



Thematic report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

Race relations in prisons:

Responding to adult women from black and
minority ethnic backgrounds

March 2009

Crown copyright 2009

ISBN: 978-1-84099-224-3

Published by:
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
1st Floor Ashley House
2 Monck Street
LONDON
SW1P 2BQ

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
1. Overview of black and minority ethnic groups in custody	7
2. Good practice	21

Appendices

I. Overview of black and minority ethnic women in the UK	22
II. References	23

Acknowledgements

This research was initially conducted by Julia Fossi as part of a keynote address delivered with Dame Anne Owers at the 'What works with women offenders: challenging stereotypes and achieving change' conference in Prato, Italy, September 2007. It has been updated and expanded for this report.

Introduction

Over the last three years, more stringent equality duties have been placed upon public authorities, and they apply directly to black and minority ethnic women in prison. First, all public authorities are now subject to a race equality duty¹ which requires them to positively promote racial equality, and to carry out impact assessments of policies and practice in relation to particular racial and ethnic groups. Second, since April 2007, a similar gender equality duty requires the promotion of gender equality and the carrying out of gender impact assessments. Given these express duties, it is surprising that so little is known about black and minority ethnic women's specific experiences in the prison system, and that there has been so little focus on their particular needs.

Although there is information about women prisoners' distinct and specific needs – the high rates of mental health problems, substance-related needs, abuse histories, self-harming behaviours and resettlement requirements – very little attention has been paid to the differential experiences within the women's population:

'Little is known about the experiences of British ethnic minority women defendants and offenders – something an integrated approach to the race and gender equality duties should address.' (Dustin, 2006)

Women in prison are considered a 'minority group'. There is no longer any separate operational lead for women within the Prison Service (which runs public sector prisons); instead, the Women and Young Peoples' Group oversees policy issues relating to women and juveniles. In response to the Corston report, there is also now a ministerial champion for women, an inter-ministerial group looking to divert women from custody into community provision and a Criminal Justice Women's Strategy Unit.

The publication of the National Service Framework for Women and the Prison Service Order 4800: Women Prisoners have gone some way to provide a strategic approach to the delivery of services for women offenders. However, there is, as yet, no diversity strategy and no guidance on the commissioning of services for minority groups such as women and minority ethnic offenders, let alone minority ethnic women offenders. There is no reference at all to the specific needs of women in the NOMS Race Review, published in December 2008 to chart progress over the last five years against the findings of the Commission for Racial Equality's inquiry and the Prison Inspectorate's thematic review of race in prisons. Black and minority ethnic women are therefore further marginalised by the prison system; they could almost be described as 'forgotten minorities'.

This paper provides an overview of the different experiences and specific needs of minority ethnic adult women in prison, highlighting the contextual effects of multiple discrimination; being a 'woman', from a 'minority ethnic' group, often from 'minority nationality groups' and from 'lower socioeconomic' backgrounds. Chigwada-Bailey (2003) stated:

'It is not simply a question of adding together the effects of these various aspects of disadvantage, rather of considering ways in which, when they intersect and interact, they compound one another – the argument being that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.' (page 19)

¹ Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Code of Practice which came into effect in May 2002.
Race relations in prison: responding to women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds

1. Overview of black and minority ethnic groups in custody

- 1.1 Black and minority ethnic individuals are over-represented in the criminal justice system: they are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people, and are more likely to be given custodial sentences in the Crown Court (Ministry of Justice, 2008).
- 1.2 In June 2007, there were five times more black British national prisoners in prison compared with their white British counterparts (the proportion of black prisoners relative to the population was 7.4 per 1,000 compared with 1.4 per 1,000 for white prisoners), and twice as many (3.6 per 1,000) mixed ethnicity prisoners compared with white prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2008).
- On 30 June 2007, 29% of women in prison were from a black and minority ethnic background (compared with 26% of the male population and 26% of the total population in the UK).
 - Of the British national population, 81% were white and 19% black and minority ethnic.
 - On the same date, 25% of the women's prison population were foreign nationals, with the largest proportion from Nigeria and Jamaica (33% of the foreign national population).

Sentences

- 1.3 While the literature acknowledges that there are differences in the criminal careers of male and female offenders – women are more likely to be convicted only once and to have a shorter criminal career (Moffitt *et al*, 2001) – little attention has been paid to the differences in criminal history within the women's population.
- 1.4 The most common indictable offences committed by women are theft and handling stolen goods, which account for 60% of women's offending, followed by drug offences (11% of offending). However, the majority of the women's prison population is held for drug offences – women are proportionally imprisoned in much greater numbers for drug-related offences than for any other offence.
- In 1995, 7% of women prisoners were imprisoned for drug offences, but by August 2005 this had increased to 35% (Home Office, 2005).
- 1.5 Researchers have stated that the nature and length of drug sentences may indicate a form of gender discrimination within the justice system (Taylor, 2004).
- 1.6 The ethnic disparity in women's prisons could reflect the different offences for which white and black and minority ethnic women are sentenced.
- On 30 June 2005², 57% of BME women were imprisoned for drug offences, compared with 27% of white prisoners.
 - On the same date, the proportion of black British women imprisoned for drug offences (42%) was almost twice the proportion of white British women (25%).
 - Of the proportion of women imprisoned for drug offences:

² All statistics dated 30 June 2005 in this report are taken from the RDS NOMS, 2005 reference.
Race relations in prison: responding to women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds

- 65% were British nationals (73% of whom were white and 26% black and minority ethnic):
 - of those, 40% were imprisoned for 'unlawful drug supply' (48% of the white women and 18% of the black and minority ethnic women)
 - 35% were imprisoned for 'drugs unlawful import/export' (22% of the white women and 69% of the black and minority ethnic women)
- 35% were foreign nationals (19% of whom were white and 81% black and minority ethnic):
 - of those, 83% were imprisoned for 'drugs unlawful import/export' (89% of the white women and 81% of the black and minority ethnic women)
 - 10% were imprisoned for 'unlawful drug supply' (8% of the white women and 10% of the black and minority ethnic women).
- Black and minority ethnic prisoners were more likely to be under immediate custodial sentence for import/export than their white counterparts (77% compared with 30%).
- White prisoners were more likely to be under immediate custodial sentence for unlawful drugs supply than their black and minority ethnic counterparts (43% compared with 13%).

