
Working with Foreign National Women Prisoners

Statistics from March 2013 showed a total of 612 Foreign National Women held in prisons in England and Wales. While these numbers may sound negligible, it is worth noting that when looked at as a percentage of the overall prison population, there is a higher percentage of foreign national women in the prison estate than foreign national men (15.8% of all woman are foreign nationals, as opposed to 12.6% of men).

In a criminal justice system which is largely geared towards male offenders, women prisoners may often find themselves at a disadvantage, and foreign national women prisoners may be particularly disadvantaged.

Even in the UK, women who offend can be seen as aberrations and evidence suggests that they are often treated less sympathetically than equivalent male offenders and are more likely to get custodial sentences for relatively minor offences. In some cultures, this may be taken even further and a woman who offends can find herself entirely ostracised from her community.

The issues outlined below are by no means specific only to women FNPs or, but they may be more pronounced or occur more frequently than among the British women prisoner or male FNP population.

Family and Children

Women prisoners are more likely than male prisoners to be sole or primary carers of a child or children. They may have children in the UK, in their country of origin, or a mixture of both.

Mothers of children in the UK may lack family or other social networks so that the children are at increased risk of being taken into social services care.

Mothers with children in the country of origin may lack any state assistance (e.g. additional welfare benefits) for any family or friends left caring for the children. They may also fear for the safety of their children due to threat of harm from persons involved in the offence for which the woman was arrested or who has been involved in some way in the process of bringing the woman into the UK (for example, a

trafficker).

Separation from and anxiety about children can lead to considerable stress and mental and physical health problems.

As with any woman prisoner who is not considered a threat to her child/children, every effort should be made to ensure that contact is maintained between mother and child.

Trafficking

Despite many perceptions, trafficking is NOT exclusive to women. However, because trafficking often relies on an imbalance of power, women (and children) may be more vulnerable to trafficking due to the relative position of powerlessness which women hold within certain societies.

Please see the section on Trafficking for further details on working with people who have been trafficked. [\[link to trafficking section\]](#)

Immigration

A woman who may have suffered rape or sexual abuse may find it very difficult to disclose this. Any FNP who is making an application to stay in the country on grounds of asylum or trafficking should be made aware of their right to be interviewed by a female immigration officer if they so wish.

As noted above, women are more likely than men to be sole or main carers for children. It is therefore important that any women FNP with children in the UK gets expert advice on her immigration status if facing deportation. This is because the relationship between immigration law and the rights of the child are quite complex.

Gender and literacy

Due to the status of women in many societies they are more likely than male FNPs to be illiterate in their own language. As such, it should never be assumed that translated materials are the solution to all problems in ensuring that FNPs understand what is happening or what is expected of them. Full use should be made of professional interpreting services.