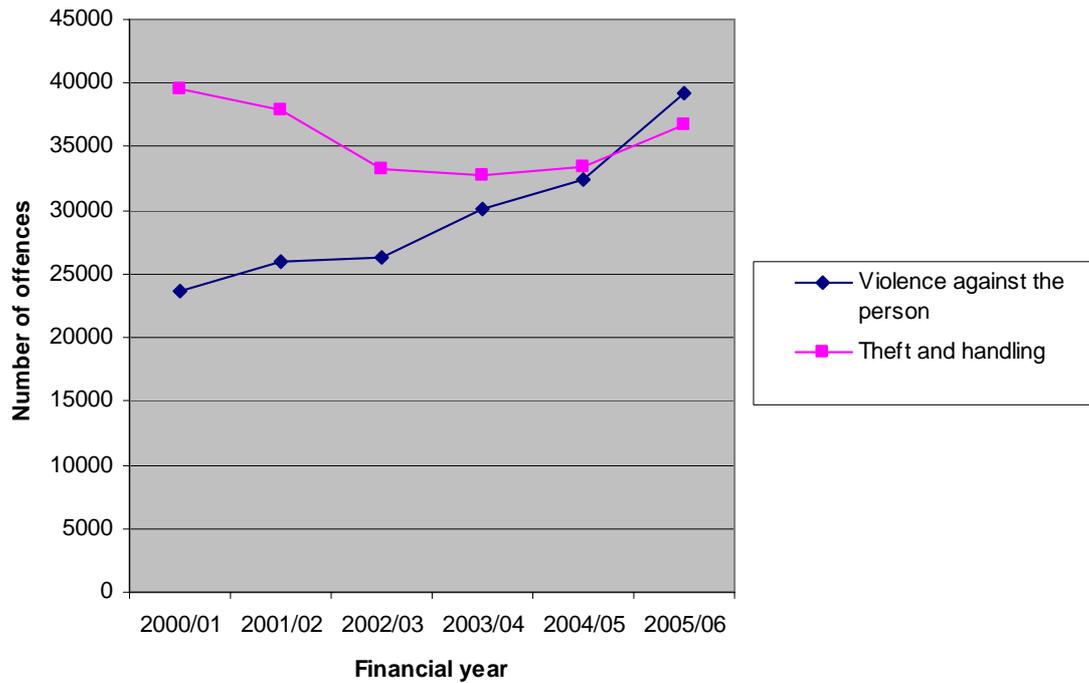
Figures 9a and 9b show that the pattern for boys’ offending is somewhat different. Only two offence categories (violence against the person and public order) have risen consistently between 2000 and 2006, although other categories indicate large percentage increases over this period (breach, criminal damage and arson, and racially aggravated offences). Violence against the person offences are the most common offence by disposal for boys who offend. Reckless or dangerous driving offences (although the total numbers are small) and ‘other’ offences have seen large percentage decreases over this period.

Figures 8a and 8b: Number and type of offences committed by females 2000–06³⁷



³⁷ Violence and theft and handling offences have been separated from other offence categories as they demonstrate not only the greatest volume of offences committed by females over the six financial years in question, but also the steepest rises.

Figures 9a and 9b: Number and type of offences committed by males 2000–06³⁸



In the majority of cases between 2000 and 2005, data was not recorded on the SACHS database³⁹ regarding the primary offence of the young person, thus it is difficult to identify any trends relating to the use of custody for different offence types. Where data has been recorded the majority of young girls were placed by the YJB for the following offences:

- violence against the person
- robbery

³⁸ Violence and theft and handling offences have been separated from other offence categories to aid comparison with Figures 6a and 6b.

³⁹ See Appendix B for table showing completion rates for offence data on SACHS.

- breach
- theft/handling.

Court disposals

The biggest change in sentencing patterns between 2000 and 2006 with regard to 10–17-year-old females has been the nationwide introduction of the Referral Order in April 2002. Referral Orders constituted 38.4% of disposals handed down by the courts in 2002/03, but although rising in real terms, the use of Referral Orders has decreased as a share of total disposals to 34.1% in 2003/4, 32.1% in 2004/5 and 31.7% in 2005/06. This fits with the updated guidance on the use of Referral Orders issued in August 2003, which removed the mandatory nature of the order in some circumstances and allowed magistrates more discretion. There has also been an increase in the use of the Compensation Order, while the number of Conditional Discharges and Reparation Orders given to girls has decreased. All other first-tier disposals (Absolute Discharge, Fine and Bind Over) have fluctuated but remained fairly level between 2000 and 2006.

These patterns are replicated with disposals for boys as demonstrated by Figures 10a and 10b. Referrals Orders constituted 27.9% of all disposals for boys in 2002/03 and again, while rising in real terms, amount to a smaller proportion of boys’ disposals with Referral Orders constituting 22.7% of boys’ disposals in 2005/06. Sentencing patterns for boys between 2000 and 2006 also show that there has been an increase in the use of Compensation Orders and a decrease in the use of Conditional Discharges and Reparation Orders. As with girls, other first-tier disposals have remained fairly constant between 2000 and 2006.

Figure 10a: Notable changes in the use of first-tier disposals for girls 2000–06

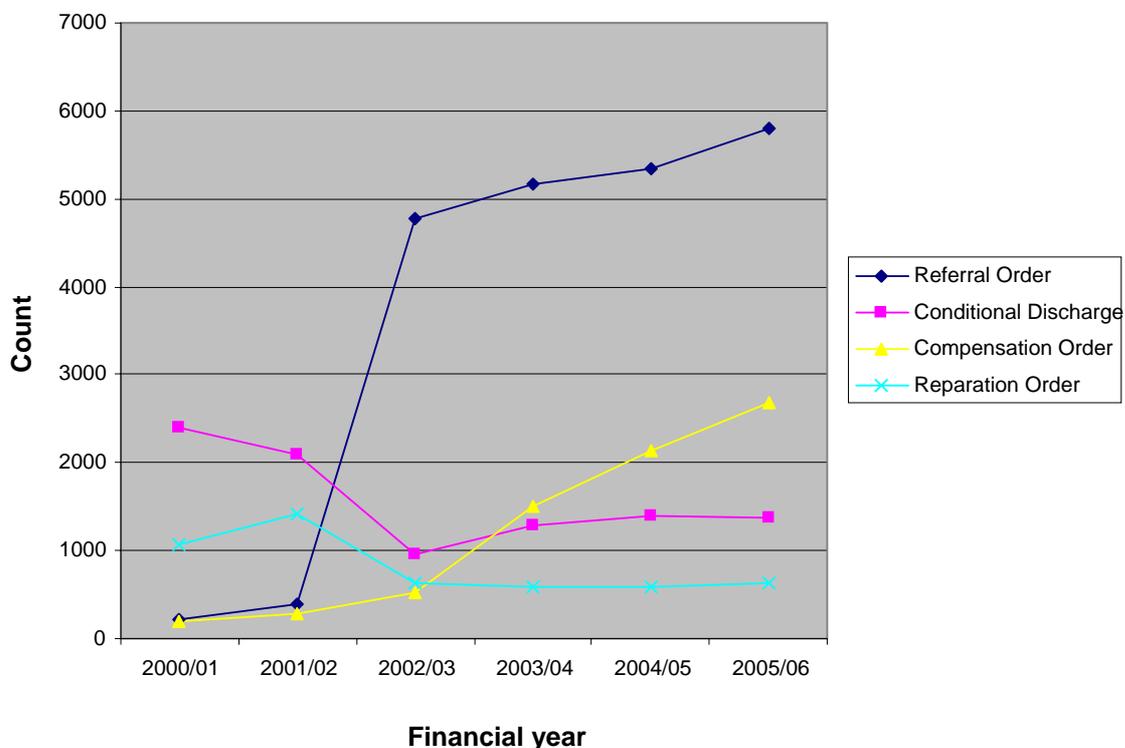
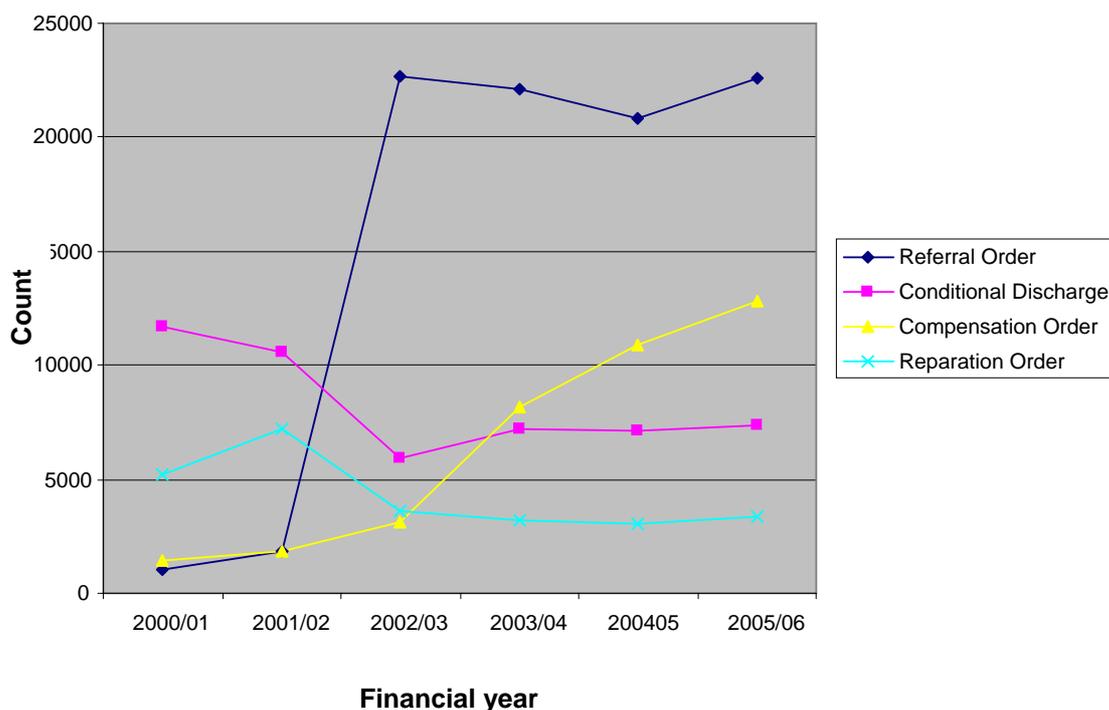


Figure 10b: Notable changes in the use of first-tier disposals for boys 2000–06



For girls, there has been an increase in real terms in the use of Supervision Orders, both with and without conditions, particularly from 2002/03 onwards. However, Supervision Orders without conditions account for a decreasing percentage of total disposals for girls. In 2007 1,998 Supervision Orders and 528 with conditions were issued. The use of Action Plan Orders halved from 1,689 to 849 disposals between 2001/02 and 2002/03. However, the use of Action Plan Orders has increased in subsequent years and accounts for around 6% of disposals for girls. The use of Curfew Orders has increased dramatically in the past three years. In 2002/03 there were just 106 Curfew Orders used with girls while in 2005/06 this had increased to 746. Once again, the pattern for boys is similar, as demonstrated by figures 11a and 11b.

For this study we were also able to access *Asset* data on 3,321 young people (comprising 2,745 boys and 576 girls).⁴⁰ This compared males and females in the general YOT population on the basis of recorded data returned as a part of *Asset*. The examination of *Asset* does not show many differences between girls and boys. For example, there was no apparent relationship between gender and disposals as analysis of Themis data has also highlighted. These findings suggest a different picture for young people than for adults (Hedderman and Gelsthorpe, 2004). *Asset* data suggested however, that boys were more likely to receive an Attendance Centre Order (16.9% compared to 4.9%), Action Plan Order (20.8% compared to 11.5%) or Community Service Order (4.2% compared to 1.8%). Girls were more likely to have received a Final Warning than boys (10.3% compared to 6.3%).

⁴⁰ This information was kindly supplied to us by the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research.

Figure 11a: Notable changes in the use of community disposals for girls 2000–06

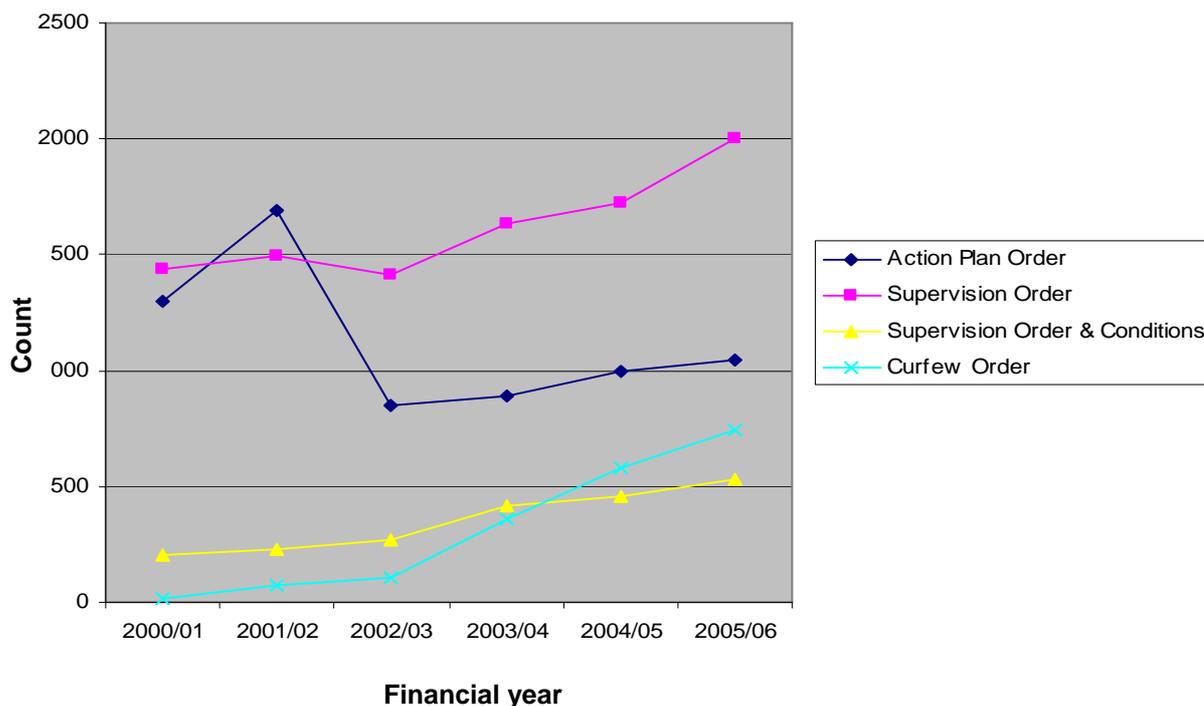
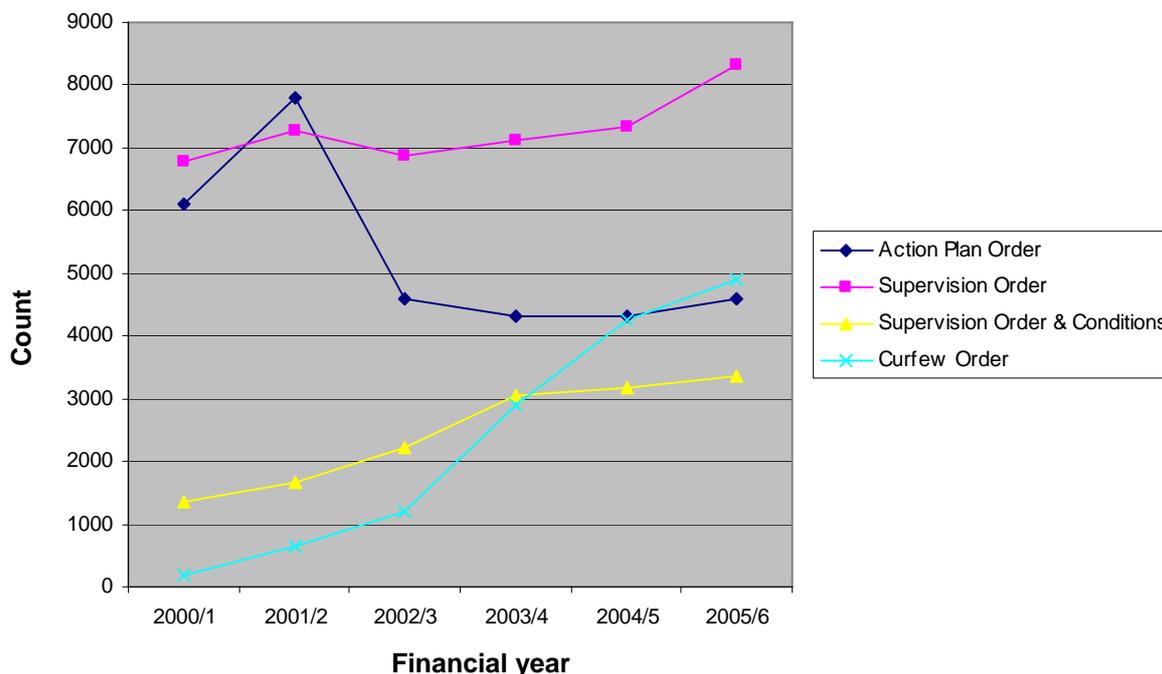


Fig 11b: Notable changes in the use of community disposals for boys 2000–06



For girls, the use of Detention and Training Orders (DTOs) remained relatively constant between 2000/01 and 2003/04, however the past two years saw increases and in 2005/06, 593 girls were sentenced to a DTO. The use of section 90/91 disposals has remained reasonably static, with approximately 30 girls receiving this disposal each year.

