

# The dynamics of female offending: case studies in Scotland.

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THE DYNAMICS OF FEMALE OFFENDING:  
CASE STUDIES IN SCOTLAND

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# THE DYNAMICS OF FEMALE OFFENDING: CASE STUDIES IN SCOTLAND

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines female offending in Scotland, and assesses our current understanding of its nature and causes. It acknowledges the importance of work carried out in the area of female criminality in the last twenty years, but stresses that our knowledge of the subject is still limited in comparison to the amount of work carried out in the area of male criminality.

The thesis is in three parts. Firstly, it provides a review of the literature, exploring the validity of previous research (Chapters One and Two). It examines and shows the limitations of both classical theoretical perspectives, which are largely based on biological views of women, and modern studies, many of which are based on research on male offenders. It is shown that these theories cannot adequately account for female offending. This part of the thesis goes on to bring together individual and situational factors thought to be associated with female offending, based on current research.

The second part of the thesis (Chapters Three to Five) presents the results of the empirical study on which this research is based. A fieldwork project was carried out, based on detailed and semi-structured interviews with 26 women offenders in Scotland. Their present life experiences, their histories and their views about the reasons for their offending are examined. A complex picture emerges, of women with experience of being in care, of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and of women with family, drink and drug and psychiatric problems. Follow-up interviews were also conducted. These findings are discussed, and they illustrate the importance to these women of support, whether practical (including financial) or emotional, and its impact on recidivism or desistance. Finally, the main arguments and findings to emerge from the study are considered (Chapter Six). These show that the women shared common characteristics and negative life events. Putting the research to use is also discussed and suggestions are made for future work.

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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Recorded crime is overwhelmingly a male activity. A mere 14 per cent of those found guilty of a crime or offence in Scotland in 1995 were female (Scottish Office 1997a). In addition, women convicted of offences tend to have fewer previous convictions than men (Kershaw 1997, Kershaw and Renshaw 1997). Further, fewer females than males are convicted in all crime categories with the exception of one: 'other' crimes of indecency, where women account for 85 per cent of what are mainly offences related to prostitution (Scottish Office 1997a). As Morris (1987) points out, the dominance of women in this category reflects differences not in the behaviour of the sexes, but in social responses to that behaviour. Finally, self-report studies indicate that, whilst the male and female ratio of the incidence of delinquent behaviour is closer than official statistics suggest, and that the pattern of delinquent behaviour is similar for both sexes, males are however more involved in delinquent activity than are females (Datesman and Scarpitti 1980, Riley and Shaw 1985, Graham and Bowling 1995).

All this suggests that women are less involved in crime than are men. Indeed, women are typically non-criminal: they have lower rates of crime in all nations, all communities within nations, for all age groups, for all periods of recorded history and for practically all crimes (Smart 1976).

Nevertheless, some 22,500 women were convicted of a crime or offence in Scotland in 1995 (Scottish Office 1997a). Female criminality is, therefore, still an area of interest to criminologists and others concerned with criminal justice. Only a relatively small number of females have convictions for offences but these are, nevertheless, convictions.

There is a relative lack of research on female offenders. The explanations for this are that they are statistically small in number, their crimes are predominately trivial ones, their small numbers make study difficult and that women's experience of offending is (assumed to be) the same as men's. Such explanations imply that women are not worth



studying as a separate group. Further, where women offenders have been studied, these studies have largely been ignored (Heidensohn 1985).

The study of women and crime has developed considerably in the last twenty years. However, our knowledge of the subject is still limited in comparison to the huge amount of work carried out in the area of male criminality. Despite the public's obsession with crime and despite the endless volumes written to account for it, biological sex - the most consistent predictor of criminality - has often been virtually ignored.

It was in the context of the increasing prominence in the media of the 'new female criminal' (see Adler 1975, Simon 1975, cf. Box and Hale 1983, Pearson 1983, Kirsta 1994), and of limited research in the area, that the work upon which this thesis is based was carried out.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine female offending in Scotland. The research focus is on why women commit crimes. What causes a woman to commit her first crime and what prompts her to desist from offending are both examined in this work. There was also a need to speak to the women themselves; importantly, they can provide many clues as to the possible causes of offending by women.

The available literature has been gathered together in order to assess the current state of knowledge. It has been found to be limited both in the number of research projects (relatively few studies have looked at female offending) and in the scope of these projects (relatively few topics are examined in each), to lack co-ordination of the little research that has been carried out, and it largely fails to hear from the women themselves.

This research is an attempt to help fill that gap. The research objective of this thesis is to assess our current understanding of the causes of female offending. Its aim is to bring together the research literature already existing, to consider explanations already put forward and to gain information direct from women offenders. It presents the results of a fieldwork project based on detailed and semi-structured interviews with 26 women

offenders in Scotland, either in prison or in the community. Their present life experiences, their histories and their views about the reasons for offending are examined. By concentrating on women offenders, some of the generalisations and contradictions inherent in most previous research on 'the offender' (in reality, male offenders) may be avoided. The women in this study are interesting not only because of their personal histories, but also because, as women who commit crimes, they are excellent sources of information. This approach leads to new questions about the reasons why women offend.

This research was guided by a single premise: that the best information about female offenders would come from female offenders themselves. Twenty six women were interviewed, comprising one pilot study and 25 women thereafter. The initial 26 case studies began in May 1994 and were completed in May 1995. The follow-up interviews, a total of 10, took place one and a half to two and a half years after the initial interviews were completed. All the interviews were completed by the end of 1997.

## **OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part (Chapters One and Two) provides a review of the literature, presenting material on offending and showing how previous research has been limited in several fundamental respects. Chapter One discusses traditional criminological studies. It shows the limitations of classical theoretical perspectives, as much of the information on offending is based on studies of male offenders. Nevertheless, it identifies five traditional, 'male-based' theories which may be of use in examining female offending. Chapter Two brings together relatively current (post-1985) research. Individual and situational factors thought to be associated with female offending are considered.

The second part (Chapters Three, Four and Five) is concerned with the empirical study on which this thesis is based. Chapter Three sets out the methodological approach used in the present study, developed as a result of the limitations found in existing research. It describes how the research was carried out, arguing that the subjective experiences of

the individual must be understood in order for her actions to be interpreted. The chapter also contains some important reflections on the research experience. Chapters Four and Five outline the results of the investigation into female offending. Chapter Four discusses the results of the initial interviews, presenting the women's accounts of their histories and their perceptions of their lives. At the time this research was conducted, little previous research in Scotland had investigated whether the experience of certain multiple variables may be relevant to women offenders. The picture that emerges of these women is one of poverty, the experience of being in care, past and/or present experience of domestic violence, self-abuse and sexual abuse as a child. There are many complexities to add to this picture. What also emerges is that the experience of these variables is not uniform: the women's own resources and opportunities vary. A profile of 'women vulnerable to offending' is drawn up, based on the material presented in this chapter, and suggests a new route for research for our theoretical understanding. Chapter Five presents the results of the follow-up interviews. The recidivism or desistance of the women since the initial interviews are discussed, illustrating important factors in the women's own words.

Part Three (Chapter Six) draws together the main arguments and findings to emerge from the study, and it discusses the implications of the research results, suggesting future research.

It is hoped that this work will enable others to have a greater understanding of women who offend. A second goal is that others will be encouraged to continue to try to understand and to improve the lives of those women who offend and those who may be vulnerable to offending, in an attempt to prevent further crimes. This work was completed in 1998.

# **PART ONE - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

## **CHAPTER ONE – BACKGROUND**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the early literature on female offending and the rise of feminist perspectives in criminology. Section I considers modern theories of criminal behaviour, from the 1930s which saw much influential work, and through the 1960s when criminology began to establish itself as an academic discipline. The aim of this section is to ascertain whether these male-based theories can adequately account for female offending. Section II considers traditional theories of female offending, including Lombroso and Ferrero's 'classical' study of the late nineteenth century, and their continuing influence in work on female criminality. Finally, Section III provides a discussion of feminist perspectives in criminology, which have since the 1970s placed sex and gender firmly on the agenda of criminology. The aim of this chapter is to examine those studies which purported to provide an explanation of offending behaviour in women, and to consider a redressing of the balance by feminist criminologists of these 'sexist' theories.

### **SECTION I – CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORIES**

As stated in the Introduction to this work, the aim of this thesis is to assess our current understanding of the nature and causes of female offending. The search for a single theory of criminal behaviour has long been castigated as a vain one (see, for example, Walker 1966). However, various theories about offenders have been dominant at various times. Levin and Lindesmith have noted the progress of science is often portrayed as a 'majestic and inevitable evolution of ideas in a logical sequence of successfully closer approximations to the truth' (1937, p.671). This is clearly a misconception (Young 1977). Instead, one has to re-examine the theories in their social context (Gelsthorpe 1989).

To understand female criminality fully, it is first essential to examine explanations of crime (Williams 1997). A broad explanation of offending behaviour which can be identified in the modern literature is concerned with issues of social organisation. These can be divided into functional and interaction analyses.

### Functional Theories

Functionalist theorists argue that what is an offence may vary, but criminality is found in all societies, and that offending behaviour and the social response it provokes sustain the moral foundation of society. Thus, far from always being disruptive, it may contribute to a social system and underlie the operation of society (Maconis and Plummer 1998).

The first key trend in the sociology of deviance put the emphasis on structural inequalities which exist because of social class. Merton's (1938) theory of anomie examined conformity to conventional social values and in particular the emphasis placed on achieving prosperity. He suggested that it is reasonable to conclude that discrepancies between aspirations and legitimate chances of achievement increase as one descends in the class structure. Although Merton recognised class inequalities, he did not recognise the structural inequalities which exist through sex. Leonard notes, 'Merton made no attempt to apply his typology to women ... He argues vigorously that the dominant goal in American society is monetary success, and yet he has forgotten at least half the population with this formulation' (1982, p.57). Morris (1987) points out that within Merton's theoretical framework, there should be at least as much crime by women as by men, since most women are concentrated in low-paid and low-status jobs and opportunity structures are less open to them.

Sub-cultural theories profiled the 'delinquent' behaviour of young men, gangs and 'criminal areas'. Cohen, a major contributor to the sub-cultural school of criminological theory, made no analysis of female delinquency; indeed, he states, 'Our task in this volume is ... not to explain the kind of delinquency that is characteristically female' (1955, p.144). However, he states that the female delinquent also wants to succeed, in her particular sex role. Cohen argues that the girl's success in the adult role is, compared to the boy's, more dependent upon her relationships with the opposite sex and less dependent upon her own achievements. He further argues that the delinquent subculture is inappropriate as a response to the problems which arise in the female role -

the establishment of satisfactory relationships with the opposite sex - because it threatens her in her status as a girl in consequence of its strongly masculine symbolic function. As a result, female delinquency is relatively specialised, consisting overwhelmingly of involvement in situations that are likely to 'spill over' into overt sexuality. The male delinquent is versatile, while the female tends to be a sexual delinquent, Cohen concluded. As Campbell (1991) notes, no mention is made of rape or the boys' involvement in sex. Attempting to explain female criminality simply in terms of sexual delinquency is clearly inadequate.

