

Beyond Youth Custody Girls and Young Women

Making Research Count

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Dr Fiona Factor

Beyond
YOUTH CUSTODY

**RESETTLEMENT
OF GIRLS AND
YOUNG WOMEN**

RESEARCH REPORT



Girls and young women report - findings from –

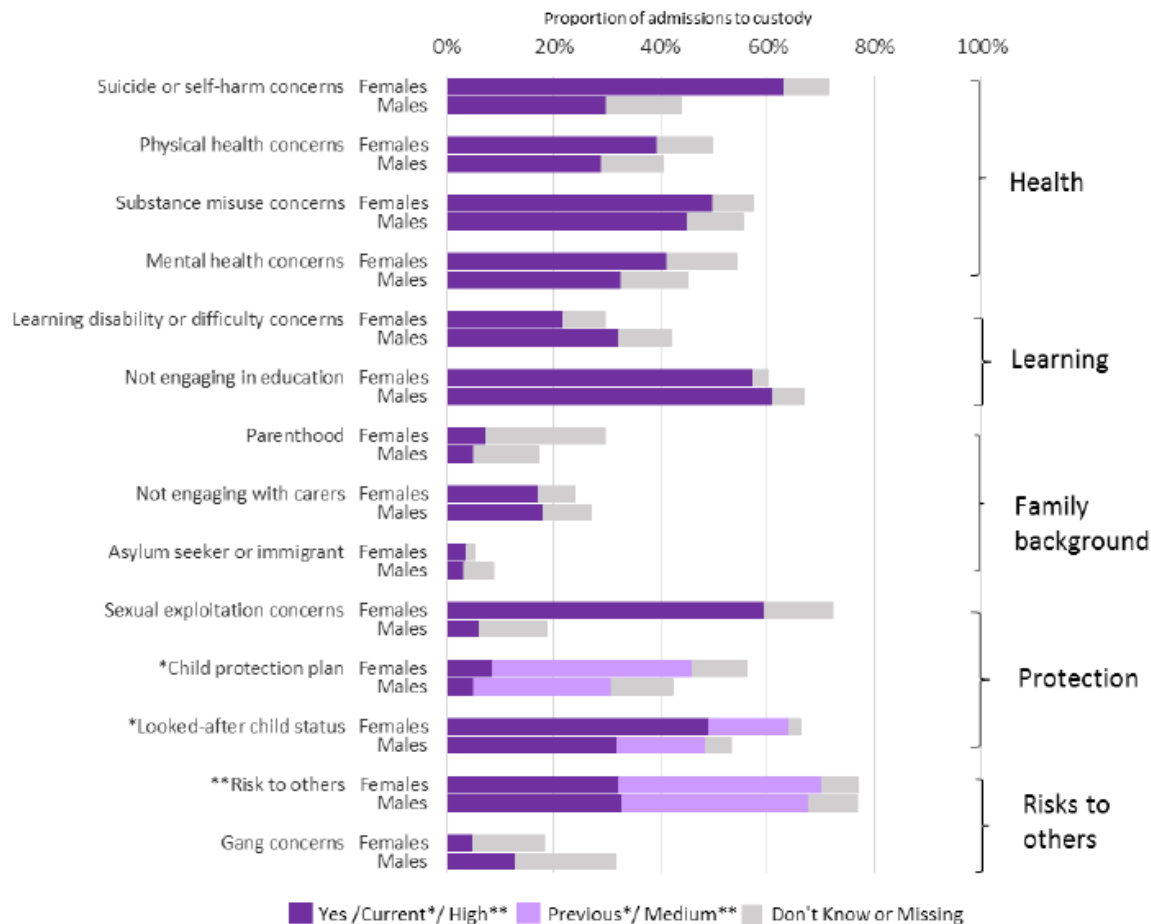
1. extensive lit review,
2. in depth interviews with girls and young women in Holloway
3. Focus groups with practitioners –
4. An online survey

Why consider girls and young women specifically?

1. Mental health difficulties, self-harm and substance misuse are common among girls and women who offend. Over a third of girls in the youth justice system disclose having self-harmed - with 15% having attempted suicide.
 2. In custody, over two thirds of young women have psychiatric problems and half of girls are severely depressed.
 3. Women prisoners report higher levels of unmet support need than men., and as such, their resettlement needs to focus on practical, social, welfare and emotional needs whilst simultaneously empowering them.
 4. Women in prison often have a tenuous or negative concept of themselves that persists after release and is often exacerbated by others' reactions to them and their sensitivity to those (perceived) reactions.
 5. Many women leaving custody experience debilitating feelings of isolation and loneliness and without support, such this undermine their determination to cease offending.
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Girls have high levels of vulnerability

Figure 1.2: The distribution of key characteristics by gender for all admissions to custody.



Two largest differences for which females were higher than males:

- sexual exploitation concerns (60% female, 6% male)
- suicide or self-harm concerns (63% female, 30% male)
- Looked after children (49% female, 32% male)

**BEYOND YOUTH CUSTODY
MESSAGES FOR PRACTICE**

Two populations

- **Gang involved (GI) young people**
- **Girls and Young Women (G&YW)**

Synergies and differences?