1.7 The classification of 'drug' offences should be taken into account when looking at offence-related statistics. Drug-related offending often gets lost in statistics: offences such as shoplifting, theft and fraud are strongly associated with maintaining drug habits, but are not classified as such. The statistics above should therefore be treated with caution when making assumptions about patterns and causes of criminal activity.

1.8 The literature agrees that substance abuse, particularly drug abuse, is a strong predictor of women's offending (Hollin & Palmer, 2006). It is important to note, however, that the pattern of offending for foreign national and black and minority ethnic women is very different to that of British and white women (see above).

1.9 More black and minority ethnic (and particularly foreign national) prisoners are imprisoned for illegal import or export of drugs. A significant proportion are not themselves drug users, particularly among the foreign national population. In a study conducted by Borrill *et al* (2003), drug users and those dependent on drugs were most likely to have a current offence of possession or supply of drugs; whereas non-drug users and non-drug dependent women were most likely to have a current offence of importing drugs. The high imprisonment rate of ethnic minorities and foreign nationals in England and Wales for drug trafficking or supplying offences reflects a criminal justice system based on deterrence (Joseph, 2006). However, as the number of women imprisoned for such offences highlights, harsh penalties act as little deterrent to female drug couriers. The Sentencing Guidelines Council has recently announced that a sentencing guideline for importing and exporting drugs is to be developed, with a particular emphasis on examining whether these sentences are appropriate (Annual Report, 2006–07).

1.10 The number of foreign national women imprisoned for fraud and forgery offences (usually possession of false documents) has also risen dramatically. This typically involves women who have sought entry to the UK, often for asylum, using forged passports obtained through traffickers. In 1994, 229 foreign national prisoners were charged with such offences, but by 2005 it had risen to 1,995 (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2006), adding to the growing number of foreign nationals within the prison population. As such women are normally removed from the country in any event, it amounts to a double jeopardy.

- On 30 June 2005, 1,454 individuals were imprisoned for fraud and forgery: 611 (42%) were foreign nationals and 832 (57%) were British nationals.
- 1,281 were men (57% of whom were British nationals and 42% foreign nationals).
- 173 were women (57% of whom were British nationals and 41% foreign nationals).

- 1.11 In Inspectorate surveys, carried out in 13 establishments that received a full inspection between April 2003 and 2006, a larger proportion of black and minority ethnic women said that it was their first time in prison (67% compared with 41% of white prisoners). On closer analysis, 86% of black and minority ethnic foreign nationals stated that this was their first time in prison, compared with 55% of black and minority ethnic British nationals. To further illustrate the bias of nationality over ethnicity, 73% of foreign national women stated that this was their first time in prison, compared with 43% of British nationals.

Substance abuse

- 1.12 The level of substance abuse among women who go to prison is high.
- In the year before entering prison, 45% of female arrestees in England and Wales tested positive for opiates and 30% for cocaine; while 43% reported using crack cocaine, and 44% heroin (Home Office, 2004).
 - In the Inspectorate's 2007 mental health thematic, 57% of women reported drug problems on arrival.
 - The proportion of women reporting drug use in the 12 months prior to imprisonment was significantly larger for white women (77%) than for black and minority ethnic women (63%) (Borrill *et al*, 2006).
- 1.13 White women offenders have a higher prevalence of drug misuse and different patterns of misuse than some black and minority ethnic women offenders.
- White women prisoners had higher rates of drug use, particularly heroin, tranquillisers, amphetamines and cocaine, and also reported significantly higher rates of psychological dependence (Borrill *et al*, 2006).
 - There was a marked ethnic difference in dependence, with 60% of white women being dependent on at least one drug, compared with 29% of black/mixed race British nationals:
 - 47% of white women were dependent on heroin compared with only 10% of black/mixed race women
 - rates of crack cocaine dependence were similar for white women (25%) and black/mixed race women (21%).
- 1.14 In our surveys, significantly fewer black and minority ethnic women said that they had problems with drugs on arrival than their white counterparts (18% compared with 41%).
- The same pattern occurs when comparing foreign national women with British national women (14% compared with 38%);
 - and when comparing black and minority ethnic British nationals with white British nationals (24% compared with 41%).

Fewer black and minority ethnic women and foreign nationals stated that they would have a problem with drugs or alcohol once they had left prison. This included black and minority ethnic British nationals (compared with white British nationals) and black and minority ethnic foreign nationals (compared with black and minority ethnic British nationals).

- 1.15 In our foreign nationals thematic, only one woman (7%) reported previous substance abuse, compared with 57% of British national women.
- 1.16 Thirty-one percent of women who were dependent on drugs had a current offence of possession or supply, and 24% had a current offence of robbery or burglary. The most common current

offence for non-dependent women was importing drugs (26%), followed by possession/supplying drugs (18%).