The application of sub-cultural theories is limited to urban, working-class, male delinquency (Elliott 1988). Although assumptions about masculine and feminine gender are crucial to this whole trend of criminological thinking, these assumptions are nowhere examined or empirically tested in the literature. Why there were no published studies concerned solely with female delinquents during this period of numerous studies of delinquent boys, can presumably be explained by two factors (Heidensohn 1985). First, a theory could easily be undermined if its gender base - expressed in various forms of 'masculinity' - were examined. Second, criminologists were still almost all male, limited by interest and experience from observing female behaviour. As Morris (1987) points out, theories which ignore or misrepresent women are consequently weak.

### Interaction Theories

The second broad analysis, the interactionist perspective, is that nothing is inherently deviant but may become defined as such through the response of self and/or others. Functional theories assume that deviant behaviour occurs in a world that is basically stable. Conversely, the first interactionist theory to be considered here, labelling theory, assumes that most people have committed deviant acts. According to Lemert (1951), primary deviance (the initial behaviour) has many causes, but secondary deviance results from being labelled as deviant and re-labelled until one accepts a deviant role. Labelling theory also examines why society officially brands some people, and not others, as criminal. This theory enables us to recognise the sexual bias of defining, for example, prostitution as criminal behaviour, indicating more about what society views as unacceptable behaviour for women, than about actual behaviour (Leonard 1982). However, labelling theory tells us little about why women (or men) offend in the first place.

Sutherland's (1939) theory of differential association proposes that criminal behaviour is learned. He specifically mentioned that differential association could show why males are more delinquent than females. However, as Leonard succinctly points out, 'Unfortunately, he did not pursue the matter' (1982, p.106). As Heidensohn (1985) notes, Sutherland would have needed an elaborate analysis of sex differences in socialisation to explain why males and females learn different behaviour patterns. He did hint at this, noting that girls are supervised more carefully (Sutherland and Cressey 1960). To an extent, differential association seems capable of explaining female crime. However, perhaps more importantly, this theory reinforces the notion that women and men are treated unequally in our society and that males and females from the same families and reference groups have very different experiences (Elliott 1988).

Control theorists argue that, since criminal behaviour 'usually results in quicker and easier achievement of goals than the normative behaviour' (Nye 1958, p.5), the problem is one of explaining conformity rather than nonconformity. Reckless (1961) suggested that a variety of factors, such as poverty, might 'push' a person towards crime, while other factors, such as illegitimate opportunities, may 'pull' one towards misbehaviour. He argued that, nevertheless, conformity remains the general state of affairs, as to commit crime the individual is required to break through a combination of outer containment (such as supportive relationships) and inner containment (for example, frustration tolerance and norm retention). Reckless concluded that contemporary society may produce individuals who have little capacity to tolerate denial and with no real sense of commitment to the traditional rules of social life.

Hirschi (1969), on the other hand, gave great weight to control through social bonds, stressing that adults induce their young into conformity. The later expansion and modification of his theory, which concentrates on differential association, argues that the more adolescents are attached to and supervised by their parents, teachers and conventional friends, the less likely they are to become involved with or influenced by

delinquent peers (Box 1983). Various researchers (for example, Smith 1979) broadly agree with this line of argument and show that females' lives typically contain more of those factors which act as constraints on delinquent behaviour. Young females are more closely supervised by their parents than are their brothers and female friendships, being more home- than street-centred, play a distinctively protective role (Hagan et al, 1979). This theory goes some way towards explaining the low incidence of female crime, although it does not explain why girls *allow* themselves to be socialised in such a restrictive way (Heidensohn 1985).

To conclude, structural theory argues that economic marginalisation contributes to criminal behaviour, sub-cultural theory suggests that peer groups influence offending, and the theory of differential association puts forward the view that criminal (and non-criminal) behaviour is learned. These theories are largely presented as explanations for male criminality; where women are mentioned, their criminality is explained in terms of their sexuality. Both labelling and control theory help to explain why women (and men) do not offend, rather than why they do. These propositions will be considered further, in Chapters Four and Five, in the analysis of the findings of the present research.

## **SECTION II – TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF FEMALE CRIMINALITY**

The few early published accounts of female criminality were mainly medical works of the early nineteenth century (Smart 1976) and studies which dwelt on women's social and moral position, and especially their vulnerability to 'falling' into crime (Heidensohn 1994). Later in the nineteenth century, women offenders began to be studied by criminologists.

The most significant early study of female criminality is that of Lombroso and Ferrero (1895). At the time they were writing, the most influential natural science was biology; they drew from these beliefs and gave them apparent scientific support. Lombroso and Ferrero's work is based on their support of the positivist school of thought, which maintains that there is a clear distinction between criminals and 'normal' members of society. Their conception of the criminal was as a naturally occurring entity, a fact of nature.



Lombroso and Ferrero identified a 'complete type' (or born criminal) and a 'demi-type' (or occasional criminal) amongst female offenders, according to the number of 'characteristics of degeneration', such as size of the skull and thick dark hair, which they possessed (see Tyler 1993). Lombroso and Ferrero noted that born female offenders, physically resembling males, were rare. However, they went on to argue that such offenders make up for their relatively small numbers by the excessive cruelty of their crimes. Occasional criminals, on the other hand, argued Lombroso and Ferrero, have 'womanly' qualities, such as a strong sense of maternal love. The concept of woman's 'natural' role is fundamental to Lombroso and Ferrero's work. Smart (1976) points out that they based this assessment on uncritical perceptions of middle-class women in Europe at that time, studying female criminality in isolation from all other social, economic, cultural and historical phenomena. Confusing sex, which is biological, and gender, which is cultural, and the perception of masculinity in female offenders, are recurrent themes in many studies of female criminality. As Heidensohn (1987) notes, what is striking about biological determinism theories is not merely their sexism, or even their misogyny, but their resilience and persistence. Lombroso and Ferrero did, however, play 'a crucial role in focusing research on individual offenders and their traits and characters' (Heidensohn 1985, p.113).

In the early 1900s, Thomas (1907) reinforced Lombroso and Ferrero's biological view. By the 1920s, however, Thomas' approach showed a belief that criminality was also socially induced (Thomas 1923). This developing liberalism resulted in individual offenders being seen as not fully adapted to the social values of society which represent their interests and therefore were 'sick' rather than inherently evil (Smart 1976). Thomas (1923) based his analysis of human social behaviour on a concept of four 'wishes', which were said to be emotionally related to certain biological instincts, including that of love. However, Thomas believed that women had a greater proportion, and a greater variety, of love in their nervous systems. He argued that it was this additional and intense need to give and feel love that leads women into crime, particularly sexual offences like prostitution. The 'unadjusted girls' in his work were those who used their sexuality in a socially unacceptable way to get the affection they were otherwise lacking in life, and in order to achieve material objects. As Smart (1976) argues, Thomas was merely reflecting his own cultural beliefs, that men do not feel emotion or affection in the same

way as women; and he overlooked the economic dependence of women on men. Smart adds that Thomas did not concern himself with the sexual (mis)behaviour of males, presumably because the dominant moral code condemned sexual promiscuity only in women. As Klein and Kress observe, '(W)omen have been the target of voyeuristic studies concerned only with their sexuality' (1976, p.155). Klein (1996) again makes reference, in her critique of authors who contribute to the 'legacy of sexism', to the way in which boys are seen as 'instrumental' whilst girls are 'expressive'. In her study of sexism in assessment centres, Gelsthorpe (1989) found that girl offenders, unlike boy offenders, are rarely seen as rational.

Rather than suggesting structural changes to the social order, Thomas proposed that delinquent girls should be helped to 'readjust' to their conventional female roles of marriage and domesticity. Carlen (1985) argues that this belief has continued to be central to the philosophy of women's penal regimes both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

Pollak (1950) recognised that social factors are relevant, but his work, written and published at a time of high creativity and debate in criminology, 'seems not to be part of that time at all' (Heidensohn 1985, p.118), with its fundamentally biological basis and culturally loaded, stereotypical perception of females (Smart 1976). Pollak believed that female criminality is largely 'masked'. He argued, firstly, that offences committed by women are under-reported; in the home, for example, he cited violence carried out by women on their families. It should be noted that women are usually the caretakers and therefore have much more contact with children, and thus opportunities for violence. However, many women are themselves subjected to violence by their husbands or partners (Ghazi 1994). Further, studies do not support the view that women offenders are either more or less likely to be reported to the police than are male offenders (see, for example, Nagel 1981).

Secondly, Pollak argued that there were lower detection rates for female offenders compared to male offenders, due to their inherently deceitful nature. He states that 'an impressive array' of (unnamed) criminologists consider deceitfulness as the outstanding characteristic of females (1950, p.9). His view is a persistent one: for example, in her study of sexism in assessment centres, Gelsthorpe (1989) found one theme which

emerged was that of the girls being manipulative. Such views, notes Gelsthorpe, were not founded on palpable evidence.

Thirdly, Pollak believed that the existence of chivalry by men has resulted in greater leniency shown to women by the police and the courts. However, he only discusses the way in which discrimination by the police and the courts can work in the interest of women; he ignores the possibility that some women may be negatively discriminated against. Some researchers have found (qualified) support for this aspect of Pollak's work (for example, Hedderman and Hough 1994, Dowds and Hedderman 1997). Other writers argue that men and women are not sentenced differently for like crimes (for example, Daly 1994). The work of yet other researchers disputes Pollak's theory (for example, May 1977, Elliott 1988), suggesting that women are treated more harshly in the criminal justice process. However, the situation is much more complicated than this. For example researchers have found that the sex of the defendant, while not a direct influence on the sentence they received, nevertheless has an indirect influence - that is, a recognised and accepted gender role for each sex influences sentencing (Farrington and Morris 1983; Eaton 1983, 1986; Gelsthorpe and Raynor 1995; Hedderman and Gelsthorpe 1997).

Brown (1990) notes that Pollak's work was mainly concerned with the visibility of female crime, and she argues that he does not offer a biological account of the causes of woman's crime. However, Pollak saw female criminality as having a biological basis: he puts forward an additional theory, based on the generative phases (that is, menstruation and menopause), and argues that these phases are 'frequently accompanied by psychological disturbances which may ... become causative factors in female crime' (1950, p.157).

It can be seen that the views of women held by Lombroso and Ferrero, Thomas and Pollak are heavily stereotyped. Heidensohn (1985) stresses that it would be inappropriate to attack these men for their sexism, as they were men of their age. Where they can be criticised, she continues, is in their failure to analyse any of their assumptions.

Although later writers have produced new work, Konopka (1966) and Cowie, Cowie

and Slater (1968), for example, have been influenced by these earlier writers. Konopka's work is based on the conversations she had with institutionalised delinquent girls and is descriptive rather than analytical. She believed that women and girls have intense personal needs which may lead to anti-social behaviour if they are not fully satisfied. These needs, which include love, are close to Thomas'(1923) thesis. Konopka saw the apparent absence of love in the home lives of the girls in her study as a precipitating factor in the emotional instability and subsequent delinquency of the girls. As Smart (1976) notes, any emotional instability in the girls she studied might be a result of institutionalisation, rather than a factor which predisposes to delinquency. Further, Konopka did not consider the social structures which place women in a subordinate and dependent position, thereby ensuring that the majority of girls and women will indeed require material and psychological support and protection (Smart 1976).