The comparison between custodial disposals for boys and girls is demonstrated by Figures 12a and 12b. The use of DTOs with boys peaked in 2001/02 when 6,237 boys

were sentenced to a DTO. However, research between 2000 and 2006 shows that figures have only fluctuated by small amounts since then. Section 90/91 sentences for boys have fluctuated by small amounts but figures have remained between 350 and 450 per year.

Figure 12a: Use of custody disposals for girls from 2000–06

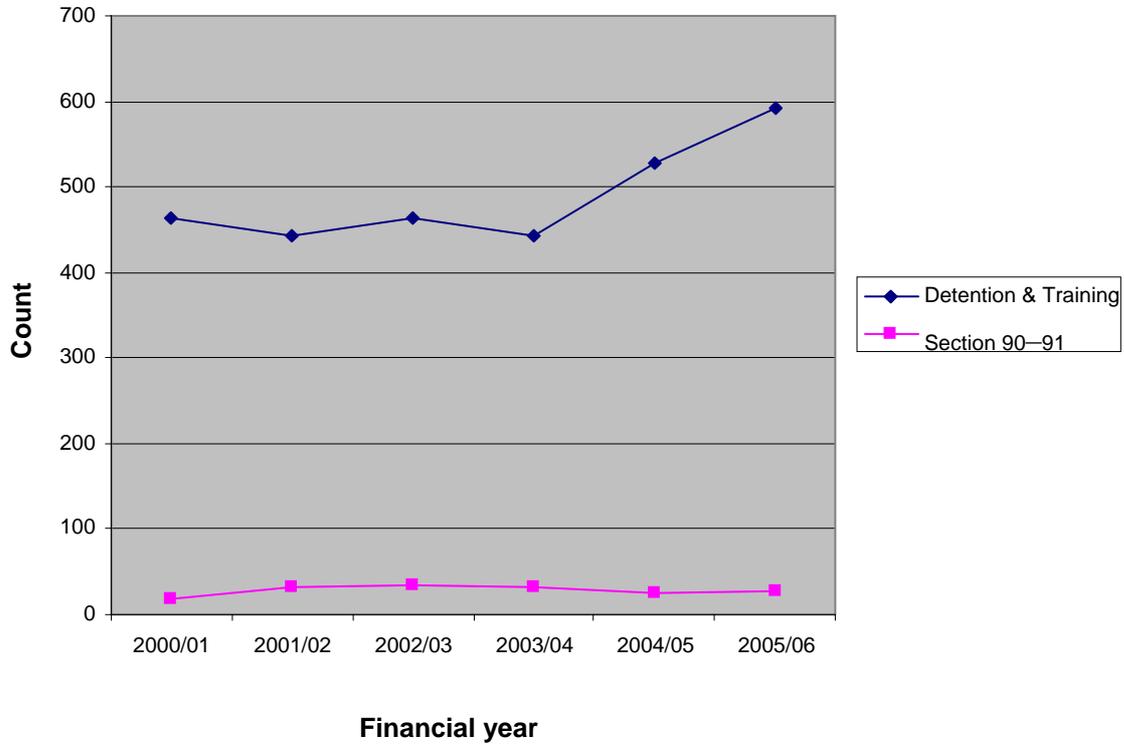
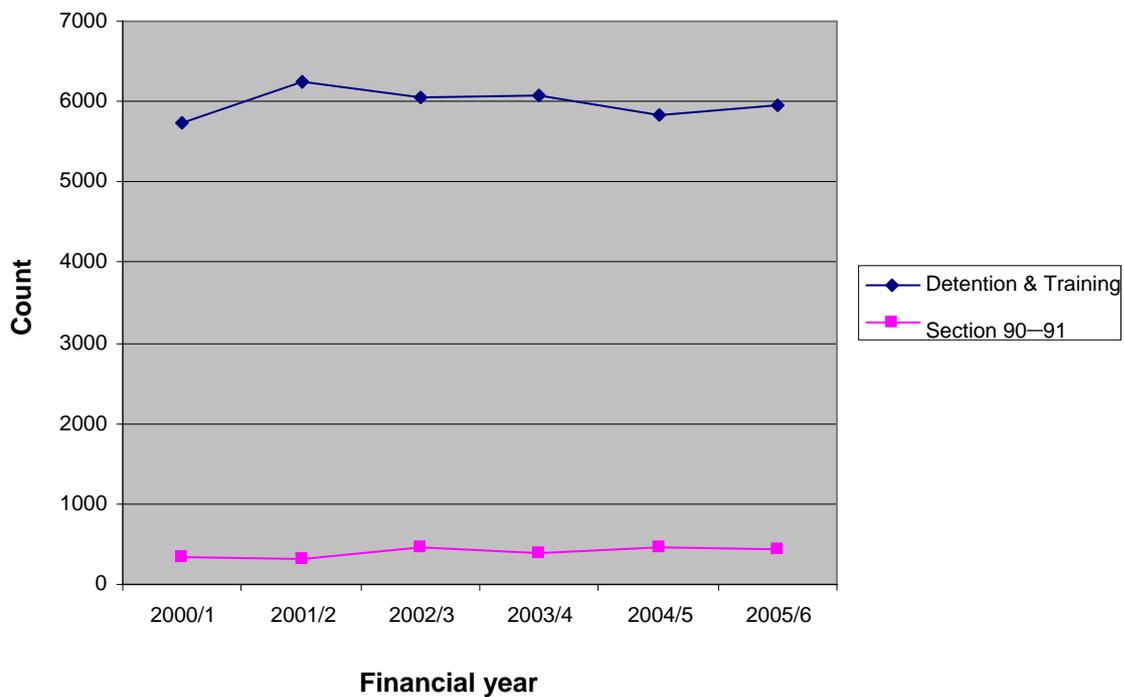


Figure 12b: Use of custody disposals for boys 2000–06



First-tier sentences, with the exception of fines, have similar age profiles for girls, as shown in Figure 13a which presents data for the last financial year. The use of first-tier

disposals increases gradually from 10–12-year-olds and then rises rapidly until at 15 years old it levels off, with 15 and 16-year-olds receiving about 2,500 first-tier disposals. It then begins to decline slightly with some 2,300 17-year-old girls receiving first-tier disposals. A similar pattern occurs with Action Plan Orders, Supervision Orders and Curfew Orders (shown in aggregate on Figure 13a as a yellow line). However, these begin to tail off more quickly after the peak of 1,075 at the age of 16. The majority of community punishments such as Community Punishment Orders, Community Reparation Orders and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, are used from the age of 15 onwards but peak at approximately 300 at the age of 16. Fines also peak at approximately 500 at the age of 17, but are first used from the age of 11. The use of custody disposals last year also started at the age of 11 and peaked at the age of 16, with 362 custody disposals handed down to 16-year-olds girls.

For boys, the patterns are largely similar, as illustrated by Figure 13b. First-tier disposals begin to rise sharply at the age of 13 and continue rising to peak at 12,760 at the age of 16. Other community disposals follow a similar pattern, with figures rising from 10 to 15 years old, peaking at 6,656 at 16 years old, then beginning to decline. Disposals such as Community Punishment Orders, Community Reparation Orders, and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders are used in small numbers from the age of 10 but peak at 17 years old. Fines also peak at 17, with approximately 6,300 handed to 17-year old boys in 2005/06, although they may be given from the age of 10. The use of custodial disposals last year started at the age of 10 and peaked at 3,632 at 17 years old

Figure 13a: Age profile of disposals for girls in the 2005/06 financial year by type

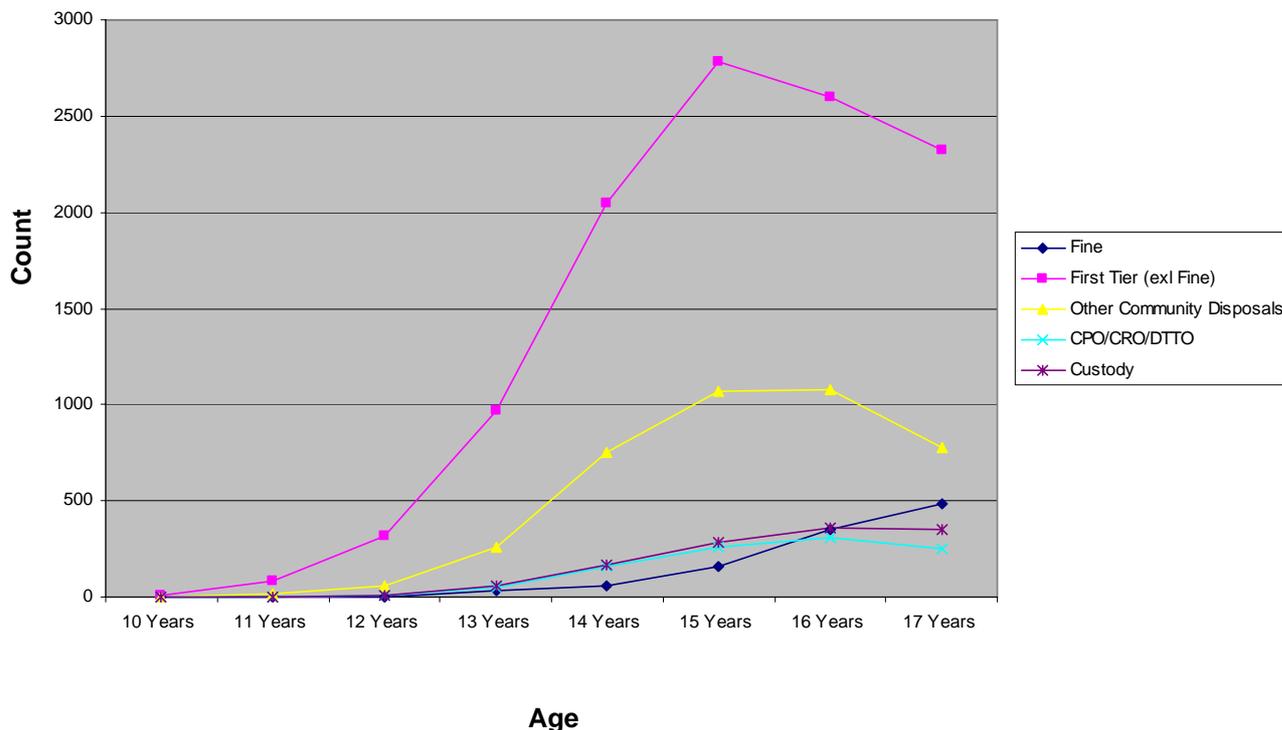
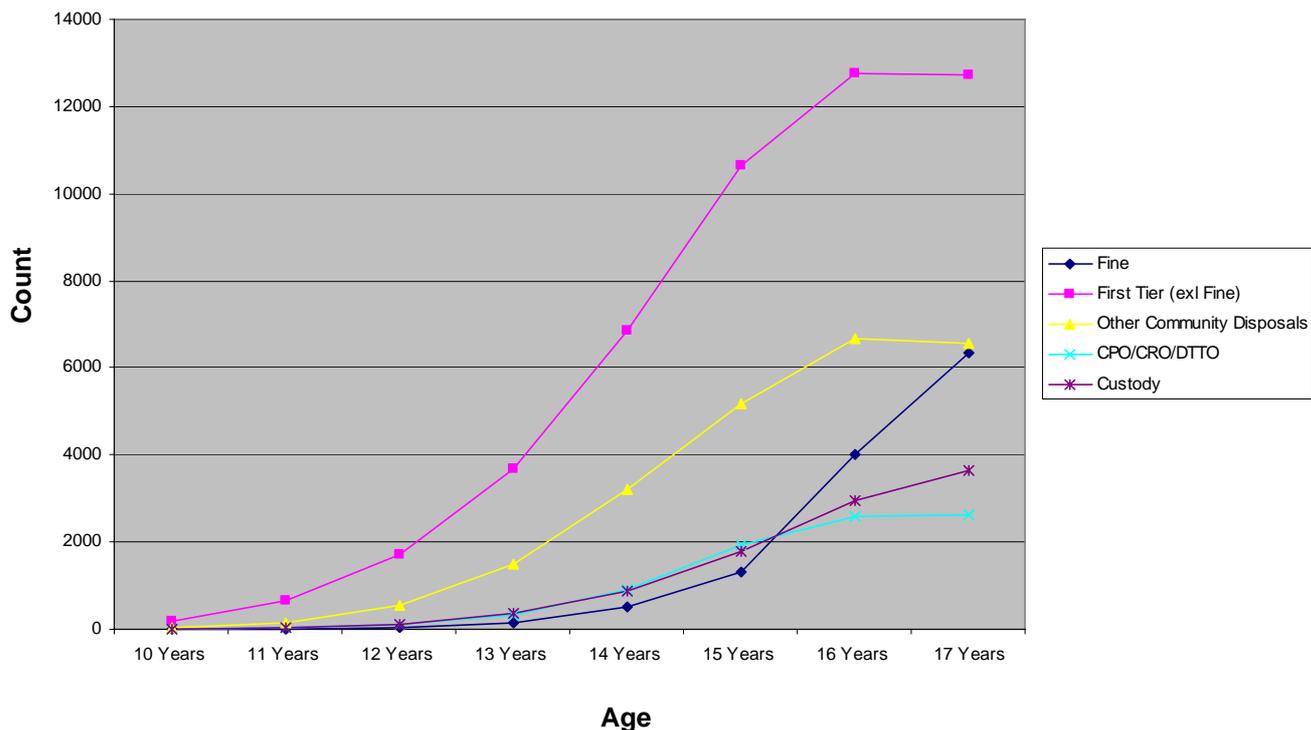


Figure 13b: Age profile of disposals for boys in the 2005/06 financial year by type