- 1.17 The distinct patterns of drug use by different ethnic groups within the women's population suggests that provision and commissioning of services should reflect the needs of the population and not concentrate principally on heroin abuse, the main drug of choice for white British nationals. A recent study highlighted that crack cocaine-specific services were delivered in only 20% (27) of the 135 establishments from which data were received (Fountain *et al*, 2007).
- 1.18 In a study specifically looking at the delivery of prison drug services for black and minority ethnic prisoners (Fountain *et al*, 2004), area drug coordinators reported that only three (2.25%) out of 133 establishments had drug services that targeted black and minority ethnic prisoners. Fountain *et al* (2007) found that only six reports from area drug coordinators contained planned service developments targeting black and minority ethnic prisoners, which would cover 21% of prisons in which drug services are provided. It is therefore unsurprising that research has highlighted the lack of take-up of drug treatment programmes by black and minority ethnic prisoners, as there are no specific services tailored to their needs.
- 1.19 Barriers in accessing treatment services have been suggested (Tyrer & Weaver, 2004; Sangster *et al*, 2002) as being due to:
- the opiate focus of drug treatment services at the expense of crack and cannabis
 - the experiences of racism in other services and in society
 - the lack of black and minority ethnic staff in service provision
 - the lack of cultural and religious competence, appropriateness and awareness of services
 - the lack of awareness of services within the black and minority ethnic population
 - concern about confidentiality and privacy, mainly due to the stigma attached to some drugs by black and minority ethnic communities.
- 1.20 It is important to find out whether these barriers, which were drawn from the male population, are the same for women and black and minority ethnic women. As previously mentioned, a large proportion of black and minority ethnic women prisoners are convicted of drug importing, trafficking and dealing, but there is very little intervention available for these offences. Those that have been developed are often found within drug treatment (CARAT) services, yet are, in truth, offending behaviour programmes, and should sit with psychology or probation. There were drug importer courses available to women in Cookham Wood (now re-roled as a male young offender institution), and currently at Downview.
- 1.21 Research has highlighted that black and minority ethnic drug users are more concerned about confidentiality than white drug users, and are reluctant to approach services until they are certain that confidentiality will be maintained (Abdulrahim *et al*, 1994; Perera, Power & Gibson, 1993). This was reiterated by a study conducted by Fountain *et al* (2007), which also noted the value placed on privacy by black and minority ethnic drug users in prison. This gave an opportunity to hide their drug use from other prisoners, including members of their own community: some expressed fears of being shunned by prisoners of the same ethnic group. However, this research focused on male prisoners, and further research into women and black and minority ethnic women prisoners is needed to determine whether the same fears apply.
- 1.22 Research has also established that the ethnicity of clients using prison drug services is not consistently monitored, training on diversity and cultural competence is inadequate, and there is a lack of a strategic lead on ethnic diversity (Fountain *et al*, 2007). Wanigaratne *et al* (2003) stressed the need for each topic in substance misuse to be examined from a racial and cultural stance, rather than as separate issues within training.

Self-harm

- 1.23 Statistics on self-harm in women's prison are astonishing. According to the prison service website, since 2003 30% of women in prison have self-harmed each year, compared with 6% of men.
- 1.24 Self-harm in prisons appears to be weighted ethnically. From September 2007 to August 2008, 77% of self-harm incidents were carried out by white prisoners.
- 1.25 Much research has been undertaken in an attempt to discover why women prisoners self-harm. Self-harm has been linked to previous histories of abuse, physical and sexual victimisation, rape, and previous psychiatric treatment.
- In a case study conducted by the Safer Custody Group (unpublished paper) of 50 prolific self-harmers, only 12 had not experienced abuse or rape in their lives. Of those who had experienced rape or abuse, 18 were children when it happened. Half had been in a psychiatric inpatient unit in the past, and 19 had been receiving psychiatric treatment prior to custody.
 - Morris *et al* (1995) observed that all women who admitted to self-harming before or after their sentence had experienced abuse in their past, with a large proportion having experienced both physical and sexual victimisation.
- 1.26 In a Home Office study into the substance misuse treatment needs of minority prisoner groups (2003b), drug dependence was associated with deliberate self-harm in black/mixed race women but not in white women. This study pointed to the importance of improving the treatment of both substance misuse and emotional problems in the black/mixed race prison population.
- 1.27 While self-harm in the black and minority ethnic women's prison population is much lower than in the white prisoner population, in the general population young Asian women (aged 16–24) are three times more likely to self-harm than their white counterparts (Husain, Waheed & Husain, 2006; Dennison and Coleman, 2000). The number of young Asian women in prison is low.
- On 30 June 2005, young Asian women (aged 18–21) accounted for 3% of the young adult women's population; there were no Asian girls (under 18), and Asian adult women accounted for only 2% of the adult women's population.
- 1.28 Research has highlighted that self-harm and suicide within the black and minority ethnic women's population should be viewed in the context of experiences of racism, sexism, class inequalities, patriarchy, gender-based violence and immigration issues (Chigwada-Bailey, 2003).
- A counselling project in Edinburgh discovered that self-harming young black and minority ethnic women found it hard to communicate with their families, and felt caught between the cultural values and aspirations of their families and those of the wider community (Effective Interventions Unit, 2002).
- 1.29 Of all self-harm incidents that occurred in the female estate in 2006, approximately 1.47% of incidents related to foreign nationals³.
- 1.30 In the Inspectorate's foreign national thematic (2006), fewer women reported thoughts of self-harm than their male counterparts. Although the follow-up to the foreign national report found evidence of an increased prevalence of thoughts of self-harm, interviews were only carried out in

³ Information provided on request from Safer Custody Group.

male establishments, so information on the real extent of self-harm in the women's foreign national population is limited. Of interest, however, is the fact that most foreign national women scored above the threshold on the GHQ12 questionnaire, which aims to measure the presence of psychological components of ill health. Not only did they score above the threshold, they also scored higher than British women, men and foreign national men. While foreign nationals may not exhibit the same distress signals as British nationals (in terms of rates of self-harm), this does not mean that they are not suffering forms of mental distress, as the GHQ12 results confirm. Attention should therefore be paid to the different outlets of mental distress across ethnicities and nationalities that do not conform to white British aetiologies.

Self-inflicted deaths

- 1.31 Between September 2002 and August 2008⁴, 46 self-inflicted deaths occurred in the women's estate. Of these, 93% of the women were white, 4% were black and 2% were Asian.
- 1.32 In the 2007 calendar year⁵, there were eight self-inflicted deaths in the women's estate – a marked increase on the three self-inflicted deaths in 2006. All of the self-inflicted deaths in 2007 were white British women.
- 1.33 Analysis of the Prison Service data available from 1998 to 2003 (Ash, 2003) identified the following characteristics among women who kill themselves in prison, compared to men who do so.
- Women tend to be younger: 33% are under 21, compared with 16% of men.
 - Women tend to be later in their period of custody.
 - Women who commit suicide are more likely to be sentenced for violence against the person (33%), compared with 15% of male suicides.
 - Half of the women were subject to self-harm monitoring, a higher proportion than among men.
- 1.34 There is no information on black and minority ethnic women prisoners who kill themselves in prison, as the numbers are small (as shown above).