Like Lombroso and Ferrero (1895), Cowie, Cowie and Slater (1968) favour a biological determinist explanation of female offending. Cowie et al. distinguish between the delinquent (or potentially delinquent) girl and the non-delinquent (or 'normal') girl. They found delinquent girls, more often than boys, to be 'lumpish, uncouth and graceless' (1968, pp.166-7), and did not consider that, for example, the poorer members of society may have both less satisfactory diets and medical care (Smart 1976). Cowie et al. also considered the chromosomal structure of the sexes and argued that female delinquents may have an abnormal chromosomal structure. There is no medical evidence to support this hypothesis (Rose et al. 1984, Grubb 1993).

Like Lombroso and Ferrero (1895), Cowie et al. confuse sex and gender and, as with their predecessors, Cowie et al. do not attempt to analyse the social structure. Like Lombroso and Ferrero's work, Cowie and colleagues' study was also influential when it was published, because issues relating to females within criminology and penology were previously largely hidden and neglected (Bottoms 1989).

It can be seen that the above studies of female criminality put forward the central theory of biological links to criminal behaviour. Although these studies have been severely criticised, biological theories continue to have an appeal, stresses Morris (1987), because they justify the status quo and do so 'objectively'.

The most powerful of the biological theories today specifically applicable to women is that concerned with pre-menstrual tension (PMT). This theory is concerned with the supposed link between the menstrual cycle and criminal behaviour. Negative associations with menstruation have a long history (see, for example, Pliny, who described menstrual blood as, 'fatal poison...causing fruits to fall from branches, dulling razors', quoted in Sayers 1982, p.111). Menstruation has been linked to women's criminal behaviour from Ellis (1894) to the present day. The main modern advocate of such a link is Dalton (Morris 1987). Dalton (1960, 1961, 1973) argues that shortly before or during menstruation women and girls are more liable than usual to, *inter alia*, commit crimes. However, as Morris (1987) notes, a number of criticisms can be made of the literature. First, simple statistical analyses are not reliable as few women have 28-day cycles. Further, it is widely accepted that stress or anxiety (caused, for example, by detection) can induce menstruation. Third, women spend almost half of their lives in the menstrual or pre-menstrual phase; therefore showing that women who commit crimes are more likely to be in a certain part of their menstrual cycle does not mean that women generally in this phase are more likely to commit crimes. Finally, much of Dalton's data is retrospective and, consequently, unreliable. It can be argued that women know that their behaviour can often be excused by reference to the menstrual cycle; they might thus believe that they are less likely to be punished for criminal acts during menstruation. Confirmation of this last criticism can be found in AuBuchon and Calhoun's (1985) small study, in which women who knew menstrual cycles were being monitored and who reported greater mood changes than those women who were not given this information, resulting in the researchers' argument that menstruation *per se* may not affect women's lives, but rather social expectations.

This relatively modern biological theory, then, also lacks real support. For example, no one has been able to demonstrate why all women of menstruating age do not commit crimes. Yet despite the lack of clear evidence for a link between menstruation and crime, the criminal courts have been fairly receptive to it (Morris 1987). The issue has most often been raised in cases of shoplifting, where the accused woman has attributed uncharacteristic absent-mindedness to PMT (Berlins and Smith 1981). However, there has been a very small number of cases involving women who killed or threatened to kill, where PMT has been accepted as a mitigating circumstance (see Edwards 1982, 1984;

Morris 1987; Ezard 1994), providing some judicial confirmation of the view that female criminality is caused by 'women's problems' - that is, having origins in biological factors.

The research and literature on a link between biological theories and female offending is far from conclusive. The theorists examined above saw female criminality as the result of individual characteristics that were only peripherally affected by economic, social and political forces. Such concentration on the individual poses the problem, and the solution, as one of individual adjustment rather than social change (Eaton 1986). Eaton (ibid.) stresses the importance of relating the lives of offending women to the wider social structure. As discussed in Section III below, feminist criminologies have attempted to address the criticisms made of the stereotyped writings discussed above and to move women into a more central position.

### **SECTION III - FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN CRIMINOLOGY**

Until the 1970s and the growth of the women's movement, the study of crime, as has been seen, was very much a male province. Statistics repeatedly show that more men than women commit crimes, and thus a concentration on the study of male offenders might be seen as a reasonable one. However, the costs to criminology of its failure to address this issue are severe. The most consistent and prominent fact about crime is the sex of the offender. In view of this remarkable sex bias in crime, it is surprising that sex and gender are not the central preoccupation of the criminologist (Naffine 1997).

Over the last twenty years many contributions to the debate about women and crime have characterised criminological theories and penal responses to females as 'sexist' (see, for example, Smart 1976, Campbell 1981, Leonard 1982, Gelsthorpe 1989). The most simple and arguably the most powerful criticism made of theory and practice within the social sciences is that they largely omit the experience of women. The main reason for this, Oakley (1974) argues, is the 'ideology of gender' which leads people to construe the world in sexually stereotyped ways: focusing attention *on* some areas of social reality (those which concern men) and *away* from others (those which concern women). When women are included in criminological works, they are presented in

stereotypical terms. Chetwynd (1975) stresses the difficulty of changing stereotypic ideas about women. These stereotypes also influence current practice in the criminal justice system; for example, much of the emphasis in women's prisons in the past has been to train them to be good wives and mothers (Carlen 1983).

Feminist perspectives in criminology were formulated as a result of these concerns. Heidensohn (1968) is generally considered to be the 'founding mother' of this area of study. She argues that before it is possible to reintegrate the study of male and female deviance, all deviant phenomena must have been properly studied within their own context.

While feminism is often referred to as a single perspective, the term encompasses many different approaches which are related to other theoretical traditions (Walby 1989). Similarly, there is no one set of arguments which can be described as 'feminist criminology' (Gelsthorpe and Morris 1988). Nevertheless, a number of core elements of feminist thinking can be identified and have been summarised by Gelsthorpe and Morris (*ibid.*): being critical of the stereotypical images of women which dominated earlier theories; accepting the view that women experience subordination on the basis of their sex and working towards the elimination of that subordination; and that sex and gender must become a central feature of analysis.

As Rafter and Heidensohn argue, criticising earlier theories or simply 'adding on' studies of women to studies of men is not sufficient. The sociology of crime and criminology must be explored with a gendered 'lens' (Rafter and Heidensohn 1995, Walklate 1995). Thus, feminist criminologists have also opened up a field of new issues, such as the gendering of sexual violence (see for example Straus and Gelles 1986, Schwartz 1987) and the treatment of women in the criminal justice process, as victims (see for example Dobash and Dobash 1980, Stanko 1985) and as perpetrators of crime (see for example Eaton 1986, Worrall 1990).

Feminist criminologists have also questioned the methods deployed by earlier criminologists (Naffine 1997). An extension of sexist thinking leads to researchers seeing no problem in generalising from the experience of males to 'people' in a way that never occurs with all-female research populations (Stanley and Wise 1993). For

example, Skolnick (1995) discusses the general (both sexes) then unwittingly shifts to the particular (men), while Hagan (1992) commits the same errors of imprecision, in his case extrapolating from the particular to the general. Hagan (1993) continues to make the same errors of omission and commission, in not questioning why the criminologists he cites chose to examine only men and why they never chose to consider only women, nor does he limit the implications of his findings to the male population (Naffine 1997). As Naffine (1995) notes, 'I know of no study which has posed the question, 'Are men treated the same as women?', a study which would establish women as the human standard' (1995, p.xiv).

While the feminist approach has succeeded in placing sex and gender firmly on the agenda of criminology, it has not been without its critics, and there are many debates within feminist circles (Croall 1998). Downes and Rock (1995), for example, argued that feminist criticisms of earlier theoretical approaches are misplaced: criminology has been 'crime led', focusing on male crime because it is statistically more prevalent. Gender is not the only neglected variable, they continue, as race and white collar crime have been similarly under-explored. Heidensohn argues against this 'crime led' defence of the neglect of gender, stressing 'patriarchal' values (1997, p.787).

Others are sceptical of what feminism has to offer (Croall 1998). Carlen (1992), for example, argues that apart from patriarchy there is little to distinguish feminist approaches from others, although she does not deny their contribution. She argues that women commit crime mainly as a result of poverty (Carlen 1988), and a realist approach, combined with feminist insights, can better analyse these problems (Carlen 1992). Heidensohn (1994) notes that she is sceptical about an 'add and stir' approach, simply mixing feminism into criminology. However, she recognises that considerable contributions have been made to the field by scholars who would accept a feminist label.

Feminist criminologies, then, have questioned the conventional boundaries of criminology and fostered different understandings. Naffine (1997) cites three areas of the intellectual development of feminist criminology. Firstly, in some cases the approach has been to extend the ambit of study. The early feminists were concerned that women had been left out of the research and that when they made a rare appearance their characters were distorted and denigrated (see for example Heidensohn 1968).



Feminist criminologists pointed out the blatant sexism of this double standard and argued that women and men should receive the same scientific treatment. Other feminists, such as Gelsthorpe (1989), have noted that this approach ignores the fact that the large amount of positivist-based research carried out into male criminality has failed to further our understanding; more research per se is not what is required, rather a need to look at what form this should take. Scraton (1990) adds that it is not simply a matter of adding on women to that which is 'known'; if the premises of the analysis are flawed, then it follows that understanding derived from the research also is flawed. Naffine (1997) notes that a number of studies have endeavoured to make male theories of crime, developed with male samples, fit women. Not surprisingly, the results have been varied and generally inconclusive (see Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988). One example was Adler's (1975) attempt to prove the thesis that 'women's liberation' causes crime in women. In this way, men were (again) constituted as the norm, 'the natural social actor' (Smart 1990).

Nevertheless, feminist empiricism (Harding 1986) is still used, and has achieved a considerable amount: it has made female offenders visible and has revealed institutionalised sexism within criminological theory, policy and practice (Gelsthorpe and Morris 1990b). Since Smart's (1976) pioneering work, feminists have generated a literature on women offenders (for example Carlen 1988), on why women are generally law-abiding (see Heidensohn 1985) and on the treatment of the female offender by the agents of the law (for example Eaton 1986).

Secondly, the significance of the identity of the inquiring subject has been called into question (Naffine 1997). With the publication of Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1955) in the USA, criminologists were exposed to a dramatically different way of conducting research into crime. It expressly rejected the idea of the impartial, scientific inquirer; in order to learn about crime, the researcher explicitly adopted the viewpoint (or standpoint) of the offender. Whyte implicitly assumed that who does the knowing affects what is known, and he acquired insights which were unavailable to dispassionate observer. However, he did not try to give voice to the females in his study. Other male criminologists, such as Becker (1963) and Parker (1974), followed suit.

