

## The Drivers of Female Imprisonment

Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending  
Round Table Event

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## Trends in the use of imprisonment

- Growing daily female prison population (210⇒413)
  - Sentenced (156 ⇒ 280)
  - Remand (54 ⇒ 133)
- Growing number of female receptions (2383 ⇒ 3461)
  - Sentenced (613 ⇒ 1025)
  - Remand (1176 ⇒ 2338)
  - Fine default (593 ⇒ 98)
- Increasing length of custodial sentence imposed
  - 228 days ⇒ 271 days
- Male prison population increasing but at a much slower rate (and latest figures suggest a levelling off)

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### Detected crime (police data)

- No overall change in level of detected crime involving women
- No overall increase in seriousness of detected crime involving women

### Cases reported and marked for prosecution (COPFS data)

- No overall increase in the numbers of women reported to the COPFS since 2002/3
- Overall downward trend in number and proportion of cases marked for court but number of women 40+ marked for court has remained largely unchanged

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### Women sentenced

- Number of women with a charged proved per 1000 population has remained stable since 2003/4
- There has been a slight increase in the number of younger women (under 21) convicted of offences and a decrease in the number convicted of crimes
- The number of older women (30+) convicted of both crimes and, in particular, offences has increased

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### Women sentenced

- Women most likely to be convicted of:
  - Miscellaneous offences (assault, BOP), motor vehicle offences and shoplifting
- ↓ Decrease in numbers of women convicted of dishonesty offences
- ↑ Increase in numbers convicted of:
  - 'other crimes' (drugs and crimes against public justice)
  - miscellaneous and motor vehicle offences

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### Women sentenced

- The use of imprisonment, community sentences and 'other' sentences has increased while the use of financial penalties has decreased
- The use of imprisonment:
  - *decreased* among women under 21 years of age
  - *increased* disproportionately among women over 30 years of age
- Courts more likely to impose custodial sentences for:
  - Crimes against public justice (all ages)
  - Drug crimes (21+)
  - Public order offences – assault and BOP (21+)
  - Shoplifting and other theft (31+)

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### Key conclusions

- No evidence that more women are coming into contact with the criminal justice system
- No evidence that women are committing more serious offences
- Courts are increasingly likely to imprison women for a range of offences
- Increased punitiveness most evident in relation to older women

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### Possible explanations

- Reflection of wider social problems (alcohol/drugs)
- 'Rolling back' of the welfare state
- The role of risk and risk assessment

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### UN Rules

"Alternative ways of managing women who commit offences, such as diversionary measures and pretrial and sentencing alternatives, shall be implemented wherever appropriate and possible" (Rule 58)

Need for services/resources that are:

- community-based
- gender sensitive
- trauma-informed
- designed to meet women's diverse needs

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