Health

- 1.35 A recent study, the largest research project conducted on the health of women prisoners, indicated the high prevalence of ill health: there were high levels of mental disorder, drug misuse, alcoholism and infectious diseases (Plugge *et al*, 2007). In the study, 83% of women stated that they had longstanding illness, compared with 32% of the general female population, and 73% were on medication on arrival at prison – mainly benzodiazepines (41.8%), methadone (36.2%), antidepressants (13.5%), and sleeping pills (10.1%). Despite the extraordinarily high prevalence of longstanding illness, only three-quarters of women were registered with GPs on arrival at prison. Disappointingly, this project did not distinguish the differential health needs of black and minority ethnic prisoners, despite having sampled a representative number of these women (28% of the sample).
- 1.36 Increased attention has been paid to ethnic inequalities in health services, and research has indicated that minority ethnic groups are not uniformly at greater risk of poor health or mortality

⁴ Statistics taken from data provided by the Safer Custody Group on request.

⁵ *Ibid*.

(Harding & Maxwell, 1997). However, certain minority ethnic groups have been found to be at greater risk of certain diseases.

- Caribbeans have higher rates of stroke/hypertension.
- South Asians have high rates of coronary heart disease/chest pains.
- All minority ethnic groups have higher rates of diabetes than white groups.

- 1.37 HM Inspectorate of Prisons' foreign national thematic report highlighted the fact that prison healthcare departments did not systematically record prisoners' nationality in their records, reported limited use of formal interpreters (preferring to use other prisoners and/or staff), and had limited health information in different languages. These factors act as barriers to accessing services, and to health services being able to meet the needs of foreign national women.
- 1.38 Our thematic review of race relations in prisons also found that ethnicity was not recorded in clinical records. Staff concluded that ethnicity was not relevant as all patients were treated in the same way, which contravenes the *Nursing and Midwifery Council Code of Professional Conduct* on recognising the diverse needs of patients (2002).
- 1.39 Interestingly, in our surveys, black and minority ethnic women reported greater levels of satisfaction than their white counterparts with the quality of prison healthcare. Research has indicated that black and minority ethnic communities have lower expectations of health services, which may account for this survey finding.

Mental health

- 1.40 HM Inspectorate of Prisons' literature review on women in prison (2005) reported the extent to which women prisoners suffer from poor mental health. A recently published study by Plugge (*et al*, 2007) confirmed the high prevalence within the women's prison population, stating that women in custody are more than five times as likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population: 78% exhibit some level of psychological disturbance when measured on reception into prison, compared with 15% in the general adult female population.
- 1.41 Our review (2005) reported that the *Government's Strategy for Women Offenders* (Home Office, 2001) failed to address as an action point the needs of women prisoners with mental health problems. Research has highlighted that most mental health assessment tools were developed with the needs of white men in mind and are unsuitable for assessing the needs of women (Ramsay *et al*, 2001) or people from black and minority ethnic groups (Department of Health, 2005).
- 1.42 The National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) and the Ministry of Justice are working together to develop a model to address coercive and complex pathways into and out of care, in both prison and the community, for some black and minority ethnic groups, and to ensure that these groups are dealt with appropriately and responsively by both services. This is based on the model in *Inside Outside* (Sashidharan, 2003), which signalled a reform of mental healthcare for black and minority ethnic communities, and *Delivering Race Equality: a framework for action* (Department of Health, 2003). It is hoped that the model will be adapted for the prison context, and that primary care trusts (responsible for commissioning healthcare within and outside prisons) will consult women, particularly foreign national women, to develop a robust service tailored to their needs.
- 1.43 In general, it is clear that people within black and minority ethnic communities are more reluctant to report mental illness, for reasons that include fear of race discrimination. Recent reports have

referred to 'institutional racism' within mental health services (Department of Health 2005, Nacro, 2007). Therefore mental health needs among black and minority ethnic communities are likely to be picked up only when they become acute, and disproportionately as a result of contact with the criminal justice system.

- 1.44 The NIMHE initiative is a welcome development, particularly given the evidence that black and minority ethnic women prisoners with a personality disorder are less likely to report that they received psychiatric treatment in prison (Coid *et al*, 2000), and are more reluctant to seek help for emotional problems, despite having similar levels of anxiety and depression to white women (Home Office, 2003b).
- 1.45 Community studies have highlighted the correlation between mental illness and socioeconomic variables. McKenzie *et al* (2001) stated that the biggest risk factor for developing schizophrenia is living in a city, and that being under financial strain increases the chances of developing depression by 50–60%. Weich and Lewis (1998) reported that common mental disorders are associated with a poor material standard of living, independent of occupational social class. The fact that some black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in the most deprived areas of England, in cities, and that black and minority ethnic women experience considerably more poverty than white women, increases the likelihood that they will suffer from some form of mental illness (see NHS website; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).
- 1.46 In our recent mental health thematic, only 30% of mental health in-reach team (MHIRT) records that we looked at recorded ethnicity, even though this is a minimum requirement within the NHS dataset. In interviews, 75% of MHIRT leads said that they felt equipped to deal with the different needs of ethnic groups, but only one team described specific services for different ethnic groups. Some were candid in admitting that there was a lack of cultural and ethnic mix in their teams, and that they needed more training in cultural awareness.
- 1.47 In our surveys, there were no significant differences between foreign and British nationals, or black and minority ethnic and white prisoners with regard to feeling depressed on arrival at prison. However, when analysing the responses of foreign nationals in more depth:
- black and minority ethnic foreign nationals were more likely to report feelings of depression than their black and minority ethnic British counterparts (33% compared with 25%)
 - black and minority ethnic British nationals were less likely to report feelings of depression than their white British counterparts (25% compared with 31%).
- 1.48 The high levels of depression found in the foreign national population can be explained by a number of factors, as discussed in the Inspectorate's foreign national thematic review (2006). Of the foreign national women interviewed:
- 71% said that they had problems concerning family contact, compared with 59% of men and 32% of young people interviewed
 - 63% said that they had problems concerning immigration, compared with 49% of men and 28% of young people.
- 1.49 The thematic review alluded to how these problems are interrelated; for example, foreign national women are more likely to be primary carers of children, and immigration issues delay the return to the family. These factors could increase feelings of displacement and isolation, which would, in turn, have an impact on mental and physical health.
- 1.50 Foreign national prisoners were assisted by Hibiscus (a non-governmental organisation providing support to foreign national women) or Citizens Advice services, which provided

invaluable support to women. However, the need for independent and competent immigration advice was not being met. It is therefore essential that immigration legal advice is offered to foreign national women in conjunction with support services such as Hibiscus.