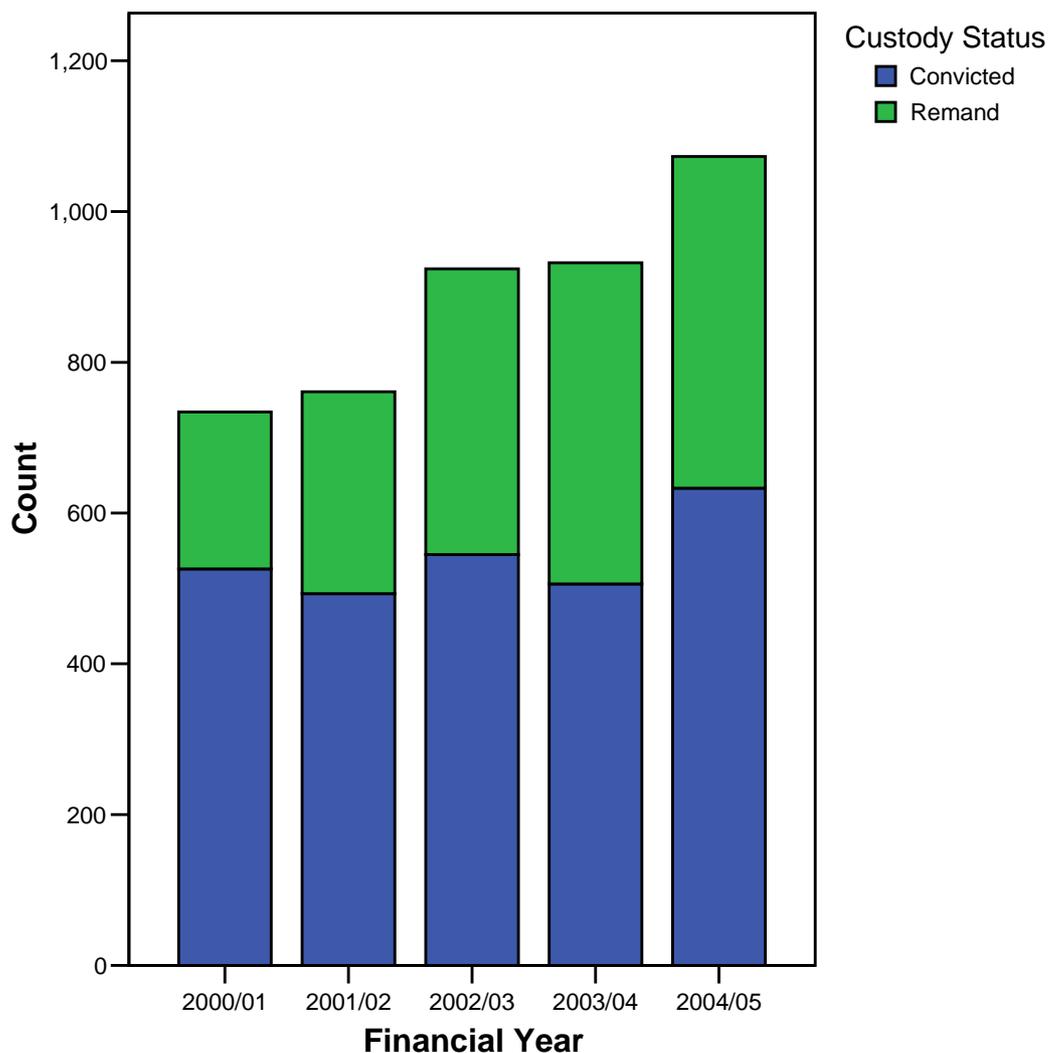


Young females in the secure estate

Over five financial years studied (from April 2000 to March 2005) the YJB placed females aged 12–18 in secure accommodation on 4,424 occasions.⁴¹ The number of occasions on which girls were remanded to custody each year more than doubled in that period and it is the use of custody for remand rather than convicted offenders that largely explains the increase in the use of secure accommodation, although there was a slight rise in convicted custody placements in the 2004/05 financial year, as illustrated by Figure 14.

⁴¹ Therefore the data may include individuals placed in secure accommodation multiple times.

Figure 14: Placements made by YJB each year



The bulk of accommodation placements made by the YJB are for 17-year-olds to young offender institutions (see Figures 15a and 15b). Between 2000/01 and 2004/05 there was a large rise in the number of placements of 17-year-old females, particularly the use of remand placements for this age group. Although there have been yearly fluctuations in the number of placements made for other age groups, there was no noticeable change in the number of placements made each year over this period.

Figure 15a: Age profile of placements for convicted female offenders

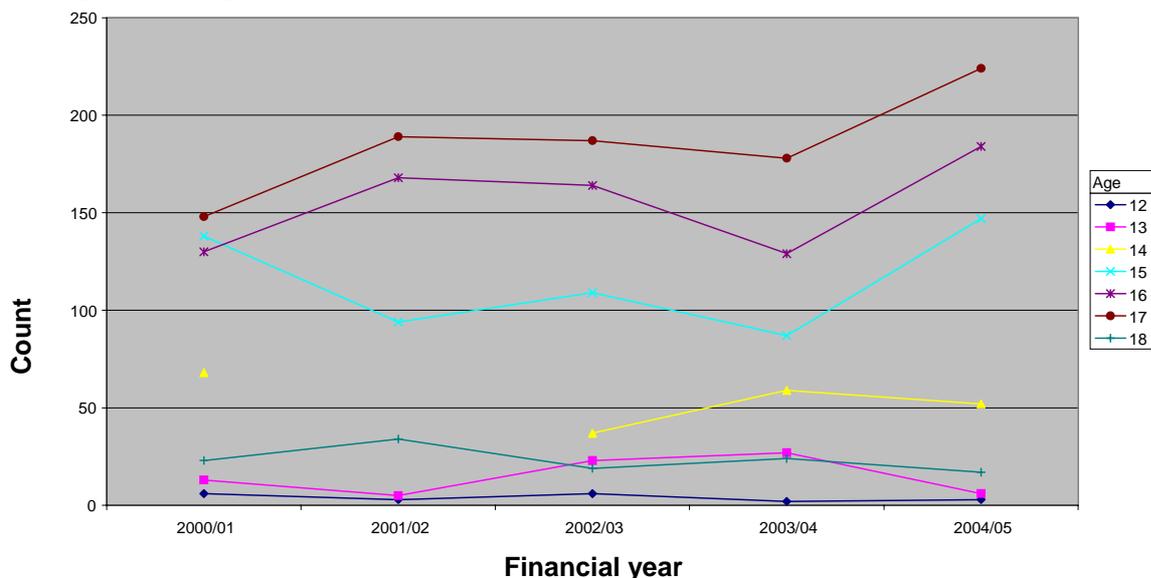
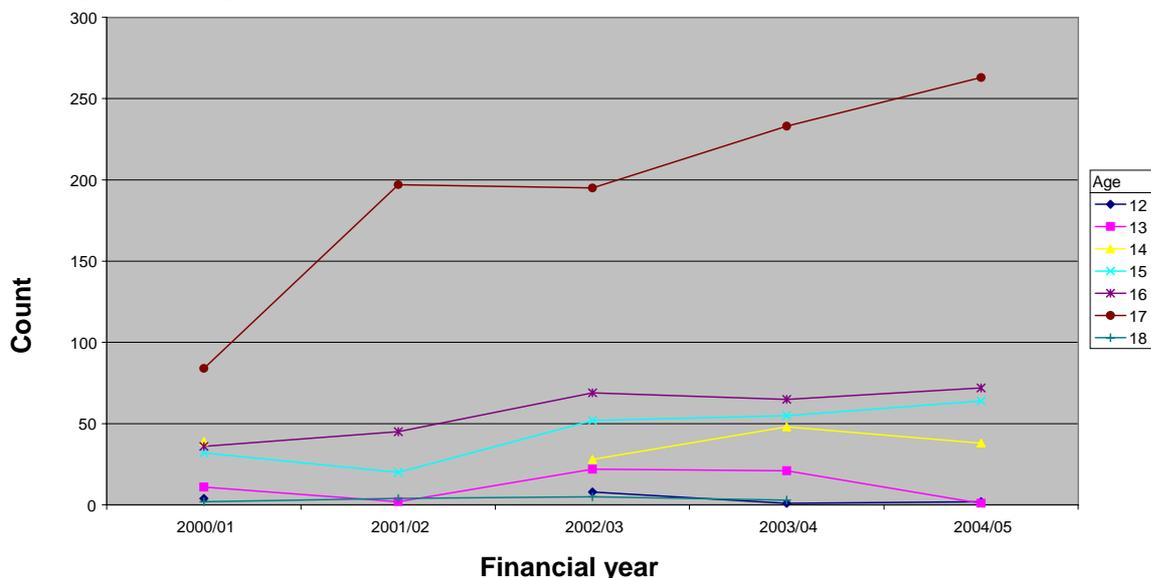
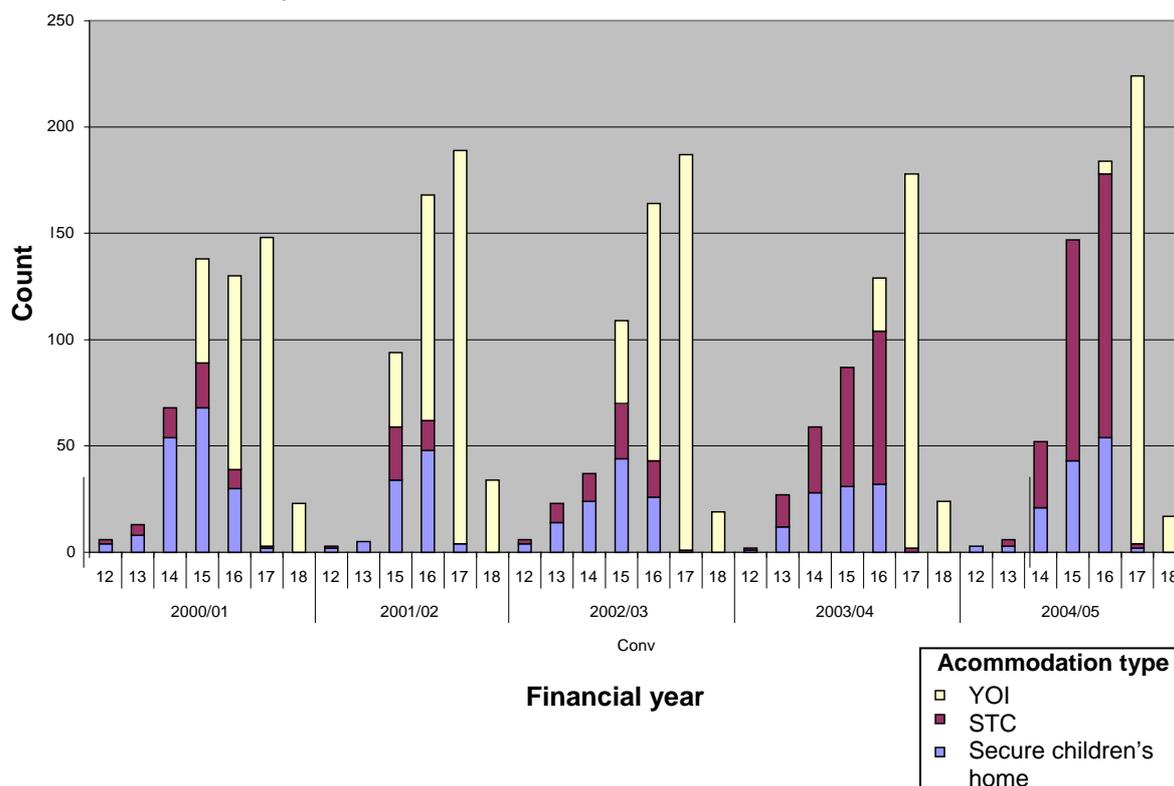


Figure 15b: Age profile of placements for remanded female offenders



There are three types of custody setting that young female offenders can be sent to depending on their age: secure children’s home, secure training centres (STC) and young offender institutions (YOI). Figure 16 shows the increase in the use of STCs between 2000 and 2005, particularly for 14–16-year-olds. The use of YOIs to house 15-year-olds stopped in the 2003/04 financial year. Only a few 16-year-old girls are now sent to YOIs. Conversely, the vast majority of 17-year-olds are placed in YOIs. The few 18-year-old females that the Board accommodates each year are placed exclusively in YOIs. The average distance young girls were accommodated away from their home during the 2004/05 financial year was 58 miles. Of interest is that younger girls tend to be accommodated further from their homes than older girls. The average distance to a YOI is 44 miles, to a STC is 70 miles and to a secure children’s home it is 73 miles, thus the fact that there are fewer STCs and secure children’s homes than YOIs, coupled with heavy demand for STC and secure children’s homes places, means younger girls are placed further away from their home than older girls.

Figure 16: Type of accommodation convicted young females are sent to by age and financial year



Summary

Overall, the PNC, Themis, SACHs and Census data indicated that girls appear to be being ‘policed’ more heavily than previously. Older girls are receiving relatively more Final Warning and Reparation Orders and there has been an increase in the number of younger girls being convicted. Girls are increasingly likely to be remanded into custody and this accounts for the increase in use of custodial placements, rather than there being an actual rise in custodial sentences for girls.

In terms of disposals, the most prevalent offence category for girls was theft and handling stolen goods, although there has been a consistent rise in violence and disorderly behaviour categories by girls over the last four years. The latter is particularly interesting as the *Asset* analysis that follows, which is based on individuals rather than disposals, suggests that violent offending is now the most prevalent among girls. Among boys, the most prevalent offence category is violence against the person. Only two offence categories have risen consistently between 2000 and 2006 (violence and public order offences).

Analysis indicates, however, that between 2000 and 2006, sentencing patterns for boys and girls have remained remarkably similar, although the use of custody has remained relatively static for boys while it has risen for girls.

Section 2b: Asset analysis

In addition to the analysis of national trend data supplied by the Home Office and the YJB, we analysed a representative sample of *Asset* forms relating to young women in the criminal justice system across England and Wales. In order for results to be significant and transferable to the general population of young female offenders, we devised a sampling strategy which would achieve this. Consequently, we sought in excess of 250 *Asset* forms.

Previous studies had indicated the numbers of young women processed by some YOTs to be very low, which always makes it difficult to achieve sufficient information on girls and makes the retrieval of sufficient number of *Assets* problematic. To counter this, it was decided to ask a sample of YOTs for *Assets* on 15 convicted girls and five girls given a Final Warning and the strategy was devised to allow this to be achieved. Ideally the *Asset* was to have been completed over the previous 12 months.⁴²

In total, 19 YOTs were requested to provide 20 *Asset* forms each. Fifteen provided some/all of the requested information resulting in 286 *Assets*. One *Asset* was discounted as it related to a young woman given a Reprimand. The final sample of *Assets* consisted of 213 convicted young women and 72 young women issued with Final Warnings.

Information regarding the sampling strategy used to obtain *Asset* reports is detailed in the Methods section of this report.

Summary of findings – young women in the youth justice system

The following provides a brief overview of the main findings from the *Asset* analysis; the full discussion of the findings follows with additional tables relating to the analysis to be found in Appendix C. The majority of analysis was undertaken on the quantitative data held on *Asset*; in some areas, analysis of the qualitative aspects of *Asset* has been carried out to support or inform the quantitative data. The analysis has been guided by questions contained in *Asset* – further exploration or evidence of issues is not, therefore, possible/available.

From our analysis of the *Asset* forms it is possible to conclude that young women in the youth justice system are on average 15 years old, with the modal age being 16 years old. They are most likely to be White (88%), with the next most common ethnicity being Black and then mixed parentage (White/Black). They are most likely to commit an offence of violence against the person (39%), with the next most common offence type being theft and handling stolen goods (27%).

More than half of the girls are subject to a Final Warning or Referral Order, with the next most common sentence being a Supervision Order (14%). They are most likely to receive their first reprimand aged 13–15 years old.

Convicted young women are also predominantly White, between 15 and 16 years old, have been convicted of a violent offence and have received a Referral Order. They have no previous convictions, have had contact with social services during their childhood

⁴² One YOT sent *Assets* which had been completed up to two years previously. See Methods section for a full discussion.

and generally experience dysfunctional family relationships. They have often been abused, witnessed violence in the family context and experienced significant bereavement and loss. Their family members are often involved in criminal activity and use drink and drugs.

These young women either live with only one birth parent or neither. They are usually enrolled in mainstream school but are not attending education. They are bored, mix with delinquent peers and participate in reckless activities. They drink and smoke but do not use drugs.

Convicted girls are often emotionally affected by both past and current circumstances; they may self-harm but probably will not have attempted suicide. They have inappropriate levels of self-esteem, are aggressive, angry, impulsive and easily led.