In 1985, Carlen referred to the still dominant conception of crime as an activity which is

primarily the activity of males with an excess of masculinity. The effect of this male-centred view of crime was the theory that the offending woman was of necessity a would-be man (Naffine 1997). Consequently, Carlen (1985) turned to women themselves and sought their own accounts of the criminal experience. However, it is argued that there cannot be such a thing as a single 'woman's standpoint', that a woman cannot speak on behalf of all women. Spelman (1988) suggests that there is a paradox at the heart of feminism: feminist inquiry seems to possess a logic that demands that we treat women as a unity, for it is women as a group that forms the subject of our concerns. However, to treat women as a homogeneous group is to erase the differences between women and so return to the sort of singular ideal of womanhood to which feminists first took exception, when men were doing the social analysis (Naffine 1997). A further criticism is that feminist criminology is about white women, which fails to appreciate the significance of race or colour (Rice 1990). Class and sexuality are other obvious variables. Cain (1990a), however, notes the new 'differences' approach: that women have concerned themselves with differences from each other, while maintaining a still recognisable women's movement.

Turning to the third area of intellectual development of feminist criminology, Naffine (1997) notes that feminists have considered how central organising categories of thought (such as the concept of woman) operate, and how those categories can be rethought and our understandings altered accordingly. Naffine points out that criminologists of the left argue that violence against women is abhorred by all groups in society and therefore there is a basic consensus about the meaning of crime. This ignores the feminist literature that has demonstrated the highly contested nature of the meaning of rape, which depends on the man's perception of non-consensual sex (see Henderson 1992). Further, criminologists of the left tend to emphasise crime in the public arena, which reduces a focus on crimes against women, especially domestic violence (Young and Rush 1994). In addition, the 'maleness' of crime, and the 'maleness' of those who study it, is again largely ignored.

Naffine (1997) concludes by stressing that none of these three divisions between the different styles of feminism stand firmly, but are imposed for the purposes of helping us to think about feminist writing on crime. In reality there is much overlap between the varieties of feminism (Morris 1987). Further, all have one thing in common: they have

'helped us to see crime differently - with greater intellectual rigour and with a sharpened sense of the political significance of the purposes and methods of criminology.' (Naffine 1997, p.29).

It can be seen that consideration of women is of fundamental, not marginal, significance for criminology. As shown above, feminists have, for example, documented sex bias within the criminal justice system, questioned the scientific methods deployed by criminologists, engaged with criminological theory and provided data about crime from the viewpoint of women. However, insensitivity to the significance of the (male) sex of the offender continues in mainstream criminology (Naffine 1997, Scraton 1990). Developing feminist perspectives in criminology is, say Gelsthorpe and Morris, 'a project under construction' (1990c, p.4). Nevertheless, feminist perspectives in criminology have already made a major contribution to our understanding of female offending.

### **Conclusion**

As stated earlier, the aim of this thesis is to assess our understanding of the nature and causes of female offending. Section I has shown that modern, mainstream criminological theories are almost entirely concerned with male offending. As a result, argues Leonard (1982), they cannot adequately account for female offending. Whilst some sociologists/criminologists, such as Sutherland and Cressey (1960), believe that their theory is of general application, applying to men and women alike, Scully (1990) argues, '... these 'universal' male truths are irrelevant to women at best, and alienating and oppressive at worst.' (1990, p.2).

Section II has shown the limitations that also exist in traditional theories of female offending. These theories are largely biologically-based and argue (respectively) that the female offender is inherently atavistic and amoral, primarily sexual, inherently and physiologically deceitful, and a product of chromosomal and physiological deviations. These theorists failed to demystify female offending because their ideas rested on unexamined stereotypes (Heidensohn 1985).

A disadvantage with wider criminological theories is that they tend to put the offender

in the background. However, adding a feminist perspective may better illuminate (male and) female offending behaviour (Williams 1997). Rock refers to feminist criminology as 'the most notable development in theorizing about deviance' in recent years (1987, p.304). Section III showed the important contribution made by feminist perspectives to criminology, in emphasising the centrality of gender.

Although the study of women and crime has developed considerably in the last twenty years, our knowledge of the subject is still limited in comparison to the huge amount of work carried out in the area of male criminality. Recent years have seen a growth in the writing on female offenders, especially in the USA and in England. Work by feminists has made and continues to make a major contribution to the social sciences (Hammersley 1992), but their work is still largely not understood or accepted by many academics (Scruton 1990, Stanley and Wise 1993). Clearly, there is a need for new research on female offending and for thoughtful criticism on the research. The following chapter attempts to bring together contemporary studies of female criminality, to highlight the main themes and to draw attention to the gaps in our knowledge in this area of criminological research.

## **PART ONE – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **CHAPTER TWO – MODERN THEORIES OF FEMALE CRIMINALITY**

#### **Introduction**

While Chapter One gave the background to research on women's offending, this chapter examines the current work in the field of female criminality. Section I looks at the current literature on female criminality. It presents the most salient findings of research carried out in the last decade in the United Kingdom, to explore those factors thought to be most relevant to offending. Where possible, reference has been made to work on female offending. However, due to the relatively small amount of research carried out in the area, work referred to in this section includes some research into offending by males. Studies based on the social and psychological characteristics of offenders are explored. This section attempts to bring together contemporary studies of female criminality and thereby to show the gaps which need to be filled in this area of criminological research. Section II considers offences committed by women. Finally, section III examines the need to study female offenders in Scotland.

#### **SECTION I – THE CURRENT LITERATURE ON FEMALE CRIMINOLOGY**

##### **SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

###### **Age**

Information from the 1991 Census in Scotland indicates that females account for 52% of the population there. The age distributions of males and females are also similar, with the largest proportion at around 30% in the 25-44 age group for both sexes (Scottish Office 1997a).

It is not known for certain how much crime is committed; as the British Crime Surveys show, a high proportion of crime is not reported to the police. Nevertheless, it appears that young people commit the most crime. According to official statistics on conviction rates in Scotland, the peak age of offending for both males and females is 18. However, young people tend to begin offending at a much lower age. Kennedy and McIvor (1992) found in their study of young offenders in the Children's Hearing System in Scotland that half of their sample were aged 13 or 14. Only 17% of the children involved in their study were girls.

In England and Wales, the peak ages of offending are different from Scotland: the peak age of known offending is 18 for males but 14 for females (Home Office 1997a). Self-report studies show the peak age of offending to be higher than this: 21 for males and 16 for females (Graham and Bowling 1995, Home Office 1997a). Graham and Bowling's (1995) self-report study reveals that involvement in offending amongst young people is widespread, with every second male and every third female admitting to committing offences at some time. However, most offending by young people was found to be infrequent and minor.

Similar findings emerge in Scotland. Shoplifting accounts for the largest single conviction rate for an offence committed by females under the age of 21; for males in the same age category, breach of the peace has the highest conviction rate (Scottish Office 1997). Kennedy and McIvor (1992) also found differences between the types of offences committed by girls and boys. Approximately a quarter of boys' offences were for vandalism or fire-raising (compared to 8.6% of offences by girls) and approximately a quarter of girls' offences were for petty assault, that is fights (compared to 10.6% of offences by boys). The percentage of dishonesty offences was, at 48.6%, exactly the same for both boys and girls, but the majority of these for both sexes were of a comparatively petty nature, such as shoplifting.

Further, a few persistent offenders commit most of the crimes by young people. Graham and Bowling (1995) found that some five per cent of the young men interviewed were responsible for at least two-thirds of the offences reported by the whole group. A Home

Office study confirms this, with a finding that some three per cent of young offenders are responsible for about a quarter of all offences (Home Office 1997a).

Young people's offending is thought to be largely situational and as such is likely to reduce as they mature and are able to make more informed choices (Hestor and Elgin 1992). Both Rutherford (1986) and Farrington (1990) have noted that most young offenders stop offending when they reach their late teens. However, young males in England and Wales are not growing out of offending behaviour as quickly as they used to (Audit Commission 1996). The peak age of known offending for males has increased over the last decade (from 15 years in 1986 to 18 years in 1995); for females over the same period, the peak age has remained stable at around 14 years (Home Office 1995, Home Office 1997a). Graham and Bowling (1995) found that young women tended to stop offending consciously and abruptly after their mid-teens, as they left home, formed stable partnerships and had children. For males, however, desistance was more gradual and intermittent. Passing the landmarks between childhood and adulthood did not have the same effect on young men. Factors which influenced their chances of desistance were continuing to live at home into their twenties, being successful at school and avoiding the influence of other offenders, drug use and heavy drinking.

It appears that the number of young male offenders is decreasing, while the number of young female offenders is increasing. The numbers of males with a charge proved per 1,000 population in 1995 have fallen since 1988, with the exception of the 21-25 age group which showed an increase. However, the number of women with a charge proved per 1,000 population over the same period showed increases for all age groups apart from the youngest (16 and 17 years) and the oldest (over 40 years), while figures for the age 20 group were at the same level as in 1988 (Scottish Office 1997a).

However, the Home Affairs Committee (1993) report on juvenile offenders in England and Wales point out that the discrepancies between different sources of data make it difficult to draw firm conclusions as to whether offending by young people has been rising or falling over the last decade. The apparent fall in the number of young male offenders partly reflects demographic change (the number in this group has fallen) and it also reflects

changes to the criminal justice system (such as the greater use of warnings for some offenders). Once these factors have been taken into account, the rate of offending by young males identified by the police does not appear to have declined (Audit Commission 1996). The apparent rise in the number of young female offenders may be partly a result of a greater willingness to prosecute young women; this is discussed in Chapter Five.

In seeking to understand young offenders, there is a prevailing tendency to characterise them as a rapidly multiplying, homogeneous group (Harding 1994). However, Millham (1993) has identified five different criminal careers among young people. These are temporary delinquents (the vast majority of young offenders) who commit a minor crime, usually in the company of others, and are unlikely to repeat the experiment; difficult and disturbed young people, whose offending is linked to wider problems and who can be helped by specialist services; persistent offenders who have a history of severe familial disruption and relationships dysfunction; 'one-off' serious offenders, whose crimes are isolated and not necessarily explained by social factors; and persistent and serious offenders, who represent a combination of the young people in the preceding two groups and for whom the prospects are bleak.

Changes to the benefit system over the past decade have contributed to the difficulties facing young people. Save The Children Fund (1992) estimates some 60,000 unemployed 16 and 17 year olds are receiving no financial help whatsoever. The Bridges Project Report (1991) found that many of the young people in their study admitted to having committed crimes in order to survive. The Department of Social Security's 1991 Survey of 16 and 17 Year Old Applicants for Severe Hardship Payments highlighted the relationship between poverty and young people in trouble. One in three submitting an application for assistance were young Scots, one in four were young offenders and half had left school before reaching the age of 16 (Save The Children Fund 1992).

It appears, then, that young women are almost as likely as young men to be involved in offending, which is mainly of a minor type. However, offending by females decreases sharply in their teens, whereas for males it does not begin to decrease for another five years.