Previous victimisation

- 1.51 The Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme (VVAPP) has highlighted the extent of violence against women: domestic violence accounts for a quarter of all violent crime; 26% of all women are victims of domestic violence; and two women a week are killed by partners or ex-partners (Walby & Allen, 2004). The occurrence of childhood sexual abuse is also high – 20–30% of girls and 5–10% of boys are subjected to violence regularly (Russell & Bolen, 2000; Cawson *et al* 2000).
- 1.52 However, there is a scarcity of information on the experiences of black and minority ethnic women in relation to childhood sexual abuse, adult sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking. The small amount of research that has been conducted has concluded that there is little variance across ethnic groups (Hanmer & Griffiths, 2000; Cawson *et al*, 2000).
- 1.53 In HM Inspectorate of Prisons' 1997 thematic on women in prison, 50% of women interviewed had experienced abuse in their past, a third had experienced sexual abuse, and a third both physical and sexual abuse. Other studies have highlighted that up to half of all women in prison have experienced domestic violence, and a third sexual assault.
- 1.54 It is important to distinguish the specific experiences and needs of black and minority ethnic groups in this area. While there is little variance in prevalence by ethnicity, research has shown that survivors from black and minority ethnic communities are less likely to access statutory services (Batsleer *et al*, 2002) and, as a result, are more likely to endure violence for longer periods (Rai & Thiara, 1997).
- 1.55 Black and minority ethnic women may have compounding issues that can limit their access to support and protection if they experience violence. Additional barriers may be in the form of:
- a reluctance to involve the police or other agencies if they fear racism against themselves or their partner
 - a lack of information on services available in appropriate languages or formats
 - a lack of cultural awareness within agencies, particularly in relation to culture-specific forms of violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, 'family honour', religious and cultural pressures
 - a greater dependency on the abuser due to immigration status and/or language barriers.

Family

- 1.56 According to the Prison Reform Trust, over 60% of women in prison are single parents (PRT, 2000). Black and minority ethnic women are particularly likely to be single mothers, as more than half of black African and black Caribbean families in the UK are headed by a lone parent, compared with less than a quarter of white families and just over a tenth of Asian families (Office for National Statistics, 2003).
- 1.57 In our surveys, both black and minority ethnic and foreign national women reported more problems ensuring dependants were looked after than white and British women. Both these

groups of women were also more likely to report that they had not had a visit within their first week in prison compared with white and British women.

- 1.58 As already stated, in our foreign nationals thematic report, 71% of the women interviewed cited lack of family contact as a problem (compared with 59% of men and 32% of young adult males).
- 1.59 Reasons for the difficulties faced by black and minority ethnic women in maintaining family contact while in prison may, in part, be due to the distances that women are imprisoned from their home. In 2007, women were held, on average, 55 miles away from their home or committal court address. Approximately 800 women were held over 100 miles away (Hansard, 31 January 2008). Distances from home are likely to have increased as a result of the re-role of three women's prisons which now hold men. As discussed previously, black and minority ethnic communities tend to concentrate in urban areas (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) which may increase the distances from some prisons in England and Wales. It should be noted that there is no women's local prison in the UK's second largest conurbation, the West Midlands. The Women and Young People's Group also states that black and minority ethnic women are more likely to be rejected from their social group and face discrimination from wider society because of their race, sex and conviction (HM Prison Service, 2006). These factors add to the emotional strains experienced by these women, and increase the support they will require to aid resettlement into family life.

Education

- 1.60 Educational researchers have stressed the relationship between social class and educational performance (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000). Children eligible for free school meals are less likely to achieve high pass grades at GCSE than those who are not eligible (Bhattacharya *et al*, 2003). The fact that some black and minority ethnic communities are more likely to live in deprived areas further highlights the link between low levels of attainment and socioeconomic factors.
- 1.61 The educational attainment of women prisoners is lower than that of the general population and their male counterparts in prison (HM Prison Service, 2006). This is perhaps unsurprising, as they are more likely to suffer greater degrees of economic and social deprivation than their male counterparts. Black and minority ethnic women are likely to be even more economically and socially disadvantaged.
- 1.62 As the majority of women serve short sentences, the training and educational skills that they can gain in prison are somewhat limited, and the opportunities for employment may be more limited for lone parents. However, the importance of equipping women with skills should not be understated. Prisoners who do not take part in education or training are over three times more likely to be reconvicted, and basic skills learning can contribute to a reduction in reoffending of around 12% (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).
- 1.63 There is limited information on the differential experiences, or levels of educational attainment, of black and minority ethnic women prisoners. It is, however, noticeable that in Inspectorate surveys, larger proportions of foreign national and black and minority ethnic women than their British or white counterparts felt that the education undertaken in prison would help them on release.
- Fifty-five percent of foreign nationals felt that education would help them on release, compared with 47% of British nationals.
 - Sixty-one percent of black and minority ethnic respondents felt that education would help them on release, compared with 46% of white respondents.

- 1.64 The findings for male black and minority ethnic prisoners are similar. The difference cannot be explained by black and minority ethnic women being in prison for longer periods of time, and hence benefiting more from educational programmes, as in our sample of women respondents, sentence lengths for black and minority ethnic and foreign national women were not significantly different.