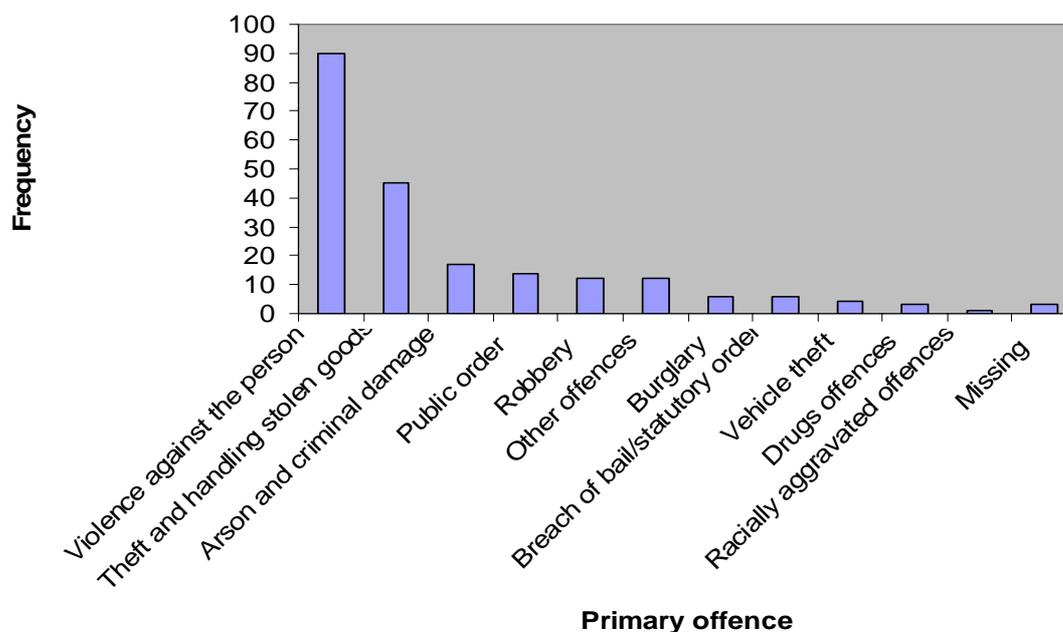
They do not understand the consequences of their offending for themselves, their victims or their family. They are generally unremorseful.

Convicted young women in the youth justice system

Final Warning *Asset* forms are significantly different from the full *Asset* used for convicted young people, containing only a small number of quantitative questions. The differences in design meant that it was not possible to comparably analyse most areas of the two different forms, therefore, the following analysis was carried out only on the full *Asset* forms relating to convicted young women (n=213).

Convicted young women in the youth justice system are predominantly White⁴³ and on average are 15 years old, with the modal age being 16. They are twice as likely to be convicted of violent offences (42%) than the next most common current offence type, theft and handling stolen goods (21%).

Figure 17: Current primary index offence for convicted young women (n=213)



⁴³ Analysis of ethnicity for convicted girls (n=213) showed it was no different than ethnicity for the total sample (n=285). Ethnicity was not found to be a significant factor in the analysis.

Convicted young women are most likely to receive a Referral Order (42%), however the next most common sentence is a Supervision Order (19%). Custodial sentences are issued to 9% of all convicted young women.

Data from the Home Office (2007) presenting the sentencing breakdown across England and Wales for males aged 10–17 years old in 2005 indicates that sentencing patterns for both young men and young women are similar (also confirmed by the analysis discussed in Section 2a). Referral Orders are also the most commonly received sentence for young men (33%), with Supervision Orders being the next most common sentence (13%). The likelihood of receiving a custodial sentence is the same for both young men and women (10% and 9% respectively); additionally 4% of girls in the system will have served a previous custodial sentence. Given that 42% of girls will have had no previous convictions and that research indicates that girls’ offending is generally less prolific and less serious in nature than boys’, the parity in sentencing patterns is surprising. At least 11% of those with previous convictions will have failed to complete a previous disposal.

By the age of 14, 34% of young women will have received their first conviction; 33% will receive their first conviction between 15 and 17 years of age.⁴⁴ The average age of first conviction (where data is available) is 14; thus the window between first reprimand and first conviction appears to be six months. This data fits with findings from the Persistent Young Offender study (Arnall et al, 2005) and that from the general *Asset* data.

As highlighted above, 42% of young women in the system will have no previous convictions. Only 5% will have more than ten previous convictions. Where young women have no previous convictions they are almost twice as likely to receive their first conviction for a violent offence as for a theft and handling stolen goods offence. Those young women who have 10+ convictions are more than twice as likely to commit violent offences (50%) as public order offences (20%) or ‘other’ offences (20%).

Figure 18: Number of previous convictions (n=213)

No. of previous convictions	Frequency	%*
0	89	42
1	22	10
2	16	7
3	15	7
4	5	2
5	3	1
6–7	8	4
8–9	2	1
10+	10	5
Missing	43	20

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors.

⁴⁴ From the *Asset* data supplied by Oxford Centre for Criminological Research, girls were slightly older than boys when they received their first reprimand (13.56 years compared to 13.19 years) and their first conviction (14.50 years compared to 14.13 years).

Risk factors

Although not all sections of *Asset* are well completed, analysis indicates the interplay of multiple risk factors in the lives of young women who offend.

Care histories

At least 52% of young women in the youth justice system will have had some referral to social services. Nineteen percent will have been accommodated by a voluntary agreement with their parents and 13% will have had their name on the Child Protection Register.⁴⁵ Analysis of *Asset* data on 2,745 boys⁴⁶ indicated that girls who offend will, in general, have higher levels of in care experiences and contact with social services than boys who offend.

Figure 19: Care history (n=213) and comparable data for boys (n=2745)

	Ever	Never	Don't know	Missing	Boys – ever
Accommodated by voluntary agreement with parents	41 (19%)	129 (60%)	7	36	14%
Subject to Care Order	24 (11%)	148 (69%)	7	34	5%
Remand to local authority accommodation	12 (6%)	159 (75%)	4	38	8%
Name on Child Protection Register	27 (13%)	127 (60%)	24	35	8%
Any other referrals to social services	110 (52%)	58 (27%)	12	33	30%
Any social services involvement with siblings	61 (29%)	82 (38%)	29	41	17%

Family and relationships

Girls who offend experience substantial levels of family dysfunction; 36% will have experienced abuse, 24% witnessed violence in the family context and 29% significant bereavement or loss. These figures are in keeping with research highlighting the link between family dysfunction and youth offending (Batchelor, 2005; Arnull et al 2005).⁴⁷

Figure 20: *Asset* recording of family/relationship issues (n=213)

Family/relationship issue	Number with experience	%
Experience of abuse	77	36
Witnessing violence in the family context	51	24

⁴⁵ Girls were slightly more likely to have been the subject of a care order than boys (9.7% compared to 6.5%) and to have been accommodated by voluntary parental agreement (22.9% compared to 18%). However, there was no statistical difference in the percentage of boys and girls being referred to the Child Protection Register (boys 41.3%, girls 42.4%), nor placed on the register (boys 11.1% and girls 13%). Further there was no significant difference in the percentage of boys and girls with siblings involved with social services (boys 25.8%, girls 29.5%).

⁴⁶ Kindly provided by Oxford Centre for Criminological Research.

⁴⁷ See also the systematic review in this report for a discussion of the perceived relevance of family risk factors to young women's offending.

Experience of significant bereavement or loss	62	29
Family members involved in criminal activity	59	28
Family members involved in alcohol abuse	38	18
Family members involved in substance abuse	40	19
Significant adults fail to communicate with/show interest in the young person	66	31
Experience of inconsistent supervision or boundary setting	89	42
Difficulties with care of own children	11	5
Experience 'other problems' related to family/personal relationships	73	34

Living arrangements

A sizeable minority (37%) of young women in the youth justice system will not live with either their mother or father, while 46% will live with only one parent. Only 17% will live with both parents.

Figure 21: Living arrangements (in the last six months) for those not living with either birth parent (n=79)

Accommodation issue	Number with experience	%
Living in a home/institution	28	36
Living with a partner	7	9
Living with grandparents	8	10
Living with other family members	4	5
Living with friends	3	4
Living with 'others'	6	8
Living with foster carers	2	3
Living alone	5	6
Living with multiple individuals/in multiple places	15	19

Young women not living with either parent are significantly different from those who live with at least one parent in a number of ways. From a socio-economic aspect, those not living with either parent are significantly less likely to be living in a deprived household ($p=0.024$)⁴⁸; however, they are significantly more likely to have been accommodated by a voluntary agreement with their parents ($p=0.000$) or to have been subject to a care order under s31 of the Children's Act ($p=0.000$). They are significantly more likely to have had previous referrals to social services and had their name on the Child Protection Register ($p=0.071$).

Young women not living with either birth parent are likely to have had contact with members of their birth family (including mother, father and siblings) in the last six months, however, they are significantly more likely to have had significant adults fail to communicate or show interest in them ($p=0.003$) and to have experienced abuse than young women living with at least one parent ($p=0.004$).

⁴⁸ Using Pearson's Chi-Square test.

In terms of experiences of offending, this group are significantly more likely to have received their first conviction aged 16–17 ($p=0.037$), be in the 16–17 age group ($p=0.08$) and to have committed six or more offences ($p=0.09$). The girls are significantly more likely to have had previous contact with a YOT, to have received a Referral Order or disposal such as a fine and are more likely to have pro-criminal friends ($p=0.054$). However, there are no significant differences in the types of offences they commit compared with young women living with at least one birth parent.

On an emotional/psychological basis, this group appear most likely to engage in ‘internally’ harmful behaviours. They are significantly more likely to have ever or recently used crack cocaine (although the actual numbers of girls in the sample who had ever/recently used crack cocaine were very small), to be coming to terms with past events ($p=0.001$), be coming to terms with current circumstances ($p=0.003$) and have concerns about the future ($p=0.005$). Overall, they are significantly more likely to be affected by emotional and psychological difficulties ($p=0.052$) and are significantly more likely to have caused deliberate harm to themselves ($p=0.077$). However, they are significantly less likely to have recently used alcohol than young women living with at least one parent ($p=0.092$), and are less likely to be aggressive to others ($p=0.045$).

Young women aged between 16 and 17 years old are most likely to be living away from the family unit and are significantly more likely than other age groups to be living alone ($p=0.068$), with friends ($p=0.038$) or with a partner ($p=0.007$).

Accommodation uncertainty/unsuitability is likely to be a key factor for young women in the youth justice system as illustrated by figure 22.

Figure 22: Accommodation issues (n=213)

Accommodation issue	Number with experience	%
Classified as no fixed abode	8	4
Living in unsuitable accommodation	36	17
Living in a deprived household	66	31
Living with known offenders	47	22
Absconding or staying away	70	33
Living in disorganised/chaotic households	34	16
Experience ‘other’ problems in relation to their living arrangements	66	31

Education, training and employment

At least 32% of young women in the youth justice system are in mainstream school and 9% are enrolled at a Pupil Referral Unit. Young women aged between 14 and 15 years old are significantly more likely to be non-attendees of their educational provision ($p=0.000$). Young women aged between 16 and 17 years old are most likely to have nothing currently arranged or to be unemployed ($p=0.003$).

Previous research has indicated that education, or the lack of it, is an important risk factor for juvenile offending (Arnull et al, 2005). Relatively low numbers of girls in the youth justice system will have difficulties with literacy or numeracy (12% and 10%, respectively) and only 10% are recorded as being of special educational need.

Of the sample, 12% are said to have bullied fellow pupils/colleagues and 9% are thought to have been bullied themselves.

Of the sample, 10% have negative attitudes towards education, training and employment (ETE), while 20% are said to lack attachment to their current ETE provision. Poor relationships with teachers or colleagues are recorded for 15% of the sample, and 9% have parents/carers with negative attitudes towards ETE.

Lifestyle

The biggest lifestyle problem for young women who offend is having nothing much to do in their spare time; 65% are thought to suffer from this. In addition, 42% may participate in reckless activities.

Pro-criminal peers are a problem for 49% of young women who offend, 26% lack non-criminal friends and 29% lack age appropriate friendships. Having pro-criminal peers has been established as a risk factor by other research (see Piquero et al, 2005 and the previous systematic review for discussion).

Substance use

The use of drugs is very limited among young female offenders, as illustrated by Figure 23. Only tobacco and alcohol appear to have widespread use, with 61% and 57% respectively having recently used these substances. Cannabis has relatively limited use – 29% recently used this substance. Experience of harder drugs such as heroin, cocaine or crack cocaine is extremely limited among young women who offend⁴⁹, for example only 4% have ever used heroin, 7% have ever used cocaine and 4% have ever used crack cocaine. Additionally:

- 24/213 (11%) use practices which put them at risk
- 29/213 (14%) see substance use as positive/essential to life
- for 27/213 (13%), substance use has a noticeably detrimental effect on their life/daily functioning
- 14/213 (7%) offend to obtain money for substances
- for 52/213 (24%), substance use is considered to have ‘other links’ to offending.

Figure 23: Use of drugs and alcohol (n=213)

	Ever used	Recent use	Not known to have used	Don't know/missing
Tobacco	33	130	27	23
Alcohol	46	121	24	22
Solvents	15	9	128	61
Cannabis	52	62	66	33
Ecstasy	25	19	112	57
Amphetamines	19	9	118	67

⁴⁹ The extent of missing data in this section of *Asset* should be borne in mind when considering substance use.

LSD	4	1	132	76
Poppers	11	3	124	75
Cocaine	14	3	121	75
Crack cocaine	8	3	129	73
Heroin	9	4	126	74
Methadone	5	1	129	78
Tranquillisers	7	4	123	79
Steroids	1	0	126	86
Other	2	5	118	88

Alcohol use

The *Asset* data showed high levels of recent use of alcohol among the sample.⁵⁰ This data, plus recent wider concerns about the use of alcohol by young women and possible links with offending, led us to analyse the 57% of the sample who had recently used alcohol.

Recent alcohol use is not linked with social deprivation as recent alcohol users are significantly less likely to live in deprived households ($p=0.051$) and significantly more likely to benefit from support from family and friends ($p=0.046$). The girls are also significantly less likely than other girls to be identified as of special educational need; and significantly less likely to display inappropriate social and communication skills ($p=0.098$).

In terms of offending, recent alcohol use is significantly associated with greater numbers of previous convictions, with the girls in this group more likely to have three to five, or six or more previous convictions ($p=0.03$), and this is congruent with other research (Eklund and Klinteberg, 2005; Richardson and Budd, 2003). They were significantly more likely to have been given a Supervision Order for their current offence ($p=0.049$).

Psychological characteristics appear to have an influence on recent alcohol use: boredom significantly increased the likelihood of a young woman being a recent alcohol user ($p=0.073$). Additionally, recent alcohol use was significantly more prevalent among girls showing aggressive behaviour ($p=0.039$), impulsivity ($p=0.056$) and among those involved in destruction of property ($p=0.089$). Recent use of alcohol was also significantly linked to holding discriminatory attitudes ($p=0.044$), believing certain offences were acceptable ($p=0.003$) and thinking some people were acceptable targets ($p=0.099$). Analysis also highlighted that recent alcohol users were significantly less likely to accept responsibility for their current offence than those who had not had alcohol recently ($p=0.008$).

The analysis also indicated that the young women who had deliberately harmed themselves ($p=0.019$) or attempted suicide ($p=0.025$) were significantly more likely to be recent alcohol users. Similarly, young women in this group were significantly more likely to have witnessed violence in the family home ($p=0.051$).

⁵⁰ With reasonably low levels of missing data.

Physical and mental health

Physically, young women who offend are healthy, with only 5% having a physical health condition which affects their everyday life functioning, although 19% may put their health at risk through their behaviour. Girls in the youth justice system have much more complex mental/emotional health histories, however.

The 16–17-year old age group are most likely to suffer from emotional and psychological difficulties and these are significantly linked with their current circumstances ($p=0.053$). The percentage of young female offenders who may be coming to terms with current circumstances is 55%, while 49% are coming to terms with significant past events and 37% are thought to have concerns about the future.

