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Conditional welfare and the gendered criminalisation of poverty

Overview

- Background
- Research rationale
- Aims and objectives of the research
- Facts and figures
- Social profile of women offenders
- Brief outline of relevant literature
- Methodology
- Next steps
- Questions

Background

- Previously worked for providers of Flexible New Deal, Work Programme and Offender Learning and Skills Service providers.
- This PhD project will explore the impact of the new conditionality and sanctions regime on women who have offended or who are considered to be 'at risk' of offending.
- Welfare and criminal justice as policy areas have undergone significant reform, particularly under the Coalition, which have a gendered impact.

Research rationale

Welfare policy

- Retrenching social provision with disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups eg, lone parents
- Expanded conditionality, tougher sanctions = rising sanctions and hardship applications/awards

Criminal justice policy

- Drift from focus on women offenders under Coalition to reducing re-offending through extended monitoring and contracted out of probation of lower risk offenders
- MOJ Transforming Rehabilitation
- More empirical evidence on the effects of diversionary programmes required particularly in a changing landscape.

- Ex-offenders spend half of their first 12 months after release in receipt of welfare benefits
- Ex-offenders “day one” referral to Work Programme

Aims and objectives of the research

Aim

To re-examine Wacquant's "carceral-assistential net" employing a feminist lens, focusing on the lived realities of criminalized and 'at risk' women (Wacquant, 2009, p. 99).

Main research question:

- What is the impact of recent welfare and criminal justice policy reform on women at the social margins?

Subsidiary questions:

- How are women conceptualised as being 'at risk' or criminal in dominant narratives; what effect does this have on public opinion, policy and practice?
- What are the lived realities of women categorised as such?
- How does the interaction between a softer, pre-emptive (gender-differentiated) penal system and a more punitive (gender neutral) welfare system impact on women?

Facts and figures

- Women are twice as likely to be sentenced to prison by a magistrate for a first offence (Prison Reform Trust, 2013)
- Women are being imprisoned for longer periods of time with a significant increase in women being sentenced between 6-18 months (Bromley Briefings Prisons Factfile, 2014)
- On leaving prison women are three times less likely to find work than men (Prison Reform Trust, 2015)
- Women make up 15% of offenders serving community sentences (5% of prison pop) (Prison Reform Trust, 2013)

Social profile of women offenders

- 46% of women and 21% men have attempted suicide (gen pop 6%)
- Committing offences for money for drugs (women 66%, men 38%)
- Higher prevalence for drug abuse and dependence in female (30-60%) than male (10-48%) prisoners
- A higher proportion of women reported problems with alcohol, with 50% reporting being drunk at the time of their offence
- 50% of women prisoners have suffered domestic abuse
- Female prisoners report poorer mental health than male prisoners: 49% with anxiety, depression and 25% with indicators of psychosis
- 30% of women prisoners self-harm, males 6%
- Witnessed abuse as a child (women 56% men 41%)

Source: Bromley Briefing Prisons Factfile, 2014; Fazel et al., 2006; MOJ, 2013

Brief Outline of Relevant Literature

- Linkages between penal welfare systems - Wacquant, 2009; Garland, 2001; Beckett and Western, 2001
- Work of feminist criminologists - McCorkel, 2004; Bumiller, 2013 Hedderman et al., 2011; Corcoran and Fox, 2013
- Gender and its intersections with class, race, citizenship
Beverley Skeggs, 2003; Beatrix Campbell, 1993, 2014; Linda McDowell, 2006
- Social policy analyses from a gendered perspective - Ann Shola Orloff, 1999; Ruth Lister, 2004; Jane Lewis, 2008
- Foucauldian concepts of power, discipline, exclusion, identity, discourse, rationality, resistance to power.

Methodology

- Literature review
- Feminist methodology with qualitative research methods:
 - in-depth qualitative interviews with auto-photography and photo elicitation plus relational maps and timelines with 20 women offenders
 - in-depth interview with two centre managers
 - in-depth interview with four key workers
 - key worker questionnaire for national distribution to community centres providing diversion/interventions for women

Why visual, participatory methods?

- Power balance between researcher and participant
- More and different insights than just “talk-only interviews” (Rose, 2012, p. 305)
- Helps to understand the everyday realities of what may otherwise be taken-for-granted, “it gives them a distance from what they are usually immersed in” (Rose, 2012, p. 306)

[Life After Detention: A Photo Story](#)

[Photo-elicitation in Prison: Visual Methods and Visual Culture](#)

Next steps...

- Ethics approval from NOMS
- Application for Confirmation of PhD (RF2A)
- RF2A presentation
- Interview planning
- Recruitment of female offender participants
- Recruitment of key worker participants

Thank you for viewing!