Work experience

- 1.65 In 2004, 25% of men and 44% of women of working age from black and minority ethnic groups were economically inactive, compared with 16% of men and 25% of women from the white population. When looking specifically at women, 70% of those of working age in the population as a whole were employed, but the same was true of only 52% of women from ethnic minorities. This difference has been explained by a number of factors: lack of British qualifications; language barriers; being a sole parent; traditional gender roles; and racial discrimination in workplaces (Fawcett Society, 2005).
- 1.66 Research has shown that few women prisoners were in employment before they arrived in prison. A Home Office study (2000) found that only three in ten women in the sample were working in the period immediately before imprisonment, and two-fifths felt that they possessed a work skill. There is no body of evidence for the number of black and minority ethnic women prisoners in employment or with work skills prior to imprisonment, but, given the statistics quoted above, it is likely to be even fewer than the overall figure.
- 1.67 A Home Office survey of released women offenders revealed that only 25% were in employment five to nine months after release (Home Office, 2000). Although securing employment may not be womens' main priority on release (finding accommodation and being successfully reunited with children usually come first), it is imperative that women prisoners feel equipped to take on employment and have been trained and supported to do so.
- 1.68 The Prison Service's Women and Young People's Group found that prisoners from black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be employed in contract workshops in prisons, but that their white counterparts are more likely to be employed in jobs offering learning and skills training, with vocational qualifications attached (HM Prison Service, 2006). For foreign national women, this is often related to the desire to earn more money (which is more likely to be the case in unskilled contract work) to send home to dependants. But for those black and minority ethnic women who remain in the UK, resettlement opportunities are reduced if work provides no vocational skills.
- 1.69 Personal development activities are essential to the resettlement of women prisoners, as they increase confidence and self-esteem and go some way towards helping women to take the first steps towards employment. For black and minority ethnic women, specific development activities may be needed for them to disclose racial barriers to employment and to deal with historic experiences of discrimination and abuse.

Accommodation

- 1.70 A primary concern for women in prison is that without accommodation they will be unable to re-establish a family unit following their release. As many women in prison are primary care givers, securing accommodation is often the main motivating factor to address other needs (Carlen, 2003). In a study conducted by Nacro (2001), 38% of women prisoners said that they had lost their homes as a result of imprisonment, and only 11% had received help with housing problems

while in prison. A Home Office study (2000) reported that 38% of women said that they had no accommodation to go to on release and, interestingly, 75% of women who had visits while in prison reported having accommodation arranged on release, compared with 35% who did not receive visits. The Prison Service's operational standards for women in prison record that 60% of women do not have a home to go to on release (PSO 4800).

- 1.71 Black and minority ethnic women prisoners are likely to experience equivalent or, in some cases, worse housing problems than white women, given that more of them tend to come from inner-city areas with acute housing problems. The Women and Young People's Group's resettlement strategy (2006) highlighted the fact that black and minority ethnic women are also more likely to be rejected by their social group. Whether this rejection extends to their family unit is unknown, but the fact that offending (and drug offending in particular) carries a particular stigma in some black and minority ethnic communities suggests that the resettlement barriers facing black and minority ethnic women are even greater.
- 1.72 In our surveys, only 57% of black and minority ethnic women reported knowing who to contact in the prison for help with accommodation on release, compared with 63% of white women. Although not statistically significant, more black and minority ethnic than white women felt that they would have a problem with accommodation on release from prison (47% compared to 45%).

Perceptions of prison life

- 1.73 In Inspectorate surveys black and minority ethnic women reported significantly poorer perceptions than white prisoners across most healthy prison areas.

Of particular note:

- black and minority ethnic women reported greater levels of victimisation by staff
- 26% of black and minority ethnic women reported having been victimised by staff, compared to 16% of white women
- black and minority ethnic women were more likely than their white counterparts to report victimisation through verbal insults or assaults.

Black and minority ethnic women felt less respected:

- 63% of black and minority ethnic women felt respected by staff, compared with 77% of white women
- 81% of black and minority ethnic women reported that they could shower daily, compared with 87% of white women
- 42% of black and minority ethnic women felt that they had been treated fairly in the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme, compared with 54% of white women.

Black and minority ethnic women reported poorer access to the prison regime:

- 16% of black and minority ethnic women reported being out of their cells for more than 19 hours a day, compared with 23% of white women
- 47% reported that they had association at least five times a week, compared with 58% of white women.

Black and minority ethnic women had poorer access to resettlement services:

- 22% reported having met their personal officer in the first week, compared with 29% of white women
 - 57% reported knowing who to contact in the prison for help with finding accommodation on release, compared with 63% of white women.
- 1.74 The only dominant areas where black and minority ethnic women's perceptions were better than their white counterparts were in relation to healthcare (see paragraph 1.39) and whether the education or training they had undertaken in prison would help them on release.
- 1.75 In HM Inspectorate of Prisons' thematic report *Parallel Worlds* (2005), black and minority ethnic prisoners reported discriminatory treatment by staff, particularly in relation to access to the regime. Women from black and minority ethnic groups also felt that their needs were overlooked. Asian women reported high levels of feeling unsafe, and of victimisation by other prisoners: this was higher than any other prisoner group, male or female.
- 1.76 Black and minority ethnic women were unhappy with a number of tangible elements of prison life: food, healthcare, the range of products in the prison shop, and the cost of international phone calls. They also reported feeling misunderstood by staff, describing better relationships between prisoners and staff from the same culture. Black and minority ethnic women rarely approached staff, and only when they had a problem, and believed that staff perceived them as aggressive and as potential bullies. The lack of cultural and racial awareness among staff was a predominant factor mentioned by both black and minority ethnic prisoners and black and minority ethnic staff. This highlights the importance of training, both to equip staff to better deal with black and minority ethnic prisoners and other minority groups within the overall population, and to break down the different perceptions that exist in prison. There is currently no mandatory Prison Service race awareness training, and certainly no specific training to deal with the differential needs and issues among different groups of black and minority ethnic women.
- 1.77 Black and minority ethnic women were the least likely to know how to make a racist incident complaint (compared to black and minority ethnic men, juveniles and young adults), yet were most likely to say they would use the complaints system in the future. Prisoners' main criticism of the racist incident complaint process was that their claims were dismissed or ignored, and they had no trust in the system.
- 1.78 The Inspectorate's *Foreign National Prisoners* thematic (2006) uncovered high levels of reported discrimination by staff towards foreign nationals. Differing language skills, lack of cultural awareness and stereotypes of black people and foreign nationals emerged as the strongest underlying reasons for perceptions of prejudicial treatment. Black and Asian foreign nationals were the most likely to report problems with regard to race, religion and respect. As mentioned earlier, foreign national women often experience difficulties with family contact and immigration, which points to the need for attention on the development of family contact, links with home countries, immigration advice and the provision of appropriate offending behaviour courses.
- 1.79 The Inspectorate's thematic reports, together with the consistently poor perceptions of black and minority ethnic and foreign national prisoners in our surveys, point to the multiple levels of discrimination faced by black and minority ethnic and foreign national women prisoners.