## Family background

The family is a major mechanism of social control, not only for its younger members but also for adults, due to the intimacy and length of contact between members (Macionis and Plummer 1998). This can have a positive effect, such as learning acceptable behaviour, or a negative effect, for example being the victim of abuse within the family.

Farrington (1994) found that of the 45 boys in his longitudinal study who had become persistent offenders, half came from families where a parent had been convicted of a crime by the time the child was ten years old. He concludes that parental criminality is the most powerful of all the predictors of juvenile crime. It should be noted that Farrington's research was concerned only with males.

Graham and Bowling (1995), who studied both males and females, found that young people living in larger families were no more likely to offend than those from smaller families. However, Farrington (1994a) – again, looking only at young male offenders – argues that children from large families (those comprising four or more children) are more likely to be delinquent. In part, effects of family size may be attributable to biological influences of birth order (Denno 1990); for example, later-borns tend to score lower on intelligence and achievement tests (Zajonc and Bargh 1980).

Young people, males and females, living with both their natural parents are less likely to offend than those living with one parent or in a step-family (Graham and Bowling 1995). The higher rate of offenders from single parent families is associated with lower levels of parental supervision, a greater likelihood of a poor relationship with at least one parent and greater poverty. The first two factors also accounted for the higher levels of offending by children living in step families (*ibid.*). Children of single parents and those with step-parents are twice as likely as those in more stable families to have problems in all areas of their lives (Tripp 1994).

Bowlby's (1951) work on maternal deprivation, and Rutter's (1972) later adaptation of this thesis, argues that children who experience the permanent or semi-permanent loss of a

significant figure to whom they are emotionally attached may suffer serious emotional disturbance as a result. Although the effects appear similar to those of emotional abuse, they cannot be classed in the same category since the infliction of loss is rarely an act which is pro-active towards the child (Boswell 1995). It is, nevertheless, an experience which constitutes a major source of childhood trauma. In Boswell's (1995) work on violent young offenders aged 10 to 17 years, she found that 57 % of her sample had experienced significant loss via the death of or cessation of contact with a significant figure.

Lack of control by families is also central to Young's (1996) argument. He argues that a longer period of adolescence, the growth of 'youth cultures', widening horizons which have weakened the control of families, and structural changes in the family resulting in reduced supervision by parents, all help account for the rise in crime.

Government estimates in England and Wales (Social Trends 1994) suggest that there will be some 1.7 million single-parent families by the year 2000 (only 10 % of them headed by men). Any discussion of the effect of divorce on children raises emotive issues. As Devlin (1995) notes, even if children appear to do better living with two parents at war with each other than with a single or remarried parent, neither situation can be conducive to happiness at home; either way the child is the loser. In their self-report study on young people who offend in England, Graham and Bowling (1995) found that those boys and girls who ran away from home before the age of 16 because they did not get on with their parents were particularly likely to offend.

Sutherland's (1939) theory of differential association argues that criminal behaviour is learned. Later, Sutherland acknowledged that criminal behaviour is partially a function of opportunities to commit specific types of crimes - 'Probably the most important difference is that girls are supervised more carefully ...' because of fears of unwanted pregnancy (Sutherland and Cressey 1960, p.115) - but this area was not explored (Heidensohn 1985). Sutherland's (1939) assertion that criminal behaviour is learned might help to explain the lower crime rate of females (Leonard 1982).

Not only are females more closely supervised by their families, but also the family remains a more important reference group for adolescent females than it does for adolescent males. This latter point appears to be confirmed by the study carried out in England by Graham and Bowling (1995).

Hirschi (1969) gave great weight to control through social bonds, stressing that adults induce their young into conformity. The later expansion and modification of his control-differential association theory argues that the more adolescents are attached to and supervised by their parents, teachers and conventional friends, the less likely they are to become involved with or influenced by delinquent peers (Box 1983). Various researchers (for example Smith 1979) broadly agree with this line of argument and show that females' lives typically contain more of those factors which act as constraints on delinquent behaviour. Heidensohn (1985) has identified four constraints – domestic, public, work and social policies – which operate upon women. She continues that women are not only controlled by the conditions of their existence, but also by their socialisation.

It is important to note that socialisation plays a part in the development of sex role behaviour both by direct prescription and by implicit expectation (Gelsthorpe 1989). Boys and girls are socialised ultimately into appropriate gender roles (Nicholson 1984). Adults generally display significantly different responses towards girl and boy babies from the moment of birth, attributing an infant's screams and cries to different emotions (fear in girls, anger in boys), talking to and handling them with more or less robustness depending on their sex (Kirsta 1994). The little girl and later the woman are expected to 'keep close' at home, be obedient, dependent and modest about their bodies, discouraged from venturesome play and expected to take on domestic tasks, far more than are boys (Kagan 1964, Hagan et al. 1979). These controls and bonds are highly effective in that they make criminality a difficult course for women to take.

Leonard (1982) suggests that class probably influences opportunities to learn various definitions of the legal codes: working-class women tend to be less protected and controlled (as are working-class men, due to the traditional ethos of working-class life;

Miller 1958), thus having more opportunity for contact with definitions favourable to the violation of the law than their upper-class sisters. However, perhaps more importantly, this theory reinforces the notion that women and men are treated unequally in our society and that males and females from the same families and reference groups have very different experiences (Elliott 1988).

Thus, there are strong arguments for the contention that 'ineffective supervision', familial discord and weak parent-child relationships are all strongly associated with delinquency for both boys and girls. However, as differential association and control theorists argue (see Chapter One), socialisation and social control exert particularly strong pressures on females, which goes some way towards explaining the small percentage of offending women.

### Schooling

Just over a quarter (28.5%) of the workforce in Scotland have no educational qualifications (Employment Department 1992). As well as low academic ability, the many other reasons for this include bright children becoming disaffected by inflexibility in the curriculum, changes in residence, parental education (children of parents who were both educated to at least 17 years old are almost three times more likely still to be in education themselves at 18-19 years, than are the children of parents who both left school aged 15; Taylor 1996), parents' social class, problems at home, boredom at school, the attraction of the outside world, strong peer pressure resulting in the fear of being different from friends so that children deliberately under-achieve in every area of school life, and truanting (for whatever reason) (Devlin 1995).

Devlin (1995) examined the links between educational failure and future offending behaviour in England and found that the vast majority of her prison inmate respondents reported multiple schooling, unnoticed special needs, social disadvantage, bullying, truanting, peer group influences and punishment at school. Graham and Bowling (1995), in their study of young people in England and Wales, found that persistent truancy is a strong

indicator on starting to offend. The 1991 National Prison Survey in England and Wales (Walmsley et al. 1992) noted that 30% of those inmates who had attended secondary school had been habitual truants. Shaw (1991) in Canada found that less than a third of federally sentenced women had formal qualifications beyond basic education prior to sentence, and the majority of the remainder had not achieved school leaving requirements.

National truancy figures showing the distribution across pupils are not kept in Scotland. However, the Scottish School Leavers' Survey for 1994 shows that three in five school leavers (58%) admitted to having truanted during their fourth year (Lynn 1996). Half of these said that they had only skipped a lesson here and there, but nearly one in ten of all leavers (9%) had truanted for several days at a time or for weeks at a time. There was no difference between boys and girls in the proportion who had truanted, persistently or otherwise. Perhaps not surprisingly, the proportion who had truanted was inversely related to the qualifications gained. However, Lynn points out that the relationship between truancy and qualifications is almost certainly not a simple case of cause and effect. 'Playing truant probably *does* reduce the probability of a pupil gaining qualifications ... But it is probably also the case that pupils who are less likely to gain qualifications are more likely to truant - because they feel less motivated to attend school' (1995, p.11). Further, Devlin has shown in England how children have been accused of truanting when in fact they were prevented from attending by their parents: '... inmates told how their schooling was often disastrously disrupted by their chaotic family situation. In the most extreme cases, school attendance would have been low on the list of family priorities' (1995, p.98).

In his study of truancy in English secondary schools, O'Keeffe (1994b) found that the three most common reasons given for truanting were (perceived) irrelevant lessons, dislike of teacher, and dislike of subject. In her study of the school experiences of 250 male prisoners, Devlin (1995) found that over 20% had been victims of bullying at school (23% at primary school, 21% at secondary school). It should be noted that there may be a difference between the way boys and girls bully their victims: MacLeod (1994) argues that boys try the macho, aggressive form of bullying, while girls tend to use less violent methods such as exclusion from their friendship group.

O'Keeffe (1994a) argues that we need to know more about how the home, school and entertainment links operate, in particular why girls seem to truant as much as boys and yet are much less given to criminality. One explanation for this could be educational qualifications; that academic achievement tends to bring financial reward, which in turn might reduce the need to offend. At age 18-19 women are better qualified than men: 51% of women compared to 41% of men hold Higher Grades (Taylor 1996). However, this argument is weakened by figures which show that unemployment is higher amongst young females than young males (see Poverty/Unemployment below). A more likely explanation is that youth culture is gender specific: 'The most important difference among young people is the gender difference - growing up male and growing up female involve different activities, different constraints, different patterns of socialisation.' (Frith 1984, p.5). Thus, although girls may truant, their different roles in the family, their different adult responsibilities and their different treatment by the legal system (see Chapter One) suggest that we should expect differences between boys and girls, and that this must include offending behaviour.

### Peer group

The family's importance in socialisation is quite obvious, since the experience of the very young child is shaped more or less exclusively within it (Giddens 1993). However, Hendry (1983) has drawn attention to the use of peer groups as being central to social development in adolescence. Thus, although it is relationships with parents that determine in large measure a person's longer-term preferences, attitudes and values, during adolescence it is relationships with friends which most preoccupy the consciousness of young people as they grow up. Styles of dress, hairstyles, musical interests, speech, leisure activities, values, and methods of handling social relationships are among the socially relevant characteristics that teenagers appear to learn, in part, by exposure to peer models (Hendry et al. 1993).

There is evidence that young men and young women use and view friendships in different ways. Douvan and Adelson's (1966) study, for example, found that mid-adolescence (13-16 years of age) was the period when females become most anxious about being excluded

from a same-sex friendship; and Frydenberg and Lewis (1991) found that girls sought more social support and generally were more likely than boys to focus on relationships. Young men's friendships rarely achieve the depth of intimacy of young women's (Giordano et al. 1986, Hendry et al. 1993). Coffield et al. (1986) examined friendships in late adolescence/early adulthood and found that affiliation to the peer group did not tail off after 'couples' formed. However, associations with same-sex groups tend to diminish after mid-adolescence, with young women in particular leaving behind friendship groups with their own sex by late adolescence. Peer pressure is seen to lessen across the period of adolescence, perhaps as a manifestation of growing confidence (Hendry et al. 1993). The research suggests that peer group culture serves as a mask to conceal the self, reflecting the emotional difficulties and insecurities of this stage of development (Save The Children Fund 1992).