Thirty-four percent have deliberately harmed themselves and 15% have previously attempted suicide. While 28% have had contact with or referrals to mental health services, only 8% have had a formal diagnosis of mental illness; 22% are recorded as being affected by other emotional/psychological difficulties.

Thinking and behaviour

It is thought that 44% of the young female offenders – particularly those aged 12–13 or 14–15 ($p=0.01$) have inappropriate self-esteem, although *Asset* does not record whether self-esteem is considered to be too high or too low. Low self-esteem is often highlighted as a particular problem for offending young women and many gender-specific programmes focus sessions on this (see later for evidence of this). Early indications from a study by this research team on young women who offend suggest, however, that some girls who offend may have normal or elevated self-esteem; this is perhaps an area worthy of further consideration.

Of the sample, 34% are considered to be generally mistrustful of others (this is significantly more likely among young women aged between 14 and 15 years old – $p=0.052$); 20% have difficulties with self-identity; 16% see themselves as victims of discrimination or unfair treatment, and 11% hold discriminatory attitudes themselves. However, only 8% perceive themselves as having a criminal identity.

Attitudes to offending

Young women who offend may be considered to have problematic attitudes towards their offending behaviour and particular character traits linked with offending. Showing aggression towards others was recorded in 69%; 63% have poor control of their anger and 30% are involved with destruction of property; 12–13 and 14–15-year-olds in the sample were significantly more likely to be considered unable to control their tempers ($p=0.045$). These figures may help us to understand why a number of young women are offered or directed to attend anger management sessions. However, as detailed in Section 3, few whose views were accessed as part of this study had found the sessions helpful.

Of girls who offend, 72% are considered to be impulsive and 36% as needing excitement. As we have seen, these characteristics have been shown in numerous studies to be linked with girls who offend. Of the girls studied, 45% were considered to give in easily to pressure from others and 16% attempt to manipulate or control others; 22% to have inappropriate social and communication skills and 9% to display sexually inappropriate behaviour.

Figure 24: Attitudes to offending (n=213)

Attitudes	Number considered to hold attitude	%
Lack understanding of the consequences of their behaviour	104	49
Deny seriousness of their actions	74	35
Lack understanding of the effect of their behaviour on the victim	98	46
Lack understanding of the effect of their behaviour on family/carers	72	34
Lack remorse	83	39
Reluctant to accept responsibility for involvement in their most recent offence	34	16
Believe certain types of offences are acceptable	49	23
Believe certain people/groups are acceptable targets of offending	34	16
Think that further offending is inevitable	23	11
Do not have an appropriate understanding of the problematic aspects of their behaviour	51	24
Do not show evidence of wanting to deal with problems in their life	55	26
Do not understand the consequences of further offending for themselves	26	12
Have not identified clear reasons or incentives for avoiding further offending	53	25
Do not show evidence of wanting to stop offending	51	24
Will not receive positive support from family/friends during interventions	30	14
Are not willing to co-operate with others to achieve change	11	5

This analysis demonstrates that girls within the youth justice system do have problematic attitudes which may contribute towards their continued offending. It highlights the importance and value of programmes developed for working with girls who offend to give equal weight to offending behaviour and victim awareness sessions as to issues such as relationships, self-esteem and confidence. This may be particularly important for younger age groups of female offenders; 16–17-year-olds are significantly more likely to want to stop offending ($p=0.043$) and are considered to be able to identify clear reasons and incentives for avoiding further offending in comparison to 12–13- and 14–15-year-olds. As detailed and discussed in Section 3, the programmes accessed during this research did not always appear to focus on the young women’s problematic offending behaviour. This analysis would not suggest that this was appropriate and in fact shows areas of significant criminogenic need, although the girls also had substantial levels of victimisation and experiences of social and familial dysfunction. This is not wholly different from boys who offend. The *Asset* analysis also highlighted that the factors which emerged were congruent with the research discussed in Section 1; this would suggest that they are reliable.

Girls who offend – categories for analysis

Initial analysis highlighted useful distinctions between the girls and as a result convicted girls were assigned to one of three categories on the basis of their current primary offence. These groupings were: 'violence against the person', 'theft and handling stolen goods' and 'other' offences (including criminal damage, public order and drugs offences, among others). These analytical categories were assigned after initial analysis showed interesting differences between the groups which further analysis indicated were, on occasions, statistically significant. Once the girls were grouped into one of three categories it was clear that they presented different issues in terms of risk factors and with regard to interventions and engagement in programmes. Further, given the congruence of the analysis with other research findings on girls and risk factors, we would suggest that indications are that they are reliable. They could, therefore, be used within the youth justice system to help with the assessment process and the planning of appropriate interventions with different girls; it also suggests that the female offending population is not homogenous and requires a range of responses.

Violence against the person

Young women who commit violent offences fall into two distinct categories, those who generally appear to come from relatively stable environments and those who are residents of a home or institution. They are significantly more likely to be between 14 and 15 years old ($p=0.036$) and to attend Pupil Referral Units ($p=0.094$).

Analysis of qualitative *Asset* data relating to current offence details provided further information on the nature of violent offending by young women.⁵¹ Generally, young women appeared to commit violent offences against people they knew – only 11% of offences were committed against complete strangers. Thirty-six percent of offences occurred against someone with whom the young woman had some link; 3% of violent offences occurred against a victim who was considered to be friends with the perpetrator. Victims of violent offences appeared to be as likely to be male as female⁵² and to be generally of a similar age to the girls who committed the acts of violence. Violent acts were sometimes, but not commonly, committed against people in authority such as police officers (12%), residential care staff (7%) or social workers (see Pettersson, 2005). In 5% of cases, victims are family members. As mentioned above, in some cases there might be a link between the young woman's care status and the violent offence (this appears to be the case in 9% of incidents).

It appeared that violent offences committed by young women could often be traced back to a past incident or provocation (24% of cases suggested this link); again this was highly congruent with other research (Pettersson, 2005; Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003). This might relate to a previous exchange of verbal insults, an ongoing disagreement between the victim and the offender or a perceived 'slight'. Very few of the girls had used weapons in the commission of violence (4%). They were also much more likely to commit violence with other young females: 15% of the cases involved female co-defendants; 4% involved both male and female co-defendants. The commission of violence with solely male co-defendants was very rare. Violence might

⁵¹ Qualitative information relating to 98 violent offences was studied. Not all *Asset* forms provided full qualitative descriptions of offences, so analysis only relates to those cases where information was provided.

⁵² This was surprising and would be worthy of further investigation.

also be committed in the course of group fights (3%). Alcohol, as highlighted above, appeared to be significantly linked with violent offending, although the use of other substances was not.

The comparison of risk factors taken from aggregating the *Asset* findings showed that the girls who committed violent offences came from relatively stable environments and appeared to be somewhat ‘untroubled’ compared with those committing theft and handling offences or ‘other’ offences. They were less likely to experience problems with education and family or emotional or mental health difficulties, however they were considered to be aggressive, manipulative and to have anger management issues.⁵³ They were significantly more likely to drink alcohol than girls convicted of other types of offences ($p=0.088$), but did not use drugs (Richardson and Budd, 2003).

As stated above, however, the commission of violent offences was also significantly linked with being a resident of a home or institution ($p=0.001$). Sixty-seven percent of young women living in children’s homes or institutions have a current conviction for violence. This finding is supported by recent research into young offenders and accommodation (Arnall et al, 2007), which found that young people were more likely to commit violent offences in communal accommodation such as children’s homes or institutions.

Our findings would therefore suggest that there are two distinct groups of girls who commit violent offences. This may be an area worthy of further investigation given growing concerns about violent offending by young women. It also suggests that there may be different factors at work with some violent girls, particularly as most girls who committed violent offences appeared to be relatively untroubled; their principle risk factors linked to the commission of the offence seemed to involve their use of alcohol and personality-based characteristics such as aggression.

Theft and handling stolen goods

Young women who commit theft and handling stolen goods offences appeared to be quite different from those who committed violent offences. In many ways, they appeared to fit with common conceptions of what young female offenders ‘look like’, having a number of risk factors present in their lives.

Girls living in unsuitable accommodation, deprived housing ($p=0.003$) or living with a partner ($p=0.015$) were significantly more likely to commit theft and handling offences. Living arrangements appeared to be linked with the commission of the offence in 6% of cases. Additionally, not having been shown adequate attention/care by significant adults ($p=0.076$) or having inconsistent supervision/boundary setting ($p=0.024$) was significantly linked with committing theft and handling offences. These offences were also significantly more likely where the girl had been the victim of abuse ($p=0.049$).

Lack of ETE skills were strongly linked with theft and handling offences and the girls were significantly more likely to have parents/carers with negative attitudes towards education ($p=0.003$), and were more likely to lack attachment to ETE themselves ($p=0.038$). Young women who were classified as unemployed or having nothing

⁵³ This finding is based on *Asset* data, which may be influenced by the current offence at the point of assessment, e.g. if the young woman is convicted of a violent offence the YOT worker may assess them as having anger management issues or being aggressive on this basis rather than because there is additional evidence of this kind of behaviour. However, it is congruent with other research findings and the personality factors for girls and boys who commit violent offences.

currently arranged were significantly more likely to commit theft and handling offences than either violent or 'other' offences ($p=0.053$ and 0.066 respectively).

Girls who commit theft and handling offences were also significantly more likely to have pro-criminal friends ($p=0.000$), participate in reckless activity ($p=0.024$) and have nothing much to do in their spare time ($p=0.071$) than girls convicted of violent or 'other' offences. They were also considered to give in easily to pressure ($p=0.077$).

Analysis of qualitative information provided further information on girls who commit this type of offence.⁵⁴ Links between the perpetrator and victim are much less likely in theft and handling offences (9% of victims are linked with the offender in some way). A much smaller proportion of victims of theft or handling offences are the same/similar age to the offender (4%). Family members account for only 2% of known offenders for this type of offence. They were still more likely to commit their offences with female co-defendants (13%) than male (4%), but committing such an offence with a boyfriend was much more common (6%), as was committing the offence with a member of the family (6%).

Use of alcohol was less common prior to an offence of theft or handling stolen goods (apparent in only 6% of cases)⁵⁵, with other substances known to be used in 4% of cases.

Girls who committed theft and handling stolen goods offences therefore fitted more with a 'typical' pattern of known risk factors; these included socio-economic factors, pro-criminal friendship and family groups, experiences of victimisation, lack of school attachment/attainment and personality-based characteristics such as recklessness and boredom.

'Other' offences⁵⁶

Again, young women who commit 'other' offences appeared to have some significant differences from those committing other types of offences. Links between emotional/mental health and the commission of this type of offence were significant. Girls affected by emotional or psychological difficulties were significantly more likely to commit 'other' offences ($p=0.037$) and this group of young women were also significantly more likely to have had contact with or referrals to mental health services ($p=0.059$).

This group were significantly more likely not to have age appropriate friends ($p=0.088$), to use cannabis ($p=0.079$) and believe that substance use was positive/essential to life ($p=0.084$).

Analysis of qualitative data provided further information⁵⁷ which showed that links between the victim and offender were rare (8% of cases recorded some link). Where the co-defendant information was known, it was most likely that the young women would

⁵⁴ Qualitative information relating to 46 theft and handling offences was studied. Not all *Asset* forms provided full qualitative descriptions of offences, so analysis only relates to those cases where information was provided.

⁵⁵ Again this was congruent with the findings of a study undertaken by the Home Office (Richardson and Budd, 2003) which found links with general offending behaviour and alcohol use in females, but no link with theft offences.

⁵⁶ Including, for example, drug, motoring, public order and breach offences.

⁵⁷ Qualitative information relating to 57 'other' offences was studied. Again, not all *Asset* forms provided this information, so analysis only relates to those cases where such information was provided.

commit 'other' offences with female co-defendants (7% compared with 3% of male co-defendants) and in 5% of cases with family members.

Of the girls convicted of 'other' offences, 17% had used alcohol prior to committing the offence and 9% had used other substances.

Girls who committed 'other' offences were significantly more likely to have emotional or psychological difficulties, to have had contact with mental health services and to see substance use as essential to their life; in these characteristics they were more similar to the adult female offending population.

Conclusion

Analysis of 285 *Asset* forms relating to young women in the youth justice system allows us to draw important conclusions about them as a population. They are most likely to be:

- White
- aged 15–16 years old
- committing violent offences
- sentenced to Referral Orders
- having no previous convictions:
 - experiencing multiple risk factors including dysfunctional families, lack of attachment to education, emotional and mental health issues and mixing with delinquent peers
 - drinking and smoking, but not using drugs
 - aggressive, angry, impulsive, reckless and easily led
 - unremorseful and unable to understand the consequences of their actions for themselves, their family or their victims.

The analysis of *Asset* suggested that many of the convicted girls in the youth justice system have experienced a range of known risk factors. For approximately one-third there are experiences of abuse, significant bereavement or loss, witnessing family violence, family members involved in criminal activity, inconsistent boundary setting, significant adults who fail to communicate with or show care to them, and past contact with social services. Of those not living with either birth parent, 36% have lived in a home or institution for the last six months and almost half of them live with just one parent. In addition almost half of the girls have pro-criminal peers, participate in reckless activities, and had used alcohol recently. The majority of girls were considered to be impulsive (72%), to show aggression towards others (69%) and to have poor control of their anger (63%); almost half were judged to lack understanding of the consequences of their behaviour (49%). Thus the girls showed characteristics and risk factors consistent with other research. However, the levels of victimisation did not approach the levels reported in some US studies. The findings suggest that victimisation and family dysfunction are reasonably common experiences for girls and boys in the youth justice system, but more common for girls. They do not in themselves, however, appear to offer an explanatory factor.

Importantly, analysis also indicated that girls who commit different types of offences are markedly different from each other. The findings are congruent with other research

which has sought to isolate or investigate certain risk factors and types of offending behaviour. Our findings indicated that violent girls fell into two groups: those who were residents of children's homes or institutions and those who had no discernible problems aside from their own behaviour and particular personality-based characteristics. Girls who committed violent offences were more likely to drink alcohol and commit offences against other females they know after perceived 'provocation'.

Young women who committed theft and handling stolen goods offences tended to look more like commonly held notions of female offenders. They have experienced multiple risk factors including unsuitable/deprived accommodation, dysfunctional relationships with significant adults and a lack of education or employment experience. These young women mixed with mainly pro-criminal peers, were easily led and were bored.

Those young women who committed 'other' offences tended to suffer from emotional or psychological difficulties. They were more likely to be cannabis smokers and to see substance use as a positive factor in their lives.

Section 3: Are groups just for girls necessary?

This section is based on details of eight programmes for young women which are run by or for YOTs in the community in England⁵⁸ and two interventions undertaken with girls in the secure estate. Interviews or focus groups were undertaken with practitioners and girls, some observations were undertaken and where available, programme information was collated.⁵⁹

What do programmes for girls look like?

The eight young women's programmes accessed in the community as part of this research varied substantially in aim and target group, although, most of the programmes covered very similar topics and appeared to have developed comparable methods of delivery. The following discussion highlights similarities in the development of the programmes⁶⁰ as highlighted either by interviews with practitioners or analysis of programme information provided. Key topics addressed included:

- **Sexual health**

Six of eight programmes included sessions on sexual health. Sessions tended to include work on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), safe sex, pregnancy and childbirth. The number of sessions devoted to this topic varied according to the programme duration and appeared to range from one session to six sessions. The young women's ISSP programme allocated six weeks to issues such as STIs, pregnancy and childbirth and, as highlighted previously in the Appendix A, one other programme had the very specific purpose of delivering sexual health related sessions to young women at the *YOT*.

- **Healthy relationships**

Again, six of eight programmes addressed this. Topics covered within these sessions tended to cross over with sexual health sessions; most programmes addressed domestic violence, additionally childbirth and parenthood might also be discussed during these sessions. Some programmes also covered peer pressure and bullying within these sessions. The suggestions by Smith and McAra (2004) that weak attachments to school, friendships with boys, high risk behaviours and some level of moral disengagement are relevant to girls' offending suggest that this may be a useful focus and may target some criminogenic factors.