Gang-involved young people

- Gang desistance programmes should continue post release
- Use of mentors from wide cross section of society
- Appropriate accommodation is particularly crucial – relocation, access to education and employment
- Securing a regular income to deter reconnecting with previous activities
- Use of ROTL to access opportunities and ensure plans are in place so there is structure to the days following release
- Role of family members both during custody and upon release
- Plans should be achievable
- Preparation for the trauma of release

Gang involved, young women

- Coerced into committing the offence with the threat of physical or sexual violence
- The trauma associated with her time in custody needs addressing upon release and for a possibly a long while afterwards
- Resettlement programmes should recognise variations in young women's age and levels of gang-involvement.
- Research also suggests that intervention strategies should be responsive to diversity of need and experience among female gang members, with a particular sensitivity to ethnic and cultural differences.

Balancing risk and agency

- Engagement for gang-involved young people is crucial

I'll tell you why they don't want to engage because I've felt like that myself, I've had someone telling me what to do for the last four years. Do I really want someone telling me what to do again? Plain and simple and the sooner that's understood the better. And you can't say well they've got to because they...no, they don't, because they've done their time.

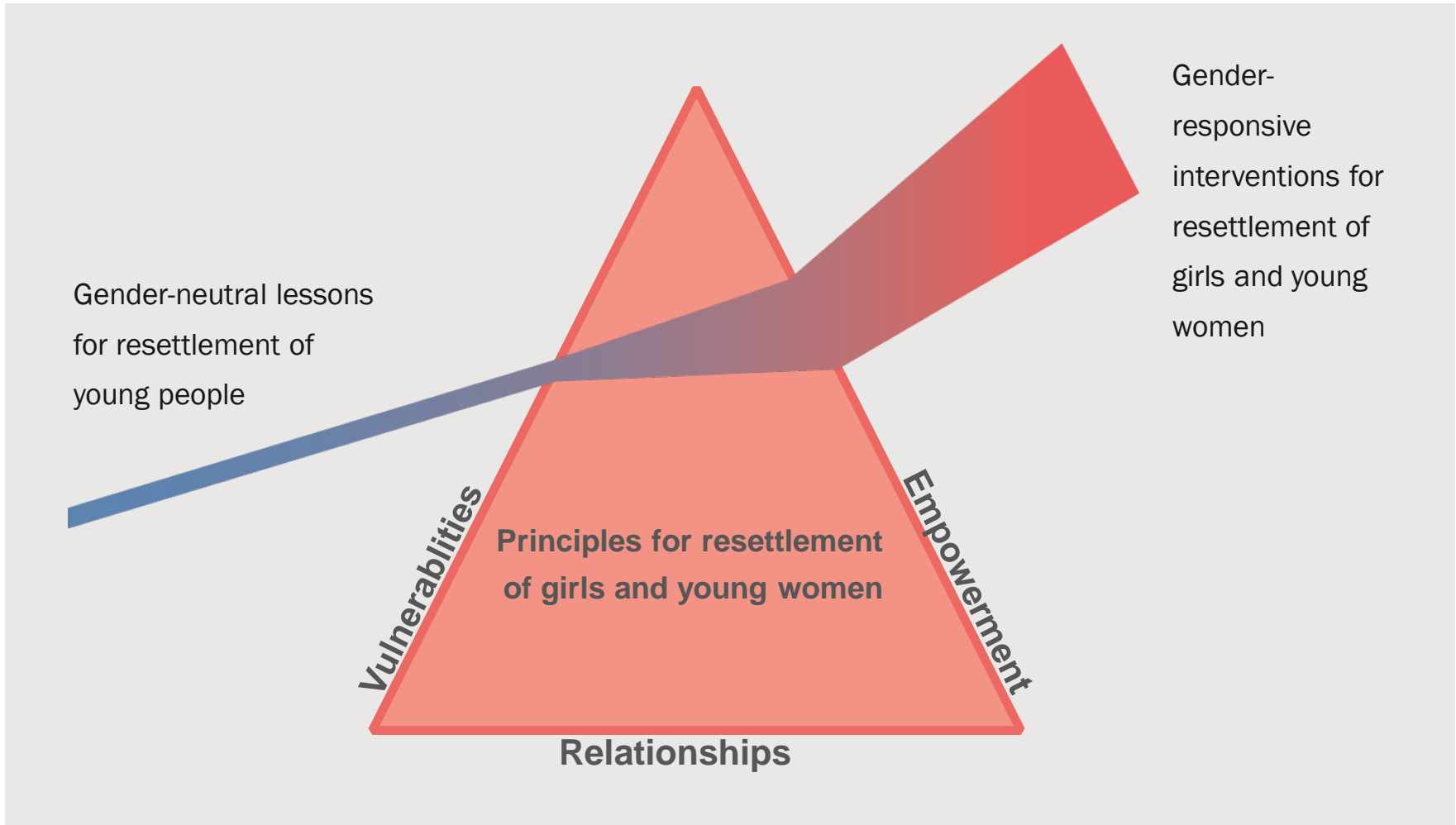
(Female Mentor, gangs project)

