

On average, women commit **less serious offences** and present **less risk** to society than men.

The women who do commit crime often face **complex circumstances** and are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged women in society.

Female offenders experience mixed outcomes; they are more likely than men to complete community orders and there is some evidence that community orders deliver better reductions in offending than short custodial sentences for women. There is also evidence that women experience negative outcomes from custodial penalties. Many will have been victimised by emotional, physical and sexual abuse in their past.

The best available evidence suggests that in order to reduce reoffending and keep women safe, we should invest in **gender-specific, trauma-informed** interventions that address seven priority areas; Substance misuse, mental health, emotion management, pro social identity, being in control of daily life, good family contact and resettling and building social capital. These areas form the basis of the questions overleaf.

For many women, contact with the National Probation Service (NPS) Court Team marks the start of their journey through the Criminal Justice System. The importance of the role of the Court officer/ report writer should not be underestimated in positively influencing that experience. Sentencing proposals for community interventions should offer the opportunity for a woman to tackle the underlying causes of her offending. PSRs that offer the courts robust community sentencing options which balance punitive and rehabilitative requirements and set out how the woman will be supported to comply may mean that, in some cases, the courts will sentence a woman to a community order rather than a short custodial sentence.

There is an increasing body of research which indicates that a **gender specific and trauma informed** approach is likely to deliver better assessment and delivery of interventions for women. This checklist aims to ensure that the right questions are asked, to enable good assessments to be made. The checklist has been informed by a number of existing documents: Better Outcomes for Women Offenders September 2015, which identified the priority needs, The Republic of Ireland developed an interview screening tool, which has also been used as a source, as has the N East NPS Division document, "Suggested PSR Questions for Women Offenders". The HMPPS, "Working with Women Offenders Guidance 2017" has also provided background material. In addition, the emerging research on complexity factors for women within the custodial estate has been used to inform this checklist.

Additional Considerations for preparing reports about Women

- **Be prepared and confident to ask for an adjournment** if extra time is required for further assessments
- Sentencing proposals must **consider** individual and particular vulnerabilities, domestic arrangements and caring responsibilities as well as **the impact of any sentence upon those children or vulnerable adults cared for by the woman**
- It is important to remember to use the Effective Proposal Tool, and to consider women only disposals and the full range of options which are available to women.
- In exceptional circumstances only, consider deferring sentence (eg repeated non compliance)
- Remember that a Suspended sentence is a custodial sentence- suspended, and will be activated in the event of re offending, current policy is not to propose them. Information can be found here: <https://intranet.noms.qsi.gov.uk/groups/effective-probation-practice-division/7-minute-briefing-suspended-sentence-orders>
- It is important when interviewing women for the purpose of Pre-Sentence reports, that other than interpreters when required or other specific support people, women are interviewed alone. If the woman is with someone, they should be asked to wait in a separate area.
- Should custody be inevitable, give consideration to an application to a Mother and Baby Unit should the interviewee meet the criteria.

Please consider using or adapting the questions below to help you in the interview.

This is an aide memoire to support practice, it is not a form to fill in.

## IDENTIFIED PRIORITY NEEDS FOR WOMEN

SUBSTANCE MISUSE	IMPROVING FAMILY CONTACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever used drugs in the past?</li> <li>• Do you use drugs at the moment?</li> <li>• Have you had problems with alcohol use in the past?</li> <li>• Do you have those problems now?</li> <li>• Do you offend when you drink or take drugs?</li> <li>• Do you ever offend when you are not using drinks or drugs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How supportive are your family?</li> <li>• How supportive is your partner?</li> <li>• Do you have a child/children or other adults in your care?</li> <li>• Who supports you in caring for those people?</li> <li>• Do you have a social worker involved with your family?</li> <li>• How is your relationship with your partner?</li> </ul>
MENTAL HEALTH	RESETTLE AND BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever experienced any mental health problems? Can you describe them?</li> <li>• Have you ever been referred to a mental health team?</li> <li>• Have you ever thought about / attempted to harm yourself or take your own life?</li> <li>• Is there anything happening that might be impacting on your health and/or well-being?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your accommodation safe and stable?</li> <li>• Are you employed or in college or training?</li> <li>• How confident are you with reading, writing and dealing with numbers?</li> <li>• How supportive are your friends?</li> <li>• Are your friends involved in your offending?</li> </ul>
MANAGING EMOTIONS	EXPERIENCES OF TRAUMA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How impulsive do you think you are?</li> <li>• Has this got you into trouble in the past?</li> <li>• Do you have any problems with your temper?</li> <li>• Has this got you into trouble in the past?</li> <li>• How easy do you find it to deal with stress or anxiety?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you been a victim of serious offending in the past (whether or not anyone was convicted)?</li> <li>• Have you experienced abuse in your current or a previous relationship?</li> <li>• Are you concerned about your safety and/or the safety of those you care for?</li> <li>• Have you ever experienced racism/religious based hate behaviour/homophobia?</li> </ul>
DEVELOPING A PRO SOCIAL IDENTITY	WHAT MIGHT GET IN THE WAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a GP?</li> <li>• Do you have a child/children/adults who you care for?</li> <li>• Are your children attending school?</li> <li>• Do you have employment?</li> <li>• Do you do any voluntary work or belong to any groups in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will look after those people you care for when you attend appointments?</li> <li>• Are you going to be able to get to your appointments?</li> <li>• Are there any other reasons that you might find it difficult to come to appointments?</li> <li>• What would have helped you to comply with previous orders/licences?</li> <li>• You had a community order and didn't complete it, why was that and what is different this time?</li> <li>• What do you think would help you to complete a CO successfully?</li> </ul>
BEING IN CONTROL OF DAILY LIFE AND GOALS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you manage your own money?</li> <li>• How easy do you find budgeting?</li> <li>• Do you consider yourself to be vulnerable at this time?</li> <li>• Have you ever considered yourself to be vulnerable?</li> </ul>	