- **Substance use**

Information provided suggested that at least four of the young women's programmes dedicated sessions to drug and alcohol use. However, the extent to which current session foci 'fit' with what is known about young females' substance misusing behaviour is less clear. For example, one observed session on substance use included harm minimisation information, information about drugs and the law, and open discussions about drug and alcohol use. As discussed above, some

⁵⁸ Not all of the programmes considered in the study are currently running (see Appendix A for detail).

⁵⁹ Please see the Methods section for a full description.

⁶⁰ Three sites provided detailed written programme information; detailed information was provided during interview by four additional sites. Very little is known about the programme structure of one site.

practitioners highlighted their growing concern about the levels of binge drinking and alcohol-related offending among the young women and observations suggested that the young women had little experience of Class A drugs. It appears, however, that despite this, in general the substance use sessions focused largely on drug rather than alcohol use.

- **Self-esteem and self-confidence**

Smith and McAra (2004) highlighted that low self-esteem might be an important factor in explaining the differences between boys and girls' offending. However, other studies have not found this and it has been suggested that this might not be a useful area for programmes to focus (Larden et al, 2006). However six of eight programmes reported that they focused on raising the self-esteem and self-confidence of the young women. Two programmes included short residential breaks where the young women were given the opportunity to try new activities. Practitioners from both sites stated that one of the key aims of the residential sessions was to increase the young women's sense of self-efficacy and improve their confidence and self-esteem. Linked with this, several practitioners also spoke of the importance of raising the aspirations of the young women participants by alerting them to the options open to them and giving them the confidence to seek and expect more from their lives. Raising aspirations appeared to be tackled during a number of different sessions, including those focusing on self-esteem and self-confidence, careers and relationships. McIvor et al's (2004) findings support those of Larden et al (2006) and suggest that the focus is best placed on moral engagement and behaviour as this fits best with girls' desistance from crime.

- **Personal safety**

Three programmes dedicated sessions to issues of personal safety. The Intensive Supervision and Support Programme (ISSP) for young women included self-defence classes as well as a six-week programme addressing rape, women's rights and grooming. Practitioners at another site explained that they provided information on personal safety in nightclubs, on the street and in taxis. Given research findings on the past and future victimisation of women and girls who offend (Acoca, 1999; Brewer-Smyth, 2004; Batchelor, 2005) this may be an important area, if not a criminogenic need.

- **Careers**

Two programmes reported that they ran sessions focusing on careers and future options. The apparent lack of programme focus on education and careers does not fit with either the findings of a number of research studies into female offending, nor the practitioners own concerns about young women's low aspirations. Research by Farrington and Painter (2004), Brewer-Smyth (2004), Batchelor (2005) and Byrne and Trew (2005), among others, highlight the impact of socio-economic factors on young and adult women's offending behaviour. Thus, not only are issues of education and employment linked to the onset of young female offending, they are also thought to be linked to the persistence of female offending into adulthood, especially as they affect employment opportunities, which is strongly related to women's offending. Research would suggest, therefore, that employment and enhancing employment opportunities in particular is an important focus for gender-specific interventions (White, 2004). Again, it would seem that how education and employment act as needs and criminogenic factors for girls and young women will require further exploration.

- **Offending behaviour**

Only three of the eight projects identified specific sessions that focused on offending behaviour and its consequences.⁶¹ For the 'Keep Out of Prison' project, a key aim was to highlight the consequences of offending to the group of young women and enhance their decision-making process; the ISSP programme ran a course of sessions on 'Offending from the third person view' and practitioners at another site reported that their programme included a session on crime and consequences and gang culture.

- **Other**

Several programmes covered other topics such as independent living (including budgeting, cooking, living in the community), stress management (teaching relaxation techniques, aromatherapy and massage) and health (tackling issues such as eating disorders, women's health issues and fitness).

In some cases, offending behaviour was tackled indirectly, through sessions on conflict management and self-identity. In one site, the practitioners stated that offending behaviour was not addressed directly but through concentration on risk factors throughout the programme. This piece of research was not intended as an evaluation of the young women's programmes and there is no evidence to suggest that this approach is not as successful in tackling the offending behaviour of the female participants as other more direct approaches. However, some practitioners interviewed commented that gender-specific work was sometimes viewed by colleagues within the YOT as treating the young women 'differently' or as 'special' in some way because the approach used was quite different than that used with young men. One practitioner stated that YOT colleagues did not support the young women's group in that site because they felt it resembled 'youth work' more than 'YOT work'. Acknowledging the offending behaviour of the young women and adopting a more 'head on' approach to it might combat these issues and help to mainstream gender-specific work. Further, clarity about how other issues tackled and considered above relate (or might relate) to girls' needs in general and to criminogenic needs in particular will further assist in this area.

Other activities

Several of the programmes offered a range of other activities to the participants, most identified as being appropriate and of interest to the young women. Activities mentioned included art, singing, street dance, drama, hair and beauty sessions, sport taster sessions, cooking and music. In some cases, practitioners used these activities to address topics, for example, the researchers observed one session where dance drama was used to explore the issue of anti-social behaviour.

Delivery

Researchers observed sessions in three of the eight sites and were provided with information on the delivery and structure of sessions in four other sites. In most cases, staff running the programme delivered sessions, however practitioners at five sites said they drew on the expertise of external agencies or other colleagues to help deliver some sessions. At least three sites used sexual health nurses or specialists to deliver the sexual health sessions; several used local drug agencies; a couple invited representatives from

⁶¹ Although in one site the programme's sole focus was on sexual health.

the police force to deliver sessions on domestic violence, rape/sexual assault or other suitable topics. Other organisations used included dance/drama groups, music groups, Women's Aid and careers services. One site invited a local female rap artist to speak to the young women about her experiences.

Why develop a programme for girls?

It appeared that the eight programmes considered in this research were developed in response to two key factors:

- a perceived increase in the number of young women being processed by the criminal justice system and coming to the attention of YOTs
- the lack of appropriate services, activities and programmes available to young women involved in or at risk of offending.

Practitioners at three sites explained that, prior to the development of a specialist young women's programme, interventions on offer at the YOT were male-oriented. Specialist programmes tended to focus on the nature of the offence, for example street robbery or vehicle theft (both largely male crimes) rather than the characteristics of the offender. Similarly, prevention programmes, such as football projects, motor mechanics or music production courses tended to have been developed to meet the perceived needs of young males and were therefore not considered to be always appropriate or suitable for girls.

Additionally, some practitioners felt that the behaviour of both young men and young women altered significantly in mixed gender sessions – practitioners described both as 'acting up' in the presence of the opposite sex. This fits well with research by Smith and McAra (2004), which linked the delinquent or offending behaviour of girls with their friendships with boys involved in risk taking/offending behaviour. The study proposed that young women were more likely to become involved in offending behaviour when in mixed peer groups. In some cases, it appeared that the needs of young women attending mixed sessions became sidelined as the behaviour of the young men in the group required more staff resources. Several practitioners commented that they thought young women were less likely to share personal experiences or feelings in mixed gender groups.

Practitioners in two sites explained that their experience of working in youth services or with the YOT meant that they knew young women were involved in offending behaviour, but that they were under-represented in group sessions. One youth service practitioner felt that schools and YOT workers tended to refer more young men to offending behaviour programmes than young women. This meant, however, that the young women's risk-taking activity was not being properly addressed.

Overall, the practitioners interviewed during this research spoke in terms of 'redressing the balance' and ensuring that the same opportunities were open to both young women and young men. Furthermore, the issue of gender has become increasingly important in the youth justice system (see the systematic review of the literature in this report for examples of the growth of gender-related research). The Equality Act 2006 included a positive duty on all public bodies to promote gender equality and this came into force in April 2007, affecting the work of YOTs and organisations working within the youth justice field. The YJB recognised the importance of gender in its *Key Elements of Effective Practice – Offending Behaviour Programmes* (2008), which emphasises that, among other things, the gender of the young offender should be considered when selecting appropriate programmes to tackle their offending behaviour.

Sustainability of the girls programmes

As discussed in the Methods section, initially four YOT sites identified by a previous report to the YJB (Owers, 2004) as providing a gender-specific intervention were approached to take part in the current study. However, three of these four sites indicated that they no longer provided a young women's programme or any gender-specific intervention, thus, it became apparent that the sustainability of young women's work within YOTs was an issue. Owers' report identified 45 YOTs that offered gender-specific interventions. As part of this study, each of those YOTs were approached and asked to confirm whether such interventions were still on offer to young women, According to received responses, 39% of YOTs who, in 2004, were identified as providing a gender-specific intervention for young women no longer did so in 2005. In 2007, shortly before the submission of the final report, the 19 YOTs who were still offering gender-specific interventions were re-approached by email and telephone. At this point, 11 (25% of the original 44 identified in 2004) confirmed that they continued to offer a gender-specific intervention, five said they no longer offered this service and three did not respond.

We would suggest that sustainability of girls' programmes/work is a fundamental issue of good practice which needs to be treated as a key concern if gender mainstreaming⁶² is to occur and be built into YJB activity. In particular, if gender-specific programmes are considered worthwhile then consideration will need to be given to how they can be delivered on more than an ad hoc basis.

Practitioners interviewed as part of this study were asked about sustainability issues in their own sites – this was particularly relevant for three sites who no longer offered a young women's programme (see Appendix A). Issues of sustainability could be broken down into two 'themes':

- staffing issues
- characteristics of the target group.

They are both discussed in more detail below:

Staffing

This appeared to be a key theme for practitioners at YOTs, and much less so where the intervention had been contracted out to youth services or other organisations.

Practitioners at five of the eight sites surveyed in this research reported that the staffing arrangements for young women's interventions needed to be a key consideration if the programmes were to be sustained over time. In many cases, staff became involved in developing or leading the young women's programme due to a personal interest in the area. Some practitioners felt, however, that their commitment to the programme and 'goodwill' towards it was, at times, taken for granted by management and colleagues. This included staff at two sites (one with a young women's intervention, the other having folded) who were expected to maintain full caseloads of between 15 and 20 young people in addition to leading the young women's intervention; these practitioners felt this was untenable. In contrast, staff in three sites said YOT management had

⁶² Gender mainstreaming is defined by the Council of Europe as 'the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of all policy processes, so that gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by actors normally involved in policy making'. Taken from the document titled *Gender mainstreaming in the CJS* (Author and date unknown).

recognised the responsibility and workload involved in setting up and delivering a gender-specific programme and had made adjustments to their workloads as a result, for example:

- the programme leader in one site had been relieved of duty work
- staff in another site had recognised that the gender-specific programme leaders needed a specialism in their area and had agreed that they should not have other casework on top of this⁶³
- staff at the third site were responsible for the young women's ISSP programme offering 25 hours of activities over seven days a week to programme participants so could not be expected to take on additional work.

It is clear that management support and understanding was important to the ongoing success and mainstreaming of gender-specific interventions. Further, where the work appeared to be spread among a larger number of co-workers, the programmes were considered to be more 'mainstreamed' into YOT activity and thus more likely to be sustained, notwithstanding possible future staff changes.

Only one programme in the community was co-led by a male worker; in all other cases the staff delivering and developing the programmes were female. Opinion varied as to whether male staff could or should be encouraged to undertake gender-specific work with young women; this was in marked contrast to the secure estate as will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

Characteristics of the target group

Practitioners at three sites (two where no gender-specific intervention was currently on offer and one where the intervention had changed significantly) considered that the characteristics of the target group had led to difficulties, in some cases resulting in the programme ending. These points can be summarised as following:

- **Throughput**
As highlighted by the literature, there are relatively fewer young women being processed by the criminal justice system and being supervised by YOTs than young men. In one site, a programme had been developed in response to apparently growing numbers of young women attending the YOT. However, the increased numbers were short-lived and the programme folded due to lack of demand. This was also cited as a reason for non-provision of interventions in five of the sites identified by the previous YJB study (Owers, 2004).
- **Risk**
Practitioners at several YOTs raised concerns about mixing young women 'at risk' of offending with those young women with 'fully fledged' offending careers, considering that the issues for both might be very different and that the former might suffer from the negative influence of the latter. Practitioners at one site talked of a 'clash of offending experiences' between those on voluntary orders and those on statutory orders.

⁶³ However, staff at this site noted that the young women's programme working with YOT referrals only had folded due to workload pressure – other staff at the YOT had requested weekly individual evaluation sheets and weekly session evaluations and the programme leaders also had to seek out partner organisations and deliver the programme.

- **Familiarity**

Due to the relatively small numbers of young women coming through the YOTs and thus, the interventions, most practitioners reported that often the young women knew each other prior to attending groups. This was variously cited as a benefit and a disadvantage. Practitioners at one site felt it was a distinct advantage that the young women they worked with did not know each other prior to group sessions as everyone started from the same place. However, practitioners at another site reported that the intervention working with YOT referrals had become unworkable when perpetrators and victims⁶⁴ were placed in the same groups.

Work with girls in the secure estate

The unit managers for six specialist secure units accommodating girls in England were approached as part of this research. They were initially contacted by email and asked if any gender-specific work was currently undertaken in their institution and if so, whether these interventions focused on criminogenic or non-criminogenic needs. Obviously, all work undertaken is to a girls' only group, but it is not necessarily designed to be gender-specific. In fact we found that there are currently no accredited programmes for use in the secure estate that are gender-specific. However, current provision can appear to be stereotypical with educational provision, for example, focusing on beauty or cooking and programme content (as in the community) featuring sexual health (Chesney-Lind and Okamoto, 2001).

Responses indicated that few of the units offered gender-specific interventions and several unit managers said that operational specifications meant they could only deliver accredited programmes and that as there were no programmes currently in existence that had been specifically designed for young women in custody, they were unable to do this.

Perhaps the most obvious difference in staffing in the secure estate from community programmes was the greater number of male staff working in the units. As discussed above, staff working on gender-specific programmes in the community voiced concerns about the appropriateness of male staff working with young women. Staff at both secure units felt that working with male staff allowed the young women to develop healthy relationships with men and build relationships with good male role models. One unit manager stated that of 22 staff members, the number of male staff was, however, capped at six.

One member of staff at Unit 2⁶⁵ also highlighted that working in the juvenile secure estate allowed for a higher staff to trainee ratio, with each member of staff acting as a personal officer for two young women. This meant that good personal relationships were fostered between staff and trainees. This fits with research on interventions for young women, discussed earlier, which suggests that they respond well to personal relationships with staff (Lanctot, 2003).

The research team undertook visits to two units in England:

- at Unit 1, three members of YOT staff developing and delivering a gender-specific programme and the educational special needs worker were interviewed

⁶⁴ Who were also perpetrators in their own right.

⁶⁵ Units visited as part of the research were assured anonymity and so will be referred to as Unit 1 and Unit 2 in this report.

- at Unit 2, the manager, two prison officers, the education worker and the psychotherapist were interviewed.

Interventions in the secure estate

Unit 1: Gender-specific interventions

Working with young women in the secure estate presents different issues from those that arise when working with young women in the community; the extent to which interventions offered in the secure estate are gender-specific is harder to establish given that the audience they are delivered to is wholly female.

Only one of the units visited was currently delivering a gender-specific intervention. YOT workers based within Unit 1 have developed a gender-specific offending behaviour programme and supplied the programme materials to the research team for this report. The programme ‘My Offence, My Victim, My Risk’ aims to encourage the young women to examine their offending behaviour and develop strategies to reduce the risk of their reoffending. The programme consists of 14 sessions delivered in two hour slots, three afternoons a week over five weeks to groups of about six trainees. The sessions cover topics such as:

- gender differences and offending
- promoting a positive view of being female
- domestic violence
- the reasons why (young) women offend
- understanding thoughts, feelings and choices
- attitudes towards victims
- understanding risk of future re-offending.

