

Needs of Women in the Criminal Justice System

House of Lords Debate | Thursday 25 July 2019

Women in prison are some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. Over half say they have suffered from domestic violence and one in three have experienced sexual abuse¹. Reports show that female prisoners are five times more likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population, with 37% saying they have attempted suicide at some time in their life². Figures from the Ministry of Justice have shown that a higher proportion of females in contact with Liaison and Diversion Services had mental health needs in comparison to males – 69% of adult females compares to 61% of adult males³.

Psychological therapies in the prison estate

Whilst emotional and psychological support for women in prisons has improved, it still varies dependent upon the prison itself; what the Governor's priorities are and what interventions are available in the community⁴. This postcode lottery of available support is damaging women's chances of overcoming their mental health condition and increasing the probability where they find themselves in a situation where they feel unable to cope.

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BACP recommends that all prison staff are provided with mandatory mental health awareness training to improve their knowledge and understanding of mental health, and to help them identify and converse more easily with prisoners who are experiencing signs of mental distress.

BACP supports the call from the Unfair Sentence report that GPs, health visitors and midwives should be trained to support parents involved in the criminal justice system, including 'equalities sensitive' training in providing physical/psychological support to women separated from their babies.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

BACP is the leading and largest professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in the UK, with a membership of over 49,000 practitioners drawn from across the various professional disciplines in the field of counselling and psychotherapy and based in a range of settings.

All BACP members are bound by the Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions and within this, the Professional Conduct Procedure.

For further information, please contact: publicaffairs@bacp.co.uk