An important predictor of offending is associating with others involved in offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, Farrington 1994). Criminologists have long recognised the importance of peer group influence in the development of male offending behaviour (see, for example, Sutherland 1939 and Cohen 1955, outlined in Chapter One). As discussed in Chapter One, women are largely absent from research on peer group offending. An exception is Campbell's (1991) study of girls in gangs in the United States of America. She found that the girl members of the gangs talked frequently about their 'sisterly' relations with each other. Not surprisingly, association with delinquent peers is a strong predictor of delinquency for girls as well as boys (Figueria-McDonough et al. 1981).

In a study of young offenders in the Children's Hearing System<sup>1</sup> in Tayside in Scotland, 'peer group pressure' was mentioned in social background reports by social workers as being a factor relating to the offence in only a small proportion of the cases (Kennedy and McIvor 1992). However, Kennedy and McIvor found a generally high number of co-accused. In their comparative study of young offenders in the criminal justice system, Kennedy and McIvor found the influence of the peer group to be one of the factors most commonly identified by social workers as related to offending. Work by Gelsthorpe (1989) should be noted in this context: in her study of sexism in assessment centres in England,

Gelsthorpe found similar, clear assumptions by staff about the different patterns of offending by boys and girls.

Responding to 'dares' and getting into minor trouble with friends is generally considered to be normal childish behaviour, and most adolescents simply grow out of it (Devlin 1995). Nevertheless, a number of those who have contact with delinquent peers go on to offend as adults. Walmsley et al. (1992) in the National Prison Survey for England and Wales found that 57% of prisoners gave 'getting in with the wrong crowd' as the reason for their offence.

Graef (1993) observed a group of young male offenders following a probation programme in London. He describes their poor home lives and parental ineffectiveness; but he also argues that they are testing their masculinity when the usual outlets for their 'rites of passage' (such as apprenticeships for blue-collar jobs) are gone. He goes on to discuss the 'normal' reactions of young males 'through the ages', such as to fight when they feel insulted (1993, p.254), though such explanations risk stereotyping male behaviour (see Chapter One).

In his work on sub-cultures, Cohen (1955) argued that people want to excel not only as people but also as men or women, and that the girl's success in the adult role is, compared to the boy's, more dependent upon her relationships with the opposite sex and less dependent upon her own achievements. Thus, Cohen argued, as marriage is for women a way of achieving success, the female delinquent in a subculture tends to be a sexual delinquent; gang membership reduces their marriage prospects (Cohen and Short 1958). As Campbell (1991) notes, no mention is made of the boys' involvement in sex. Current awareness of the double standard of morality has directed researchers' attention away from a purely sexual view of girls' involvement in gangs and is beginning to show the girls' activities and autonomy. In her work on girl gang members in the USA, Campbell (1991) argues that wherever women's desire and need for male approval and protection declined, usually coinciding with a lack in certainty of being able to count on men's financial help and support, the stronger became their sense of solidarity and tendency to coalesce into semi-detached or completely autonomous groups. These existed either as auxiliary units to

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<sup>1</sup> A Children's Hearing is a tribunal which aims to help children under the age of 16 who are in need of care



all-male gangs or, increasingly, broke away completely. Relationships continued to be important to the girl gang members - but the girls cared not only about the romantic and sexual involvement with boy members but also the 'sisterly' relations with girl members.

Thus, peer groups play an important part in the social development of young people, with same sex friendships being of particular importance to adolescent girls. Although association with delinquent peers is a strong predictor of offending, young females not only use friendships groups in different ways to boys (see McRobbie and Garber 1976 on the 'culture of the bedroom'; Lees 1983), they also tend earlier to grow out of friendship groups and, with this, move away from the influence of peer group pressure.

### In care

In Scotland in 1993 there were almost 12,400 children in local authority care; this is 1.07% of the population aged 0-17 years (Scottish Office 1996). Eighty three per cent of children subject to a supervision order were in community accommodation, either living at home, with foster parents or friends or relatives. The remaining 17% of children in care were in residential care.

The largest percentage of children in care (40%) had been in care for one to three years; a further 33% had been in care for less than a year, 13% for three to five years and 14% for five years or more. Children living away from home tended to have been in care for a longer duration than those children subject to a supervision order and living at home. The majority of children in care (53%) were aged 12-17 years. In each age group boys outnumbered girls (59% boys and 41% girls in total), particularly in the 12-17 age group (Scottish Office 1996).

In Scotland, children are placed in care through the Children's Hearing System. A Children's Hearing is a tribunal which aims to help children under the age of 16 who are in need of care or control. In 1993, for the first time, the rate of children referred to the

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or control.

Children's Hearing System for non-offence grounds exceeded that of referrals for offenders (Hartnoll 1995). Thus, a large number of children in care have committed no offence, but are there as a result of the belief that they would suffer from neglect or abuse if they remained in their own home (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Children Admitted into Care\* in Scotland, 1993**

REASON FOR CARE	No. OF CASES	%
Offence grounds	1535	39.5
Truancy grounds	500	12.9
Beyond parental control	382	9.8
Lack of parental care	888	22.9
Schedule 1 case**	580	14.9
Total	3885	100

\* This table excludes children placed in voluntary care

\*\* Schedule 1 to the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin, Social Work Series, SWK/CC/1996/15.

Walmsley et al. (1992), in the National Prison Survey in England and Wales, found that more than one third of young offenders had had some previous experience of being in local authority care before they were 16 years old. They point out that children who have been in care for long periods are found in disproportionate numbers in the population of young offender institutions and prisons. In her study of women, poverty and crime in England, Carlen (1988) considered a small number of women who had been brought up in care. She argues that experience of care had broken the women's attachments to family and friends, and failed to equip them with a whole range of knowledge necessary to independent adult living. (The same argument may apply to boys who have had a similar experience of care). The women had responded by engaging in deviant behaviours, born either of a desire to establish ties with some person or group or of a sense that they had never been able to obtain the rewards of social respectability. Relationships are considered separately below,

but it is important to note here that Carlen found experience of local authority care to be one of the major reasons for offending by the women in her study.

In their study of young offenders in the Scottish criminal justice system, Kennedy and McIvor (1992) found that the majority of their sample were males. Just over half the offenders were known to have had previous appearances at a Children's Hearing; most of these had been referred on at least one occasion on offence grounds, and all but one had been made subject to some form of supervision by a social work department. In their sample, more boys (75%) than girls (68%) were initially referred to the Children's Hearing for offence-related matters; and more girls (16%) than boys (3.2%) were initially referred as a result of being a victim of a Schedule 1 offence - that is, a victim of sexual abuse, assault, abandonment or neglect.

Two English studies argue that idealisations of femininity also operate in care proceedings. Hudson (1985) argues that teenage boys are allowed a developmental space for behavioural experimentation prior to their emergence into adulthood, whereas the same is not true for teenage girls. The majority of girls are not placed in care because they have committed offences, but because of concerns about their perceived sexual behaviour and/or because they are seen to be 'at risk' of 'offending' against social codes of adolescent femininity. Webb (1984) also notes that girls are made subject to care orders for less serious offences than those committed by boys. This suggests that magistrates have certain attitudes towards girls. It is not clear, due to a lack of research in this area, whether the Scottish system of Children's Hearings overcomes this problem of idealisations of feminine behaviour.

It appears that past experience of being in local authority care is a strong predictor of offending, for both males and females. However, girls tend to be taken into care as a result of being a victim of an offence, or because of conventional beliefs (by Children's Hearing members/magistrates) as to what is acceptable behaviour for young females, rather than for their own offending behaviour. The effects of this are clearly detrimental to young women (Carlen 1988).

## Sexual and non-sexual abuse

As will be seen below, there are strong findings for the argument that family violence is closely linked to present or later offending by the victim of such violence. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales has recognised the high numbers of women in prison with histories of emotional, sexual and physical abuse (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 1997). Loucks (1998) has also noted this in Scotland, and that few women received help in response to their victimisation. Common factors in family violence - that is, child abuse and spouse abuse - include a poor relationship between abuser and victim, dependency, low self-esteem, emotional and social isolation, marital difficulties, ill-health, depression, poor self-control and a history of abuse and neglect as a child. While different forms of family violence are usually discussed in isolation from each other, all forms of violence in the family are interrelated (Browne 1989).

The belief that women and children are subordinate to men and in particular to the husband/father is largely accepted and supported by society (Edinburgh District Council Women's Committee 1993). Feminists emphasise the failure of conventional crime surveys to measure the largely sub-criminal harassment which women experience at the hands of men as part of everyday life (Stanko 1995). The 1994 British Crime Survey has made some progress in measuring the types of harassment which may be fear-inducing if not always criminal: 'The results for women were ... a little unexpected ... (women) worry about harassment and attacks by members of one's own family.' (Hough 1995, p.23). However, subsequent analysis did not focus on this aspect of fear of crime.

Abuse outside the family is also considered here – notably sexual abuse, and in particular issues concerned with rape.

## Child abuse

The term 'child abuse' covers emotional, physical and sexual abuse. All three types of abuse will be considered here, but as far more has been written about sexual abuse this will be examined in greater detail.

Physical and emotional abuse of children includes actual physical abuse, psychological abuse (such as humiliation, extreme inconsistency and lying; Furnell 1987), and emotional and physical neglect (Wolfe 1991). Physical and emotional forms of child abuse may interfere with long-term development. Such children have been reported to be developmentally delayed, including language development (Appelbaum 1977), and behaviourally disordered, including having higher rates of aggression (Shaw-Lamphear 1985). Not surprisingly, such children often report greater feelings of hopelessness, depression and low self-worth (Fantuzzo 1990, Salter 1995).

Sexual abuse of children has been defined as any exploitation of a child under the age of 16 for the sexual pleasure and gratification of the adult. This ranges from indecent exposure and voyeurism, such as watching a child undress, to fondling, taking pornographic pictures, attempted intercourse and rape (Elliot 1988). As with emotionally and physically abused children, the sexually abused child may suffer from intellectual, emotional, social, moral and physical damage (Cooper 1978).

Studies show that more girls than boys are sexually abused (see, for example, the Scottish research of Hartless et al. 1995 and Anderson et al. 1994). One study reported that one in eight girls and one in 12 boys had been victims of sexual abuse (Edinburgh District Council Women's Committee 1993). Various other studies of child sexual abuse put the estimate much higher: for example, around one in four girls are abused before they reach the age of sixteen (Peters et al. 1986). A child may be abused once or the abuse may last for months or years. As awareness of the problem increases, the reported average age of abused children decreases. Statistics in this area are often unreliable because children are reluctant to tell others that they are being abused and, where they do tell, they may not be believed.

Victim surveys, both large-scale and local, suggest a high degree of victimisation and support the view that there is extensive under-reporting of crimes (Henham 1997). There is no reason to suppose that sexual offences are any more reported than other offences; on the contrary, they are less likely to be reported (Hartless et al. 1995). The majority of perpetrators are not strangers to the children, but usually live in the home of the victim at

the time the abuse occurs and are often in a position of authority or trust over the child (Waterhouse et al,1994). The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children found in a study of registrations of sexual abuse of children that perpetrators were registered in 90% of cases: natural fathers were suspected in 25% of the cases, father-substitutes in 20%, brothers and other relatives in 23%, mothers in two per cent, both parents in three per cent and others in 17% of cases (NSPCC 1989).