The programme has been designed to be delivered to sentenced young women and the expectation is that attendance on the programme will have been set as part of the trainee’s sentence plan. The YOT staff who have developed the programme explain that they have taken account of age, emotional maturity, educational ability, and gender and cultural needs of the participants. The primary objective of the programme is, according to the manual, to ‘address the aspects of a young woman’s attitudes, peer influences, behavioural or cognitive skills that have contributed to her offending’.

As highlighted above, very few gender-specific programmes accessed as part of this research focused on the offending behaviour and criminogenic needs of participants. Our analysis of *Asset* forms and relevant literature indicate that targeting the problematic attitudes and beliefs that may increase the risk of offending is equally as important as focusing on other risk factors, which are more commonly targeted in gender-specific programmes. As it appears to be one of a small number of offending-focused gender-specific programmes, it may be worthwhile undertaking a targeted evaluation of this programme to ascertain its impact.

Education was a primary objective at Unit 1, with 25 hours of education being delivered each week. The special education needs worker at the unit agreed that while the young women tended to have higher educational abilities than their male counterparts, the average literacy/numeracy age of the trainees (usually 11–14 years) was generally two years younger than their actual age. Again, most were described as having stopped

engaging in education between the ages of 11 and 14 years; which indicates that they would have continued to develop in line with their age had they continued with education. The young women at Unit 1 were described as being sometimes defiant or misbehaving in class, but few had been diagnosed with conduct disorders such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, which is much more common among young male offenders. Generally, the trainees were felt to be receptive to education.

The educational element was not gender-specific, although some of the vocational courses targeted what could be described as stereotypically 'feminine' subjects:

- hairdressing
- catering
- business administration
- parent craft.

Additionally, staff felt that lesson plans were tailored to the interests of young women, even if they could not be described as gender-specific. They also offered a drug and alcohol course and citizenship programme.

The 'My Offence, My Victim, My Risk' programme at Unit 1 could be, and sometimes was, facilitated by a male member of staff.

Unit 2: Non-gender-specific interventions

The manager of Unit 2 confirmed that they did not currently deliver any gender-specific interventions as there were no approved accredited programmes developed for young women in custody. However, certain elements of the work done with the trainees had been developed or introduced to meet their needs, for example, a sexual grooming workshop run jointly by the education department and drugs workers was being delivered. Additionally, a six-week, accredited Barnardos course was introduced to meet the needs presented by issues of child protection and inappropriate family relationships.

The education worker at Unit 2 felt that when she identified a need among the trainees she was able to put together a course to meet this need and could apply to the National Open College Network (NOCN) to get it accredited. At the time the research was conducted one trainee was piloting new course units covering eating disorders and negative body image.

The majority of work done with the young women in Unit 2 was education-based, with the unit aiming to deliver 22 hours of education per week. This was generally described as vocation-based, which was considered to fit best with the education histories of the trainees. Staff described most of the young women as having been excluded from, or opted out of, schooling in years 9/10 (age 14–15 years), although some trainees had gained GCSEs and A-levels before coming to the unit, meaning a wide spread of abilities needed to be covered.

Working with more able trainees posed financial difficulties for the unit, however, as the total annual budget for resources is £5000 and the cost per GCSE or A-level is £400. Although local education authorities were supposed to assist with funding, this was not always easy to arrange and where custodial sentences were short, could not be organised in time.

Specialist mental health provision was also felt to be successful in Unit 2 with trainees having access to a child psychotherapist, mental health nurses, YOT team counsellor and the prison psychiatrist.

The experiences of young women in the secure estate

As part of this study, two focus groups were undertaken with young women in both of the secure units visited. Additionally, two young women from one unit undertook one-to-one interviews. The purpose of the focus groups/interviews was to explore the interventions the young women had received both in the community and in custody, and to seek their views.

Most of the young women had previously had a range of community sentences including Referral Orders, Supervision Orders, Attendance Centre Orders and ISSPs. A number had previously been in custody, held in both STCs and other YOIs. Although the young women were often negative about the interventions they had received they were also positive about some interventions. The responses from the girls will be briefly discussed below:

Negative responses to interventions

A number of young women felt that the interventions they had received were generic rather than targeted to their specific needs. In general, the young women felt they had received the same interventions as anyone else. Some of the young women felt that the interventions they received on orders (mentioning ISSPs in particular) were intended to reduce their offending by keeping them busy rather than by tackling the underlying reasons for their offending. This is not in keeping with the *Key Elements of Effective Practice – Offending Behaviour Programmes* (YJB, 2008) which states that offending behaviour programmes are more likely to be effective if they focus on aspects of the young offender's life which have been shown to be risk factors for criminal activity. It is, however, congruent with the findings from the report on PYOs (Arnall et al, 2005).

Drug and alcohol courses were often mentioned negatively, with one young woman explaining:

...the first [programme session] I went to was alcohol and I don't, I drink but I'm not a drinker, if you know what I mean. There were boys there who were really alcoholics but it didn't really relate to me and I was bored so I didn't go again.

Just one young woman felt that attending alcohol-related sessions had helped her reduce the amount of alcohol she was consuming.

Analysis of *Asset* data confirms that very few of young female offenders have significant drug use issues, however, links can be drawn between alcohol use and, for example, violent offending. Concentrating sessions on alcohol use and links with offending/problematic behaviour may be worthwhile, therefore, but the relevance of this may be lost if the emphasis is placed on drugs. Participants were clear that where they found an intervention irrelevant or boring they stopped attending, sometimes resulting in them breaching their order.

Anger management sessions were also viewed negatively by the young women, even if they accepted that they had anger management issues. None of the participants said that their anger management sessions had helped them and several felt they had only served to 'wind them up'. Anger management was identified as being problematic from the analysis of *Asset* and the increasing number of violent offences indicates that properly targeted and delivered anger management programmes may be very relevant for young women who offend. Feedback from young women, however, suggests that current anger management programmes are having little positive effect.

Positive responses to interventions

Where the young women identified interventions that they had found helpful, these related most often to the relationship built between the young person and the worker. The participants cited responding well to interventions with social workers, Barnados workers, mentors, YOT workers, advocates and alcohol workers on the basis that they had built positive relationships with them. This is supported by findings from a study on persistent young offenders (Arnull et al, 2005), which highlighted the importance young offenders placed on personal relationships with their YOT worker, and Lanctot's (2003) work revealing that young women in particular respond well to personal relationships with interventions staff.

Two young women explained that seeing a psychiatrist or similar had helped them deal with issues in their lives; one said:

One thing that released my anger is when some social thing woman, she was hitting main points, when someone relates to you and says 'you used to be abused' when them things hit you, hit your heart and make you want to tell them things you've never told no one else, that's what, like an open box and things come out...you have to relate to someone on the same level, talk to someone on their level, ask them personal questions and let them come out.

Participants were generally positive about interventions that helped them achieve long-term goals or get qualifications, for example, most were positive about the education they were receiving or had received in the secure estate.

Only one of the young women who participated in the study had ever attended a gender-specific intervention in the community (in fact, one of those accessed as part of the community element of this study) and she spoke positively of its relevance. The group at Unit 2 were also positive about the 'Sex and Relationships' group they attended because it was relevant to their experiences, with one young woman saying 'yeah, you'll sit down and do it because it's not boring you, you're into it, you'll do it'.

The young women who participated in this element of the research were split between those who preferred a one-to-one style of intervention delivery and those who enjoyed group work more. Positive aspects of one-to-one work were that no one would be judging them and that no one could gossip about their personal details; group work was preferred by some because it could be interesting to hear other people's experiences and working one-to-one could be boring.

Issues of good practice

All practitioners interviewed during the research were asked to highlight issues of good practice they had developed or noted during their work with young women. A number of points arose from discussions.

Ongoing support

Practitioners from six community programmes highlighted the importance of identifying and/or providing ongoing support to the young women after the programme ends. Some of the programmes offered intensive support to the young women over a lengthy period, often where the young women had no other stable support networks in place. Practitioners were aware that suddenly withdrawing that support could undo any progress achieved. In several sites, one of the aims of the programme was to identify alternative groups, programmes or organisations that could continue to offer support to participants once their involvement with the young women's group had ended.

The nature of the continuing support differed from site to site. In several sites, the young women were referred to alternative YOT/youth service programmes; some were referred to Connexions, volunteer projects or other relevant services. Two sites had considered developing a peer mentoring or peer education scheme, where the participants would receive training to support and mentor other young women in their position.

In some cases, practitioners highlighted that it was not only a case of identifying other support networks for the young women but also a matter of finding ‘replacement behaviours’ for the participants. One practitioner commented that it was unrealistic to expect the young women to stay away from peer groups and ensuing problem behaviour if they had not been offered some alternative, particularly where these amounted to survival techniques. The importance of continued support was also raised by staff at one secure unit visited who worked hard to build links with external agencies that could continue to help the trainees on release. This can pose logistical problems given that the catchment areas of secure units holding young women are sizeable. The feeling of those working in the secure estate was, however, that all the good work done with young women in custody was lost if appropriate support mechanisms had not been identified for release.

Exit strategy

Practitioners from two community sites felt that a clear exit strategy needed to be planned into the early stages of the programme and in fact several of the programmes had found some way to mark the end of the process.

Empowerment and ownership

Practitioners in most of the community sites were concerned that the programme should ‘empower’ the participants. Several programmes were described as being ‘reflexive’ to the needs of the individuals in the group and thus while the overall contents of the programme remained the same, the delivery, format and detail of the programme might change for each programme cycle. In some sites there appeared to be high levels of consultation with the participants.⁶⁶

Practitioners at three sites felt it was important that the young women had ‘ownership’ of the group, although it was not clear how this was achieved.

Evaluation

In line with the YJB’s *Key Elements of Effective Practice* and notions of participant empowerment, a majority of the programmes (at least five of eight) included some degree of evaluation by participants and to a lesser extent staff. The evaluation of programmes was concerned with how the participants and staff involved in the programme had perceived it, rather than with establishing effectiveness. Generally, evaluation was conducted through the use of brief ‘feedback forms’ completed by participants and staff at the end of each individual session and a final feedback form completed at the end of the intervention. These focused on what participants enjoyed/did not enjoy, felt they had learnt, and included suggestions for improvement.

Most staff considered participant programme evaluations to be important in order that sessions could be adapted according to feedback. Several practitioners felt that the

⁶⁶ Several group leaders preferred to consult with the participants before allowing researchers to observe group sessions or access the views of the young women, for example.

programmes had become more focused and successful as a result of the feedback provided by previous participants. Researchers did not have sight of any programme evaluation tools.

Incentives

Several programmes offered some kind of incentive to the young women who participated. This ranged from offering food and drinks during sessions to the accreditation of certain sessions. In some cases the young women were able to submit elements of the work they did within the group as part of their National Record of Achievement.

Staff training

Practitioners from several sites emphasised that successful groups (whether gender-specific or not) required well trained, confident staff. One practitioner commented that single gender work needs to be underpinned by solid group work skills, while another had highlighted to YOT management that practitioners needed training on both group work and working with young women.

Building relationships

Staff at both secure units emphasised that working with young women within the secure estate allowed for good personal relationships to be built between staff and trainees due to the high staff to trainee ratio. Both male and female members of staff were encouraged to participate in education provision and run 'extra-curricular' activities such as sports and leisure activities in the evenings and weekends. This fits with research findings, discussed previously, that indicate that girls respond well to personal relationships (Lanctot, 2003).

Structure and planning

Staff from two sites agreed that the young women responded best to well planned and structured sessions. In one site, the girls had requested greater structure in the sessions.

Providing feedback

Several members of staff highlighted the importance of providing timely feedback to the young women's YOT caseworker/teacher/referrer. Not only was this said to help foster good working relationships between programme leaders and colleagues, it was considered to help 'embed' the programme within YOT structures by acting as a useful source of information. Practitioners also felt it was important that some issues raised within group sessions be picked up in one-to-one sessions the young women had with their YOT caseworker.

One site made sure that YOIS⁶⁷ files on each participant were updated after each session so colleagues could access relevant information.

Staff highlighted various other elements of good practice including:

- sending reminder letters/making telephone calls to encourage attendance

⁶⁷ The computer system used by many YOTs to record case information.

- adapting *Asset* and other assessment tools to be more gender sensitive
- keeping up to date with relevant research
- continuing some outreach work and work in the community to improve intelligence
- using motivational interviews with the young women to ensure participants understand what will be expected of them and are ready for group work
- making sure the group sessions were held in an accessible venue or within the young people's neighbourhoods.

Sustainability

As discussed above, we would suggest that sustainability of girls' programmes/work is a fundamental issue of good practice that needs to be treated as a key concern if gender mainstreaming is to occur and be built into YJB activity. In particular, if gender-specific programmes are considered worthwhile then consideration will need to be given to how they can be delivered on more than an ad hoc basis.

Networking and information sharing

Practitioners were asked about the levels of information sharing and networking between YOTs and other agencies providing gender-specific interventions. It appeared that there was little or no inter-YOT information sharing, other than that which might take place within the YJB-led Young Women who Offend Practitioners Group in the Criminal Justice System Practitioner Group. Further staff from just two of the eight sites in this study (only one of which currently offers a gender-specific intervention) were members of the practitioner group. Practitioner responses suggested that few seemed aware of the group and therefore they did not access it as a resource.

Additionally, practitioners from several sites appeared wary of sharing knowledge and expertise with colleagues from other YOTs. Staff commented that there was no existing structure for working with young women and much less of a sense of 'what works'. As a result, some of the practitioners felt that they had worked hard to gain expertise and specialisms in the field and to develop successful programmes, and that other YOTs interested in gender-specific work might try to 'steal' their ideas. Certainly, some YOT practitioners appeared reticent to share specific programme details even with the researchers, or did not do so.

This wariness, while understandable, may mean that practitioners working with young women are missing out on an important source of support and expertise – each other. In fact, despite the lack of information sharing, as the foregoing discussion reveals, the different programmes were often remarkably similar in structure, content and delivery. Many appeared to have been influenced by the work emanating from the Oregon or Florida programmes (Patino et al, 2006; Patton and Morgan, 2002), which have published their work. As we have noted elsewhere, however, it is not clear that the populations are similar, for example ethnicity is widely different, with the overwhelming majority of young female offenders in the UK being White.

Conclusions

Findings

This research is comprised of four specific and original elements:

1. a systematic review of literature
2. analysis of an original, representative *Asset* sample
3. analysis of Home Office and YJB existing data sets, Census data and two previous research datasets
4. qualitative research on eight gender-specific programmes in the community for girls; one gender-specific programme developed for use in a secure unit, and generic provision in one girls unit in the secure estate.

Together they give a comprehensive overview of what is currently known about girls and young women's offending in the UK in particular, and with regard to the literature in English on girls offending in Europe and the USA.

The sample of *Asset* forms collated in this study was designed to be representative of girls who offend in England and Wales. Analysis of this data allows us to conclude that a young female offender in England and Wales is most commonly White, most likely to receive their first Reprimand aged between 13 and 15 years old, and their first conviction aged between 15 and 16 years. In general, convicted girls have no previous convictions and show a range of risk factors that are consistent with other research findings. It appears that there is a complex interaction between risk and protective factors, which mediate one another and that it is the interactions between these factors which affect onset and persistency of delinquency – no one factor (or group of factors) is explanatory. What is not certain is how risk factors are translated into criminogenic needs and how that interacts with other issues so that girls and young women either continue or cease to offend. It is unclear as yet how girls' continued offending or desistance from offending can be predicted. Further, it appears that the factors that influence the offending behaviour of women and girls may be different, and therefore girls' programmes should not necessarily be grounded in the research findings on women any more than they should be grounded on those for men and boys.

Offence prevalence

The research on girls shows that with regard to convictions and self-reported delinquency, offending is still largely a male activity (YJB, 2006). However, the sources of UK data which relate to the most common offence for girls in England and Wales – Themis, PNC and the *Asset* sample – are not directly comparable.