- Consistent support
- Being there – checking in
- Recognition of victim-perpetrator overlap (CSE)
- Supervising license conditions
- When are services available – night and day?
- Impact of moving away from close networks

Implications for working with girls

1. Resettlement must acknowledge address the vulnerabilities of girls and young women
 - Recognise levels of trauma and victimisation – in particular, experiences of Sexual Violence and Exploitation (SVE)
 - Safe environments, non-confrontational approaches
3. A focus on past, present and future relationships
 - Past trauma and abusive relationships
 - Present engagement with professionals
 - Future positive and supportive relationships to promote non-delinquent identities
4. Empower girls and young women to make positive choices
 - Structural support
 - Promoting agency through participation in planning, empowerment in supervision

A model: the gender prism



1. Relationships of trust

- **Maintaining / promoting relationships in the community**
 - More flexible use of release on temporary licence
 - Improved support for family members and friends to visit
 - Improved support to families to empower them to provide support in turn

The family members suffer. The family are important'

- **Relationships with professionals.**
 - Cross the custody /community transition
 - Provide a good model of non-coercive exploitative relationships
 - Involve girls planning their own resettlement:

Young women are the experts in their own lives

- **Staff who care**

G&YW distinguish between staff who care and those who don't

Yeah, certain people go there to actually work, to help people but certain people just see it "it's a job, let me just get paid", do you know what I'm saying...?'

2. Addressing vulnerabilities

- **Trauma informed practice**

- Recognising the reality of previous victimisation and potential negative experiences of previous agency intervention
- The importance of a gender sensitive environment for the delivery of services
- Acknowledging difference

- **Provision of emotional – as well as practical – support**

I think we're all vulnerable, whether we're quiet or loud, we're all vulnerable.

- **Realistic expectations**

Deprivation of liberty is traumatic – but so is the transition back to the community (Hazel and Bateman, 2014)

You've changed a lot when you get out of jail. You've changed. You're the same, but you're a completely different person

3. Empowerment and agency

- **Girls tend to display two different attitudes towards their future**
 - A sense of optimism associated with a conviction that it is within their power to make their future and give up offending; or alternatively
 - A sense of fatalism – frequently associated with a resignation that they will reoffend
- **Agency:** *'Nothing's really that hard, you can do it'*
- **Fatalism:**
'...nothing works ... I'm a bit nervous. I'm not sure if I'm strong enough...'
- **Staff who are seen as caring are better able to foster a sense of agency**
I'm excited about leaving, I think about it every day. I'm thinking about going on a course, my YOT worker's arranged, it's a childcare and youth work course. I'm going to start it in here, and then finish outside'

What does gender-sensitive provision look like (1)?

Creating safe, empowering spaces through:

1. Premises which are not accessible to potentially threatening outsiders
2. Within single-sex facilities or single-sex sessions
3. Specialist interventions re: SVE/CSE
4. Offers opportunities to reflect upon relationships and their impact on behaviour
5. Delivered at appropriate times with available childcare
6. Starts with one-to one work until the young woman is confident to join a group
7. The environment conveys positive messages about the value of young women and celebrates achievements and societal contributions.

What does gender-sensitive provision look like (2)?

Sustainable community-based support through:

- Tapering support and exit strategies

Noting that reoffending rates often rise as support is withdrawn at the end of a statutory licence period

- Ensuring young women are equipped to access alternative support

Interventions that build self-esteem and give confidence

- Build community-based networks for young women that will continue beyond the license period

"It's like someone throwing you out of a plane, with nothing strapped on. How the hell am I gonna' ride this wind? "

18 year old – Holloway

"Gender responsiveness? – think about it from everywhere from leaflets, correspondence, assessment, who they feel comfortable with, where they meet, when they meet etc. The whole way you work is different really"

Practitioner workshop

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT SERVICES

Service user needs

- Someone to talk to – space, time and a relationship which to express yourself
- Specialist advice and support
- Solution-focussed/strengths-based
- Choice and negotiation
- A focus on strengths, opportunities and the future
- Honest, trustworthy and transparent services
- Friendly and informal services
- Empathetic and non-judgemental support
- The experience of feeling a genuine sense of care

Practitioner response

- Avoid replicating abusive power dynamics
- Don't reinforce messages of blame/culpability
- Work towards meaningful change not enforced compliance
- Working in partnership & finding solutions together
- Meaningful communication & explanations of process
- Enabling choice wherever possible
- Focusing on resilience as well as risk
- Life beyond the abuse

BYC - 5 key characteristics for support

1. **Constructive** – centred on identity shift, future oriented, motivated, strengths based and empowering
2. **Co-created** – with the young person, using their agency and their supporters
3. **Customised** – individual and diverse wraparound support
4. **Consistent** – resettlement starts early, seamless, enhanced at transitions and stable
5. **Coordinated** – involving all relevant partners