Recorded offences of sexual assault (comprising rape, assault with intent to ravish and indecent assault) in Scotland in 1996 stood at 1,729 (Scottish Office 1997c). Unfortunately the statistics are not broken down into male and female complainants; neither is it known if these figures relate to child or adult victims. Official statistics in Scotland in 1995 show that 133 men were found guilty of sexual assault, compared to one female. As Edwards notes, 'Child sexual abuse is the systematic abuse of children by adult men, which is both ahistorical and cross cultural.' (1996, p.269).

The effects of child sexual abuse are pervasive and harmful. Unresolved fear or grief tends to manifest itself in males in later aggressive or violent behaviour; in women, in psychiatric disorder, self-harm or depression (Boswell 1995). Depression appears to be found more often in adult survivors of child sexual abuse than any other symptom (Browne and Finkelhor 1986). Stein et al. (1988) found six and a half times the rate of current major depressive disorder in sexually abused women than in controls. Depression is apparently neither late-emerging (Lanktree et al. 1991) nor transitory (Dubowitz et al. 1993). Chronic, sometimes severe, anxiety is also frequently associated with a history of child sexual abuse (Salter 1995). Saunders et al. (1992) found that abused women had 16 times the rate of agoraphobia, four times the rate of panic disorder, five times the rate of obsessive-compulsive disorder and almost four times the rate of social phobia as non-abused women. Suicidality, drug addiction and alcoholism are also frequently found to be effects of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor 1988).

Research suggests that adult survivors have a high incidence of being re-victimised as adults. Wyatt et al. (1992) found that women sexually abused as children were almost two and a half times more likely than controls to be re-abused sexually as adults. A study which

compared those sexually abused as children, those abused as adults and those abused as both children and adults (Murphy et al. 1988) found higher rates of depression, anxiety and hostility in those women abused as both children and adults over the other two groups. Their findings suggest that child sexual abuse does have an impact over and above re-victimisation as adults. The findings are perhaps surprising given that child sexual abuse was often decades distant from the subjects and that adult sexual abuse was more recent. The negative impact in child sexual abuse cases comes from the depth of the betrayal (Salter 1995).

Turning specifically to sexually abused women as offenders, Walmsley et al. (1992), in the National Prison Survey for England and Wales, found that 60% of women in prison had been subjected to sexual abuse from their parents, husbands or partners, before coming into prison. Loucks (1998) found that almost half the women in Cornton Vale prison (46.7%) in Scotland had experienced sexual abuse, mainly during childhood, from fathers or other male relatives or guardians.

The vast majority of young people who commit violent offences have been the victims of abuse or trauma (Boswell 1995). Waterhouse et al. (1994) found that 23% of abusers had suffered some form of physical or sexual abuse: six per cent had suffered physical abuse, 12% had been the victims of sexual abuse and five per cent had been both physically and sexually abused as a child. When considering offences other than abuse, committed by the victims of abuse, a larger percentage of abuse victims as perpetrators is indicated. Boswell (1995), in her survey of 200 10 to 17 year olds in custody for violent offences, found that three-quarters had themselves been the victim of emotional, physical or sexual abuse: almost 30% had suffered emotional abuse, approximately the same number had suffered sexual abuse and 40% had experienced physical abuse; in addition, 27% had experienced two or more of these forms of abuse.

The idea that violence begets violence has become firmly established in the minds of professionals and the general public alike (Widom 1989). Kirsta has noted the cycle of abuse and points out that: 'a frequent confession made by survivors was feeling the urge to abuse children themselves, or actually doing so' (1994, p.283).

This therefore begs the question: why do not more women, given their high incidence of victimisation, abuse children? In their research into 501 child sexual abusers in Scotland, Waterhouse et al. (1994) found that male perpetrators comprised 99.4% of the sample, while only three female abusers were recorded. One factor could be that cases of females who commit sex offences are rarely brought before the courts because of the difficulty of proof (Kirsta 1994).

Socialisation of females, which includes caring for and not harming others, could also help answer the question posed above. Those who 'break through' this socialisation, Welldon (1993) argues, may be women with an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and lack of self-esteem who are drawn to pregnancy and parenthood as a means of compensating for this inadequacy, since it offers women instant, automatic and complete power.

Further, mothers who kill are believed to be in need of medical treatment, whereas fathers who kill are more often sent to prison. Wilczynski (1993) studied 395 parents, 44% of whom were mothers, suspected of murdering their children. The fathers were more commonly convicted of manslaughter on grounds of provocation or lack of intention to kill or cause serious harm. Of the mothers, however, a large number had their murder charge reduced to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility or to infanticide - a crime that refers specifically to the killing of a child under the age of 12 months by its mother. According to Wilczynski (1993), puerperal psychosis (a severe version of post-natal depression) accounts for only five per cent of cases of babies murdered by their mothers. She argues that the boundaries of the disorder are constantly being stretched to accommodate women whose behaviour fails to fit accepted notions of caring, capable and self-sacrificing motherhood. Her argument goes some way towards confirming part of Pollak's (1950) thesis on the 'masked' nature of women's crimes (see Chapter One).

Widom (1984) argues that females are likely to manifest the long-term consequences of abuse and neglect in other, and perhaps more subtle, ways. In line with traditional socialisation practices, abused females may be more likely to suffer depression and undergo psychiatric hospitalisation as a consequence of these early childhood experiences, rather than directing their aggression outwards (Bryer et al. 1987). As Widom (1989)



notes, previous knowledge concerning the link between child abuse and neglect and adult violent criminal behaviour has been limited by relatively little empirical evidence, inconsistent findings and studies suffering from a number of methodological problems. In her own study on the relation between child abuse and violent adult criminal behaviour in the USA, she found that being abused as a child significantly increases one's risk of having an adult criminal record. For males, this is a risk of having an adult record for a violent crime. Females on the other hand are at increased risk for property, drug and order offences. However, Widom acknowledges that interpretation of her results is complicated by the fact that the type of abuse and neglect suffered by females and males differs somewhat, and this in turn may influence differential long-term consequences.

It should be noted that Widom used officially recorded cases of abuse and neglect, and both she, and Pagelow (1982), have documented the problems in this area. Pagelow, for example, suggests that labelling these children, disrupting their residence with their family and stigmatising their parents may create a self-fulfilling prophecy that can be difficult to overcome. Widom concludes that, 'the pathway from childhood victimisation to adult criminal behaviour is far from inevitable' (1989, p.266). Twenty nine per cent of her abused and neglected subjects had adult criminal records, but the majority (71%) did not. She concludes, 'Designs, such as this one, that depend on archival data are weak in understanding process' (ibid., p.267).

Sanford (1991) argues that most victims of childhood abuse are not trapped in a vicious circle of abuse, going on to become perpetrators of violence themselves. She stresses that children can survive emotionally intact if adults provide them with a sense of safety and well-being in the aftermath of traumatic events. However, when the source of the trouble is within the family, protection and compassion are usually lacking, and the creation of a personal disaster by a loved one is bewildering and overwhelming. Forming attachments as children to other adults, and, in adulthood, belonging to a support group or forming a loving relationship, all help survivors break free from patterns of victimisation and go on to lead healthy lives. Research by Loucks (1998) in Cornton Vale shows that relatively few female victims of abuse had received any help in response to their victimisation. However, as it is not possible to collect comprehensive data on victims who receive help, due

(amongst other reasons) to the sensitive nature of the subject and the likelihood of non-disclosure, it cannot be stated whether those who do not receive help are more likely to offend in the future than those who do receive help.

To conclude, child abuse has a strong, detrimental effect on the lives of victims. Men tend to be the perpetrators of abuse and women the victims of abuse. Victims of abuse, and in particular female victims, suffer in disproportionate numbers from depression. (This is discussed below: see Mental illness). Abuse is also often linked to later offending behaviour; this appears to be violent crimes for men and property and order offences for women, although the reasons for this pattern are not entirely clear.

### Adult abuse

'Adult abuse' covers both sexual and non-sexual abuse. As with child sexual abuse, adult sexual abuse can take various forms, ranging from sexual harassment to rape. As noted above (Child abuse), recorded cases of sexual assault (comprising rape, assault with intent to ravish and indecent assault) in Scotland stood at 1,729 in 1996 (Scottish Office 1997c), and unfortunately, the statistics are not broken down by age or into male and female complainants.

It is universally acknowledged that the number of rapes reported to the police is but the 'tip of the iceberg' (Temkin 1995). The US National Crime Victimization Survey of 1990 estimated that only 54% of rapes were reported to the police. Other studies have found a much higher incidence of (unreported) rape, for example Koss et al's (1987) research among American students found that virtually none of those claiming to have been raped during the course of the previous year had reported the matter to the police. 'That the numbers debate has not reached British shores is a reflection of the relative lack of research on sexual assault carried out here,' concludes Temkin (1995, p.xvii). Neither the British Crime Survey nor the Scottish Crime Survey (see Anderson and Leitch 1996, p.3) attempt to provide an estimate of the extent of sexual assault. Other victimisation surveys that attempt to gauge the incidence of rape in Britain are hard to find (Temkin 1995).

Non-sexual violent crimes made up less than five per cent of recorded crime in Scotland in 1995 (Scottish Office 1997). However, domestic violence, by far the largest category of such crimes, is seldom reported. In Britain, some 100,000 women a year seek help from Women's Aid refuges; and it is believed that there are many more victims who do not seek help (Ghazi 1994).

Research by Smith et al. (1993), which reviewed the clinical notes of patients attending an Accident and Emergency Department, found that 35% of the women had been attacked by their spouse or cohabitee and 19% by their boyfriends. Twenty five per cent of women in the study did not have an assailant recorded. Only eight per cent of the male cases involved attacks by their spouse or cohabitee, and four per cent involved attacks by their girlfriends. Over half of the male victims did not have their assailant noted in the medical records, and this has led the researchers to point to the possibility that the scale of adult domestic violence against men is an underestimate. Other studies (such as Gelles and Straus 1988, and Browne 1993) suggest that the incidence of husband-battering is higher than commonly expected. Turner (1988) argues that female sexual abuse survivors are sometimes driven to form relationships with placid men whom they know they can dominate, using anger as a means of 'getting even' with their early abuser. However, George (1992), in his study of 38 male victims of domestic violence, found that the majority of the female partners had little or no childhood experience of violence. When asked whether they could identify reasons for the violence of their partner, most described their wives as becoming violent and abusive when their wishes remained unfulfilled. The women's views are unknown. Kirsta (1994) notes that men feel isolated and humiliated about admitting they are victims and thus are invisible as victims within the domestic arena. However, American researchers Steinmetz and Lucca (1988) suggest that, unlike their female counterparts, battered men retained their self-esteem and saw only their wives as having a problem. Nevertheless, research tends to confirm that assaults against women by their partners are much more common than assaults against men by their partners (Kirsta 1994).

Further, men's attacks on their female partners result in many more serious injuries. Browne (1993) studied a student population in Leicester and found that males exhibited forms of violence, such as systematic assault and using a weapon, more often than females.

