



AN INSPECTION OF HOW THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM TREATS FEMALES IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

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WHO ARE FEMALES IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW?

Women and girls under 18 years of age in contact with the criminal justice system (CJS) who have been suspected or convicted of offending.

WHAT DID WE LOOK AT?

- ▶ This is CJi's first thematic inspection that looked at the experience of women and girls across the whole of the CJS. It looked at treatment of women and girls who had repeated contact with the CJS and how female offending was managed.
- ▶ How the CJS was responding to particular needs like mothers with dependent children or victims of domestic or sexual abuse or violence.
- ▶ The experience of women and girls with the police on the street and in police custody, when under community supervision, in prison and in preparing for release.
- ▶ Girls as a particular group within the inspection.

WHO DID WE INSPECT?

- ▶ We looked at the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).
- ▶ Inspectors also engaged with the Department of Justice (DoJ) about their new strategy being developed to specifically respond to offending by women and girls.

WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- ▶ In 2019 women and girl defendants accounted for less than 1/5 of court convictions.
- ▶ Females are most commonly prosecuted and convicted of motoring, violence and theft offences, with a greater proportion of females than males likely to be imprisoned for theft.
- ▶ CJS professionals were often working to meet the specific needs of women and girls.
- ▶ Examples of good practice included the PBNI's female-only Community Service Squad, efforts by the YJA and PBNI to identify services for females in local areas, and Police Officers working with community organisations to help de-escalate situations involving women in crisis. A Women's Support Worker had been supporting the most vulnerable in Ash House Women's Prison during custody and on release.
- ▶ More needs to be done to develop and deliver interventions in a gender-responsive way and ensure criminal justice outcomes are responsive to women and girls' needs for example, community service that takes account of childcare needs.

WHAT CAN BE DONE BETTER?

Inspectors made three strategic and five operational recommendations for improvement. They include:

At a leadership level (strategic):

- ▶ The DoJ in collaboration with the PBNI, the NIPS and other criminal justice agencies should develop cross cutting expectations for working with females in custody and in the community; and co-ordinate a network of CJS 'champions' who can help encourage and promote a more gender-responsive approach.
- ▶ The DoJ in collaboration with the criminal justice agencies should develop a framework to ensure the best interests of children impacted by parental involvement in the CJS taking specific account of mothers with dependent children.
- ▶ The DoJ, working in partnership with all inspected organisations and key stakeholders, should ensure its new Women and Girls Strategy and accompanying action plan is effectively led, resourced and monitored, to deliver gender-responsive approaches and outcomes. Actions should take account of the issues raised in the inspection report and include the explicit implementation of its operational recommendations.

On the ground (operational level)

- ▶ Recommendations include developing a guide for Police Officers, clarifying the future of the PBNI's Inspire delivery model, development of a service user profile analysis by the YJA, and reviewing policies, guidance, training needs and materials across all inspected agencies to ensure they align with international standards and support staff to meet the needs of women and girls including special groups such as transgender people, foreign nationals and those from ethnic minorities.

WHAT NEXT?

- ▶ The DoJ's new Women and Girls Strategy being developed offers an opportunity to embed gender responsive practice in the CJS by providing strategic drive, robust governance and sufficient resources.
- ▶ Inspectors want to see a move away from generic measures and ways of working towards approaches that take into account the specific needs of women and girls that come in contact with the CJS.