Themis collects data from YOTs and the secure estate in England and Wales on pre-and post-court disposal and remand decisions; information was supplied on girls aged between 10 and 17 years old. Themis collects information based on offences and convictions rather than individuals. According to Themis data the most common offence for girls in England and Wales remains theft and handling stolen goods and these offences account for one third of those recorded. It also shows that five offence categories among girls (violence against the person, robbery, criminal damage and arson, public order and breach) have risen consistently between 2000 and 2006.

Because of the limitations of Themis data, a sampling framework was constructed to attempt to gain a representative sample of girls in the UK to investigate more fully their offending patterns and characteristics through analysis of *Asset* forms. This sample of 285 girls who had received convictions or a Final Warning recently in the UK showed that the most prevalent offence committed by girls (39%) as individuals was violence against the person; for convicted girls the number rose to 42% which was twice as many as for the next most common conviction – theft and handling stolen goods (21%).

We cannot at this stage say which is definitively correct; the difference may arise from a sampling error, or it may relate to the difference in ‘counting’. Thus, it may be that more girls commit offences of violence against the person for which they are convicted or receive a Final Warning, but that girls who commit offences of theft and handling stolen goods commit a greater volume of offences.

Are girls committing more offences?

Data collated from PNC and other sources, when compared to Census data, suggests that girls’ offending has not increased per se. It appears that pre-court disposals such as Reprimands of girls have increased, which brings them more into line with their self-reported behaviour. There has clearly been an increase in the number of girls entering the criminal justice system each year; however, there is no evidence of an increase in the rate of court convictions each year, the actual rise being accounted for by an increasing population. Instead, the increase in girls in the criminal justice system occurs at the pre-court disposal stage, particularly those receiving Reprimands. Whether this trend represents a real increase in the criminality of girls or rather an increase in either the effectiveness of the police to identify them or their willingness to use the Reprimand where before they would have taken no action is difficult to tell from this data alone. Data from the *MORI Youth Survey 2004*, which shows no significant change in self reported offending for young people (though does not provide data specifically for females), would seem to indicate that girls’ level of criminality has not changed. This adds weight to support the theory that it is a change in the policing of girls that is either capturing more first-time low level offenders or formally reprimanding such offenders where previously no further action would be taken (Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Chesney-Lind, 2001).

Additionally, girls appear to be being convicted at a younger age. It is not possible at this stage to account for this, nor to link this to the higher rate of Reprimands which they are also receiving, but it may be a trend which should be closely monitored, given that there is a significant body of research on the disadvantages to young people of being brought into the criminal justice system at an early age, rather than diverted from it. It is also of concern because most offending by girls, even that for violence, appears to be of a relatively low level. Alongside this the rise in girls’ custodial placements is attributable to a rise in the number remanded to custody, and this doubled between 2000 and 2005.

Are girls more violent?

There appears to be a perception that violence among young women is increasing. The data collated for this study shows an increased number of convictions for girls and young women for violent offences, but it is not possible to directly attribute these to a real increase in actual offending in this area (for example, self-report data would not suggest an increase). Research in the USA by Chesney-Lind (2001) and Steffensmeier et al (2005) has suggested that girls are being prosecuted more readily for offences that

may not have been prosecutable in the past. Some practitioners interviewed for this study suggested that girls were currently being prosecuted in the UK for offences in a school setting (such as fighting with other girls), which would have been dealt with differently in the past. Further, data from this study would suggest that there are an increased number of interventions with girls at the pre-court disposal/conviction stage, such as Reprimands and remands to custody.

It is unclear how to interpret these sources of information at this stage, but there are studies on girls and young women that also suggest a normalisation of violence within their lives (Eagle, 2005; Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004 and Philips, 2003) and that, in addition, violence by and among women may have been underestimated or under-reported in the past (Ness, 2004 and Philips, 2003). Certainly violent offences by girls in this study and other research appear to have a common pattern – there is usually a relationship with the victim and it is most often perceived that the victim did something to ‘deserve’ it (Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Pettersson, 2005; Philips, 2003); there is also the suggestion that girls’ violent offending is similar to boys, involving principally the same gender and activated by status and hierarchy (Pettersson, 2005; Smith-Adcock and Kerpelman, 2005; Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003).⁶⁸ Other studies suggest a link between low socio-economic status and violent behaviour in girls (Jarman, 2005; Hirschinger et al, 2003) and girls’ experiences of victimisation and violent behaviour (DiNapoli, 2003).

Findings from this study do not indicate a relationship between victimisation and girls who commit violent offences, nor socio-economic status. However, this research and other studies strongly indicate a relationship between the use of alcohol (‘risky drinking’) and violent or disorderly behaviour in girls ($p=0.088$) (Pirkle and Richter, 2006; Eklund and Klinteberg, 2005; Richardson and Budd, 2003⁶⁹). In this current study, violent girls comprised two distinct groups – those in a ‘care’ setting whose violence appears related to that (see also Arnall et al, 2007) and those girls who appeared relatively untroubled, but who had committed violent offences.

Are gender-specific programmes necessary?

This research has highlighted a need for further research into gender-specific programmes. The potential need for such programmes is indicated by:

- risk factors that show young women to be at increased risk of offending when they are in pro-criminal peer groups, mixed peer groups, or have friendships with risk-taking males
- practitioners reported difficulties in working with young men and women in mixed gender groups because of ‘acting out’ behaviours
- research that suggests that young women and young men may have broadly similar risk factors and needs with regard to programme content aimed at reducing their offending behaviour, but that there was a requirement for this to be delivered to them in different ways; for example, young women placed much greater emphasis on building relationships with staff (Lanctot, 2003; Chesney-Lind and Okamoto, 2001) while boys placed greater emphasis on structure.

⁶⁸ Although the analysis of the qualitative sections of the *Assets* collated for this study suggested boys were equally likely to be the victims as girls.

⁶⁹ Note this study was on 18–24-year-olds.

From the qualitative research undertaken for this study, findings showed that girls placed significant emphasis on the individual delivering the intervention; however, they also valued a clear structure and work which was explicitly 'offence' focused. The findings should, however, be treated as indicative at this stage, given the small number of qualitative interviews/focus groups with girls involved in the programmes.

There is very little evidence on 'what works' with girls who offend (Hipwell and Loeber, 2006) and we would suggest this is an important area for further consideration. It is known, in general, that effective interventions are those that make an explicit link between offending, criminogenic needs and inputs designed to meet those needs. Research findings suggest that multi-modal programmes that 'target interacting domains of risk' are likely to be most effective (Hipwell and Loeber, 2006; McIvor et al, 2004; Bailey, 2003; Hay et al, 2000). There is also the suggestion that other needs could then be considered separately, along with how they might best be met. It is specifically considered that it might not be possible, or desirable, to work on issues of self-esteem, for example, in an offence focused setting (Larden et al, 2006).

We would argue that there is also a requirement to be more specific about the groups of girls under consideration. There is evidence which, when considered collectively, suggests that the needs of girls and young women who offend at a low level may be different from girls who commit more serious or violent offending, and that this may be related to criminogenic needs such as alcohol misuse. It does not, therefore, seem adequate to assume that the propensity to offend, the criminogenic factors, or the needs of girls and young women who offend are the same across all types of offenders, or ethnic groups.

Recommendations

Better recording of offence by offender, as well as disposal

In order for it to be clear which offence a girl is most likely to commit it is necessary for the systems to be able to count individuals and individual offences. The implications of the current data sources mean that at present it is not known whether girls are more likely to commit an offence of violence, or whether girls who commit offences of theft and handling stolen goods are more prolific. In terms of knowing who the girls in the offending population are and how best to intervene with them, this would seem an important policy and practice issue to resolve.

Better recording/monitoring of girls entering the system

At present it is not clear whether girls are committing more offences, or as the data suggests, that there has been a change in agency responses to young women with regard to their offending (Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Chesney-Lind, 2001). If it is that girls are being more easily drawn into the system, this has serious implications. Most girls' offending continues to be low-level and is arguably better diverted from the youth justice system. This is an area to which the YJB may wish to give attention.

A need for separation of data

There is a need for the separation of data sources between girls and boys in the youth justice system at the point of monitoring and review in order to be able to understand the patterns and trends in girls' offending. At present the low numbers means that, when subsumed within the overall categories, girls' behaviour cannot be adequately assessed.

Programme sustainability

If gender mainstreaming is to be taken seriously with regard to girls and young women within the youth justice system then issues of sustainability concerning programmes need to be given thorough consideration. Currently the ad hoc way in which programmes are developed and delivered may mean that goodwill, expertise and learning are lost in a professional sense when staff can no longer sustain their involvement, or move on, while those young women who may have benefited from the gender-specific intervention are denied the opportunity to do so.

Appendix A

Site A: YOT-run programme

Site A no longer had a young women's group programme in place, the intervention having folded in 2005 due to staffing issues. The group had been a YOT-run intervention for young women at risk of and already involved in offending. The structured programme was delivered in weekly sessions.

Site B: YOT-run 'Keep out of prison' scheme

Site B offers the one-off 'Keep out of prison' intervention to young women involved in offending. The young women do not have to be at imminent risk of receiving a custodial sentence to be deemed suitable. Participants are shown around a prison holding female young offenders and adult prisoners and are given the opportunity to speak to serving trainees.

The project was set up following the success of the male version and the recognition that it was not appropriate to take young women at risk of custody into a male prison.

Up to nine young women and four members of staff can attend each session, and any young women supervised by the YOT, from those on a Reprimand to ISSP, can be referred by their YOT caseworker, subject to a satisfactory risk assessment.

Sessions are arranged approximately every three months.

Site C: Contracted out sexual health programme

Site C no longer had a young women's programme in place. The intervention was sourced out to a local sexual health and drug and alcohol project and its purpose was to deliver sexual health related sessions to young women at the YOT.

Site D: YOT-run programme

Site D no longer had a young women's programme in place. The programme had been a YOT-run intervention for young women supervised by the YOT. The intervention consisted of eight weekly structured group sessions.

Site E: YOT-run ISSP programme

Gender specific work began at site E in January 2005. The programme is delivered to young women on an ISSP attending the YOT and structured sessions are delivered to the participants five days a week. The sessions are open, self-contained units so young women can be referred to the group at any point. The programme runs on a rolling basis and is available all year round.

Site F: YOT-run programme

Site F offers an eight week long YOT-run programme (now in its third cycle). The group sessions are open to young women attending the YOT and referred to the group by their YOT worker. Participants must attend at least six of eight sessions to complete the programme.

Site G: YOT-run outreach programme

Site G no longer offers a gender-specific intervention to young women attending the YOT but YOT workers run sessions in school Personal Social and Health Education lessons and also run a referral-based programme for young women referred by social

services, YOT or schools. The site first offered a gender-specific intervention in 2001. The programme tends to work with young women at risk or involved in offending and those at risk of exclusion. The intervention includes a residential course.

Site H: Contracted out crime prevention programme

The young women's programme is delivered by local youth services in this area. It is open to young women at risk of or involved in offending and referred by YOT, educational welfare officers or school staff. The programme is now in its fourth year with three courses of 12 weeks delivered per year – each programme cycle is attended by approximately nine young women aged between 14 and 17 years old. The intervention includes a residential course.

Appendix B

Numbers of young female offenders receiving a pre-court disposal

Year	Population	Cautions	Cautions as % of population	Reprimands	Reprimands as % of population	Final Warnings	Final Warnings as % of population
2000/01	3,826,540	13,225	0.35%	16,088	0.42%	5,513	0.14%
2001/02	3,878,199	8,638	0.22%	19,142	0.49%	7,292	0.19%
2002/03	3,940,555	8,638	0.22%	17,523	0.44%	7,110	0.18%
2003/04	3,983,600	9,277	0.23%	19,779	0.50%	7,480	0.19%
2004/05	4,009,300	9,197	0.23%	24,209	0.60%	8,192	0.20%

Numbers of young convicted female offenders as a percentage of the young female population

Year	Population	Offenders	Offenders as % of peer group population	Offenders per 1000 peer group population
2000/01	3,826,540	17,909	0.47	5/1000
2001/02	3,878,199	18,310	0.47	5/1000
2002/03	3,940,555	18,795	0.48	5/1000
2003/04	3,983,600	19,128	0.48	5/1000
2004/05	4,009,300	19,341	0.48	5/1000

Young female offenders receiving Reprimands by age and year

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
10-13	5,196	6,053	5,112	5,596	7,020
14-17	10,843	13,040	12,346	14,137	17,150

Young female offenders receiving Final Warnings by age and year

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
10-13	1,176	1,532	1,399	1,437	1,552
14-17	4,305	5,734	5,682	6,024	6,584

Convicted young female offenders by age and year

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2002/03	2004/05
10-13	885	1,020	992	1,014	1,130
14-17	8,751	8,959	9,476	9,885	10,327
18-20	10,035	10,015	10,177	10,156	9,763

Recording of offences on SACHS

Financial year	% of offences not recorded on SACHS

2000/01	95%
2001/02	79%
2002/03	30%
2003/04	24%
2004/05	10%

Appendix C

Asset analysis (n=285)

Age of total sample (n=285)

Age	Frequency	%
12	4	1
13	28	10
14	53	19
15	69	24
16	92	32
17	39	14

Ethnicity of total sample (n=285)

Ethnicity	Frequency	%*
White British	173	61
White other	77	27
Black Caribbean	7	2
Black African	3	1
Black other	4	1
Asian Indian	1	-
Asian Pakistani	1	-
Asian other	1	-
Mixed: White/Black Caribbean	5	2
Mixed: White/Black African	1	-
Mixed: White/Asian	4	1
Mixed: other	2	1
Other	3	1
Missing	3	1

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

Current primary offence (n=285)

Current primary offence	Frequency	%*
Violence against the person	112	39
Theft and handling stolen goods	77	27
Arson and criminal damage	22	8
Public order	20	7
Other offences	14	5
Robbery	12	4
Burglary	8	3
Breach of bail/statutory order	6	2
Vehicle theft and unauthorised taking	4	1

Drugs offences	3	1
Racially-aggravated offences	2	1
Fraud	1	-
Missing	4	1

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

Current sentence (n=285)

Current sentence	Frequency	%*
Referral Order	87	30
Final Warning	72	25
Supervision Order	41	14
Action Plan Order	25	9
Detention and Training Order	20	7
Reparation Order	10	3
Supervision Order plus conditions	5	2
Community Rehabilitation Order	5	2
ISSP	4	1
Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order	3	1
Missing	13	5

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

Age at first reprimand (n=285)

Age	Frequency	%*
10	1	-
11	14	5
12	19	7
13	33	12
14	46	16
15	37	13
16	17	6
17	6	2
N/A	58	20
Missing	54	19

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

Analysis of Assets relating to convicted girls only (n=213)

Current primary offence (n=213)

Current primary offence	Frequency	%*
Violence against the person	90	42
Theft and handling stolen goods	45	21
Arson and criminal damage	17	8

Public order	14	7
Robbery	12	6
Other offences	12	6
Burglary	6	3
Breach of bail/statutory order	6	3
Vehicle theft	4	2
Drugs offences	3	1
Racially aggravated offences	1	-
Missing	3	1

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

Current sentence by age (n=213)

Current sentence	Age						Total %*
	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Referral Order	1	10	19	21	24	12	41
Action Plan Order	-	3	5	9	8	-	12
Reparation Order	-	-	3	1	5	1	5
Community Rehabilitation Order	-	-	-	-	1	4	2
Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order	-	-	-	-	1	2	1
Supervision Order	-	3	6	12	15	5	19
Supervision Order plus conditions	-	-	-	2	3	-	2
Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme	-	-	-	2	2	-	2
Detention and Training Order	-	1	2	4	6	7	9
No information	-	-	1	3	7	2	6

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

National sentencing patterns for young male offenders aged 10–17

Sentence type	%*
Referral Order	33
Supervision Order	13
Detention and Training Order	10
Absolute/conditional discharge	9
Curfew Order	6
Fine	6
Action Plan Order	5
Community Punishment Order	3
Attendance Centre Order	3
Reparation Order	3
Community Rehabilitation Order	2
Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order	2

Otherwise dealt with	2
Section 90–92 PCC(S) Act	1

*Figures may not total 100 due to rounding errors

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