Good practice

2.1 The Fawcett Society has published a document entitled *Good Practice in Meeting the Needs of Black and Minority Ethnic Women at Risk of Offending and Offenders (2006)*. Six areas were identified as necessary to ensure that the needs of black and minority ethnic women were met.

- Auditing of issues for black and minority ethnic women at a local level, consulting with local stakeholders, black and minority ethnic women and local data.
- Reaching and publishing services to black and minority ethnic users; targeted marketing using appropriate communication tools.
- Ensuring retention of black and minority ethnic service users; meaningful, appropriate and supportive services for black and minority ethnic women.
- Partnership working; the involvement of black and minority ethnic women's organisations and experts.
- Developing staff and promoting diversity.
- Keeping services under review, ensuring interventions improve the outcomes for black and minority ethnic women.

Appendix I: Overview of black and minority ethnic women in the UK

- The 2001 census recorded 4.5 million non-white people in England and Wales, making up nearly 9% of the population⁶.
- There are around 2.3 million black and minority ethnic women in the UK (Government Equalities Office, 2007). Black and minority ethnic women make up just under 4% of the total population in the UK.
- The UK minority ethnic population is younger, with women and girls identifying as mixed ethnicity being the youngest overall; half are under 16⁷.
- In 2004⁸, 25% of men and 44% of women of working age from minority ethnic groups were economically inactive, compared with 16% of men and 25% of women from the white population.
- In 2004⁹, 59% of people of working age from ethnic minorities were in employment, compared with 75% of the working age population as a whole.
- Seventy percent¹⁰ of women of working age in the population as a whole were in employment, while 52% of women from minority ethnic groups were in employment.
- Foreign nationals represented 5% of the workforce in the UK in 2004¹¹. White immigrants had the same chance of finding employment as UK-born white people, but black Africans, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and black Caribbeans had less chance.
- Some ethnic groups are more likely to live in areas in England which are classed as deprived (Fawcett Society, 2005). Those originating from Bangladesh and Pakistan are four times more likely to live in the most deprived local areas in England as a whole; black Africans and black Caribbeans are two-and-a-half times more likely.

⁶ Statistics taken from Census 2001, Office for National Statistics (2003).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lindley et al (2004).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Appendix II: References

- Abdulrahim, D, White, D, Philips, K, Boyd, G, Nicolson, J, Eliot, J (1994). *Ethnicity and Drug Use: Towards the design of community interventions. Vol 3: Cypriot Community Drug Use, Prevention and Interventions among Greek and Turkish Cypriots in London*. AIDS Research Unit, University of East London
- Ash, B (editor) (2003). *Working with Women Prisoners*. 4th edition. Women's Estate Policy Unit: HM Prison Service
- Batsleer, J, Burman, E, Chantler, K, Shirley McIntosh, H, Pantling, K, Smailes, S, Warner, S (2002). *Domestic Violence and Minoritisation – supporting women to independence*. Manchester Metropolitan University, Media Services
- Bhattacharya, G, Ison, L, Blair, M (2003). *Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: the evidence*. University of Birmingham and DfES
- Borrill J, Burnett R, Atkins R, Miller S, Briggs D, Weaver T, Maden A (2003). Patterns of deliberate self-harm and attempted suicide among white and black/mixed race female prisoners. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 13, pp.229–240
- Carlen, P (2003). A Strategy for Women Offenders? Lock them up, programme them...and then send them out homeless. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 53, pp.34–35
- Cawson *et al* (2000). *Child Maltreatment in the UK: A study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect*. NSPCC
- Chigwada-Bailey, R (2003). *Black Women's Experiences of Criminal Justice: Race, gender and class, a discourse on disadvantage*. Waterside
- Coid, J, Kahtan, N, Gault, S, Jarman, B (2000). Ethnic differences in admissions to secure forensic psychiatry services. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 177, pp.241–247
- Corston Report (2007). *A Report by Baroness Jean Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System*. Home Office
- Criminal Justice System (2006). *Race and the Criminal Justice System: An overview to the complete statistics 2004–05*. Home Office
- Dench, S, Aston, J, Evans, C, Meager, N, Williams, M, Willison, R (2002). *Key Indicators of Women's Position in Britain*. DTI. Available at: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/weu_key_indicators.pdf
- Dennison, C and Coleman, J (2000). *Young People and Gender: A Review of Research*. London: Women's Unit, Cabinet Office/ Trust for the Study of Adolescence
- Department of Health (2003). *Delivering Race Equality: A framework for action*. Department of Health
- Department of Health (2005). *Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care: An action plan for reform inside and outside services and the government's response to the independent inquiry into the death of David Bennett*. Department of Health
- Dustin, H (2006). *Understanding Your Duty: Report on the gender equality duty and the criminal justice system*. Fawcett Society
- Effective Interventions Unit (2002). *Integrated Care for Drug Users: Principles and practices*. Scottish Executive
- Fawcett Society (2005). *Women and the Criminal Justice System: A report of the Fawcett Society's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System*
- Fawcett Society (2006). *Good Practice in Meeting the Needs of Black and Minority Ethnic Women at Risk of Offending and Offenders*
- Fountain, J, Roy, A, Anitha, S, Davies, K, Bashford, J, Patel, K (2007). *The delivery of Prison Drug Services in England and Wales, with a Focus on Black and Minority Ethnic Prisoners*. Centre for Ethnicity and Health, University of Central Lancashire
- Fountain, J, Roy, A, Anitha, S, Davies, K, Bashford, J, Patel, K (2007). *Issues Surrounding the Delivery of Prison Drug Services in England and Wales, with a Focus on Black and Minority Ethnic Prisoners*. Centre for Ethnicity and Health, University of Central Lancashire
- Gillborn, D and Mirza, H (2000). *Educational Inequality: Mapping race, class and gender*. Ofsted

