

# DrugScope Policy Briefing: Using women



It is troubled women who get into trouble, excluded women who end up on the inside, and used women who end up as using women. Using Women aims to give a voice to silenced women and break this cycle.

## Key Statistics

- **The total number of adult women in prison has nearly trebled in 10 years (2.75% increase)** (Prison Statistics England and Wales 2002, Home Office)
- **40% are in for drug offences (possession, intent to supply and trafficking)** (Prison Statistics England and Wales 2002, Home Office, Table 1.7)
- **1 in 5 are foreign nationals** (HM Chief Inspectorate Thematic Review on Women Prisons)
- **Two thirds have children and over half have a child under the age of 16** (HM Chief Inspectorate Thematic Review on Women Prisons)
- **Half have reported abuse in their life, physical, sexual and / or emotional, most abuse occurring in childhood** (Social Exclusion Unit, Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, 2002)
- **A third said that they had a drug problem at some point in their lives. A third said that drugs were a current problem.** (HM Chief Inspectorate Thematic Review on Women Prisons)

## DrugScope's position

- DrugScope is particularly concerned with the plight of women prisoners. There is a clear link between drug use, crime and social exclusion amongst the female prison population.
- Whilst some women (especially violent offenders) need to be in prison, the majority of female offenders are not a danger to society. Imprisoning women tends to perpetrate the cycles of deprivation, dependency and delinquency that led to their criminal behaviour in the first place.
- A large percentage of women prisoners have committed acquisitive crimes (eg shoplifting) to support their drug use. Imprisonment without treatment serves only to ensure these women become trapped in a revolving door of reoffending.
- Prison does not work for the majority of drug-using women. Community support and treatment offer far better options for vulnerable women desperately in need of help rather than a spell behind bars.
- We need to look at extending provision of community-based sentences to ensure that more families are kept together and children do not become innocent victims of the criminal justice system.
- Without sufficient aftercare in terms of effective rehabilitation back into the community, hard-won gains in terms of reduced drug use can prove short-lived.
- DrugScope would like to see something like a defence of duress being introduced in law for women (and other vulnerable people) who have been involved in the drug trade against a background of abuse, violence and exploitation (including foreign national drug traffickers).

**Further information:** [www.usingwomen.org.uk](http://www.usingwomen.org.uk)