- Hanmer, J and Griffiths, S (2000). *Reducing Domestic Violence... What Works? Policing domestic violence*. Home Office, Policing and Reducing Crime Unit briefing note
- Harding S and Maxwell R (1997). Differences in mortality of migrants. In F Drever and M Whitehead, *Health Inequalities. Decennial supplement*, No 15, pp.108–21. The Stationery Office
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (1997). *Women in Prison: A thematic review*. Home Office
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2005). *Parallel Worlds: A thematic review of race relations in prisons*. Home Office
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2005). *Women in Prison: A literature review*. Home Office
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2006). *Foreign National Prisoners: A thematic review*. Home Office
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2007) *Mental Health in Prison: A thematic review*. London: Home Office
- HM Prison Service (2006). *Strategy and Resource Guide for the Resettlement of Women Prisoners*. Women and Young People's Group
- Hollin, C R and Palmer, E J (2006). Criminogenic need and women offenders: A critique of the literature. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 11, pp.179–195
- Home Office (2000). *Women Prisoners: A survey of their work and training experiences in custody and on release*. Home Office Research Study 208
- Home Office (2001). *The Government's Strategy for Women Offenders*. Home Office consultation report
- Home Office (2003a). *Differential Substance Misuse Treatment Needs of Women, Ethnic Minorities and Young Offenders in Prison: Prevalence of substance misuse and treatment needs*. Home Office
- Home Office (2003b). *The Substance Misuse Treatment Needs of Minority Prisoner Groups: Women, young offenders and ethnic minorities*. Home Office Development and Practice Report 8
- Home Office (2004). *Women's Offending Reduction Programme: Action plan*. Home Office
- Home Office (2005). *Tackling Drugs Together*. HMSO
- Husain, Ml., Waheed, W, Husain, N (2006). Self-harm in British South Asian women: psychosocial correlates and strategies for prevention. *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 5:7
- Joseph, J (2006). Drug offences, gender, ethnicity and nationality: women in prison in England and Wales. *The Prison Journal*, 86 (1) pp.140–157
- Lindley, J., Dale, A., Dex, S. 'Ethnic differences in women's demographic, family characteristics and economic activity profiles, 1992 to 2002', pp.153–65 in *Labour Market Trends* April 2004, Office for National Statistics, 2004. Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour_market_trends/ethnic_differences.pdf
- McKenzie, K, Samele, C, Van Horn, E, Tattan, T, Van Os, J, Murray, R (2001). Comparison of the outcome and treatment of psychosis in people of Caribbean origin living in the UK and British whites. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 178, pp.160–165
- Ministry of Justice (2008). *Statistics on race and the Criminal Justice System – 2006/7*. A Ministry of Justice publication under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.
- Moffitt, T E, Caspi, A, Rutter, M, Silva, P A (2001). *Sex Differences in Antisocial Behaviour: Conduct disorder; delinquency, and violence in the Dunedin longitudinal study*. Cambridge University Press
- Morris, A, Wilkinson, C, Tisi, A, Woodrow, J, Rockley, A (1995). *Managing the Needs of Female Prisoners*. Home Office
- Nacro (2001). *Women Beyond Bars: A positive agenda for women prisoners' resettlement*. Nacro NHS website: <http://www.library.nhs.uk/mentalHealth/ViewResource.aspx?resID=111332>
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (2002). *Nursing and Midwifery Code of Professional Conduct*. Nursing and Midwifery Council
- Office for National Statistics (2003). *Census 2001*. ONS
- Perera, J, Power, R, Gibson, N (1993). *Assessing the Needs of Black Drug Users in North Westminster*. The Hungerford Project and the Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour
- Plugge, E, Douglas, N, Fitzpatrick, R (2007). *The Health of Women in Prison Study Findings*. Department of Health, University of Oxford
- Prison Reform Trust (2000). *Justice for Women: The need for reform*. Prison Reform Trust
- Rai, D K, Thiara, R K (1997). *Redefining Spaces: The needs of black women and children using refuge services in England: their feelings, needs and priority areas for development in refuges*. Women's Aid Federation of England

- Ramsay, R, Welch, S, Youard, E (2001). Needs of women patients with mental illness. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 7, pp.85–92
- RDS NOMS (2005). *Population in Custody: Quarterly Briefing. April to June 2005 England and Wales*. Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/prisq205.pdf>
- Russell, D E H and Bolen, R M (2000). *The Epidemic of Rape and Child Sexual Abuse in the United States*. Sage Publications
- Sangster, D, Shiner, M, Sheikh, N, Patel, K (2002). *Delivering Drug Services to Black and Minority Ethnic Communities*. DPAS/P16. Home Office Drug Prevention Advisory Service
- Sashidharan, S (2003). *Inside Outside: Improving mental health services for black and minority ethnic communities in England*. Department of Health
- Sentencing Guidelines Council and Sentencing Advisory Panel (2007). *Sentencing Guidelines Council and Sentencing Advisory Panel: Annual Report 2006–07*. Sentencing Guidelines Secretariat
- Social Exclusion Unit (2002). *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Taylor, R (2004). *Children of Imprisoned Mothers*. Preliminary research paper. Quaker United Nations Office
- Tyrer, P and Weaver, T (2004). Desperately seeking solutions: the search for appropriate treatment for co-morbid substance misuse and psychosis. *Psychiatric Bulletin* 2004, 28, pp.1–2
- Walby, S and Allen, J (2004). *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. Home Office Research Study No. 276. Home Office
- Wanigaratne, S, Dar, K, Abdulrahim, D, Strang, J (2003). Ethnicity and drug use: exploring the nature of particular relationships among diverse populations in the UK. *Drugs, Education, Prevention and Policy* 10 (1), pp.39–55
- Weich, S. and Lewis, G (1998). Material standard of living, social class, and the prevalence of the common mental disorders in Great Britain. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 52(1), pp.8–14
- Women and Equality Unit (2006). *Minority Ethnic Women in the UK*. Department of Communities and Local Government