Browne also found that both men and women who had experienced physical abuse or severe physical punishment in childhood were three times more likely to use violence to resolve conflict or stress in their own adult relationships.

Turning specifically to female victims of spouse abuse and their offending behaviour, Walmsley et al. (1992), in the National Prison Survey for England and Wales, found that 80% of women in prison had been subjected to violence from their parents, husbands or partners, before coming into prison. In Scotland, Loucks (1998) found that 60% of women prisoners had been the victims of physical abuse and just over 70% (71.1%) of the women had experienced emotional abuse, virtually daily and usually from a partner.

Walker (1979) identified the 'battered woman syndrome' and outlined the central concepts of the cycle of violence (tension-building, an explosion of violence and a period of loving), and of, eventually, learned helplessness (feelings of powerlessness). North American studies have shown that about half of the women who have killed their menfolk are believed to have done so because of the violence they suffered at the hands of the men (see for example Bullock and Waldo 1992). The theory of the 'battered woman syndrome' helps to explain why many women who are the victims of long term violence fail to leave an abusive partner. As well as practical considerations, such as no alternative accommodation, they have little self-esteem and they are in terror of their attackers. They may also have emotional ties to the abuser, which increase the difficulty of leaving (O'Donovan 1991). While not condoning their actions, the battered women syndrome theory sees as 'reasonable' the use of fatal violence as a preventative measure to the threat of serious physical and/or psychological damage. However, Jones (1991) cautions that this theory may have the effect of transforming a social issue into a psychological problem.

The 'battered woman syndrome' has been used successfully as a defence in various countries around the world since the early 1980s. In Australia, for example, it has been used in relation to provocation, dissociative state (an act or omission which occurs independently of the exercise of the will, and resulting from abuse, shock or stress), and to duress (Tyler 1994b). In Britain, considerable media attention has been paid in recent years to the sentences given to the small number of women who have killed their violent partners.

In Scotland, a woman who killed her husband during another attack by him was judicially admonished (McKain 1995). In England, judges in two separate murder trials refused to consider provocation; the women's respective convictions for murder were quashed when the appeal courts accepted pleas of guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility (Travis 1995). It should be noted that diminished responsibility, unlike provocation, shifts the blame from the violent man. According to Kennedy (1993), the outcome of cases involving women who murder their violent partners is still very much like a lottery, depending largely on the attitude of the judge and the prosecutor - and the impression conveyed by the defendant.

To conclude, there is strong evidence to support the view that women, rather than men, are the victims of abuse, whether by partners or by strangers. In addition, adult experiences of sexual abuse, revictimisation and violent relationships are almost wholly a female experience. Evidence also suggests a link between women who are the victims of such violence and their offending behaviour; however, due to the difficulties of collecting data on victims of abuse, it cannot be stated that women who are victims are any more likely to be offenders. Indeed, it is probable that most women who are victims of violence do not offend. Further, as with child abuse, it is difficult to separate out abuse issues from factors such as environment and personality (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 1997). Further research is needed in this area.

## Relationships

Women's experiences of 'being female' are mediated by their bodies, their minds and their social interaction (Worrall 1990). Sets of relationships cluster around the socially ambiguous status of dependence (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1982). On the one hand, femininity is characterised by self-control and independence; being a 'normal' woman means coping, caring, nurturing and sacrificing self-interest to the needs of others. On the other hand, it is characterised by lack of control and dependence; being a normal woman means needing protection (Hutter and Williams 1981).

Dickson (1982) describes what she calls the 'compassion trap', in which women have a sense of obligation that they should always put everyone else's needs first. She goes on to argue that women tend to respond to such demands in ways which are understandable but ultimately destructive - they tend to lurch between passivity and aggressiveness.

Referring to studies which attempt to account for gender identity, which is established early in the child's life and usually firmly fixed, Gilligan (1982) argues that relationships are experienced differently by women and men. For boys and men, separation and an individual identity are critically tied to gender identity, since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother. Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, males tend to have difficulty with relationships while females tend to have problems with an individual identity. This involves more than a descriptive difference, however, argues Gilligan (1982), as there is also a developmental liability: in the psychological literature, childhood and adolescent development is marked by increasing separation, and women's failure to separate becomes by definition a failure to develop. In Kohlberg's (1973) work on moral development, for example, he cites the 25-year old (male) response, as identifying morality with the recognition of the primacy of the rights of the individual. In her study, Gilligan found the 25-year old female response was based on 'a very strong sense of being responsible to the world.' (1982 p.21).

Further, the assumption is that the male model is the better one since it fits the requirements for modern corporate success. In contrast, the sensitivity and care for the feelings of others that girls develop through their play (see Lever 1976 and Gilligan 1982 for an account of the differences in games played by, respectively, boys and girls) have little market value and can even impede professional success.

Thus, the values of women often differ from the values of men, and yet it is the masculine values that prevail. As a result, argues Gilligan (1982), women come to question the normality of their feelings and to alter their judgments in deference to the opinion of others.

Women's deference is rooted not only in their social subordination but also in their moral concern.

In interviews with 20 female prisoners in Scotland, Carlen (1983) found that the women always talked about themselves in relation to the family: the family life which they thought other people had and which they themselves hoped to have; the family life which they had rejected and which had often left them physically bruised and emotionally battered. Most of the women Carlen (1983) spoke to had a romanticised and conventional view of family life - that is, a man and a wife bound by ties of affection living together with their offspring in the marital home - but their own experience departed sharply from this ideal. Carlen argued that women in prison have transgressed both the formal laws of society and the informal rules that define femininity; and many find the experience threatening to their self-identity as women.

However, in her study of women, poverty and crime, Carlen (1988) considered a small number of women who had been brought up in care. She argues that women have traditionally been contained within two sites of social control: class and gender. Most working-class women, she claims, combine these two sites because of the ideology of the rewards of respectable working-class womanhood - that is, male-related domesticity coupled with a wage-earning job. Women who have been in care, she argues, perceive themselves to be marginalised, with little opportunity or inclination to put into practice the class or gender ideology. Carlen continues that experience of care had broken the women's attachments to family and friends, and failed to equip them with a whole range of knowledge necessary to independent adult living. The women had responded by engaging in deviant behaviours, born either of a desire to establish ties with some person or group or of a sense that they had never been able to obtain the rewards of social respectability. Further, in their relationships with their state guardians (social workers and social work departments), the women in her study had sensed themselves as being debtors within an imaginary debtor-creditor relationship. One result of this, argues Carlen, was that instead of gaining an independence in personal relationships, the young women had come to fear relationships as always threatening independence.

Relational theorists stress that a break up of relational bonding in society has weakened our sense of duty to other people (Schluter and Dee 1993). This approach regards crime primarily as a breakdown in relationships (Schluter 1994); an absence of family and community bonding increases the likelihood that anti-social feelings in an individual will be translated into offending behaviour (Farrington 1993).

Schluter (1994) notes that the current perspective on the world emphasises personal freedom and responsibility, rather than human relationships. Self-understanding (holding in balance choice and obligation) and a sense of purpose and happiness come from our relationships. Stability of relationships in childhood are crucial here. Schluter also points to major social trends which have had the effect of reducing face-to-face contact, and with it a sense of community involvement and responsibility, such as cashpoints instead of bank cashiers and computer games rather than street games.

Research on children's attitudes suggests that there is a growing trend for boys to take refuge in a fantasy world, while girls are more pragmatic and realistic (ChildWise 1997). It has been found that boys favour violent computer games, while girls use their computers for learning programmes; that boys prefer sports channels and violent/fantasy cartoons on television, while girls choose 'soap operas', saying that they learn about human relationships through viewing them; and that boys favour football as their top career choice, while the majority of girls choose child care, closely followed by teacher. The researchers conclude that boys are not motivated to make a contribution to society (ibid.).

Walker points to the power of human relationships to change people both for ill and for good. 'No man - or woman - is an island ... Good relationships can bring about positive change through care and encouragement. Destructive relationships, such as those where there is no trust, only fear of abuse or rejection, damage people deeply' (1994, p.147).

The research suggests that relationships play an important role in women's lives. Concern for others (and fear of social consequences: see Chapter One) may explain why women tend *not* to offend. On the other hand, a relationship with a partner who offends may result in some form of pressure on the woman to offend. This could not be considered peer group



pressure, where a young person wishes to conform to the behaviour and values of their peer group, but the result of either a desire by the woman to show her partner the depth of her love or fear of the consequences if she refuses to carry out a criminal act ordered (directly or indirectly) by her partner.

### Poverty/Unemployment

There is no official way of measuring poverty and no official poverty line, but unofficial methods are used to estimate the extent of the problem. These methods include examining the number of people on income support, on income less than half the average wage and those on family credit. All three methods have shown a rise in poverty in both Scotland (Quigley 1996) and the UK generally (Oppenheim and Harker 1996). The number of people living in poverty in Scotland has more than doubled since 1979; almost a million people in 1996 were either claiming income support or were dependants in a family claiming income support (Quigley 1996). Box (1987) points out even these figures are 'an undercount because Ministers of Employment since 1979 have altered the counting procedures to massage the figure gently downwards.' (1987, p.2). Britain also had more children living in poverty - one in three - than any other country in the European Union in 1993, and is second only to Portugal in having the largest number of people living below the poverty line in the EU (Eurostat 1997).

The major sources of data on poverty are not broken down by sex; income is measured by the household or family unit. However, it is possible to make a rough estimate of how many women are living on benefit by making assumptions about the number of women who are single parents, pensioners and so forth. Thus, it is estimated that in 1992 approximately 5.4 million women and 4.2 million men were living in poverty (defined as on and below the income support level; Oppenheim and Harker 1996).

The causes of women's poverty can be said to be three-fold (Glendinning and Millar 1992): unpaid work (women are (still) responsible for the bulk of domestic labour and for caring for dependents), paid work (many of the traditionally-female occupations, such as catering,

cleaning and selling, have high proportions of low-paid and of part-time workers) and the distribution of money, food and other goods inside the home (women often put the needs of their families above their own, thus a woman can be in poverty while other members of her family are not or are in less poverty). Oppenheim and Harker (1996) add a fourth factor: failures in the social security system. They argue that Beveridge's original scheme, which assumed a traditional family unit of a full-time male breadwinner and a woman at home looking after the house and children, has not kept pace with changes in women's roles and employment patterns.

Generally, the least well qualified are most likely to be unemployed (Taylor 1996). However, although at age 18-19 women are better qualified than men in Scotland, with 51 % of women compared to 41 % of men holding Higher Grades (Taylor 1996), unemployment is particularly high for young women as opposed to young men. For example, in 1996 in the under 20 age group there were some seven % of unemployed males, but almost double that percentage of unemployed females (see Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 Claimants of unemployment benefit by age and sex, Scotland, 1996**

PERCENTAGES AGED							
	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-plus	Total no's
Males	7.4	35.6	24.6	16.9	14.2	1.3	160,000
Females	13.2	36.3	17.9	16.9	15.7	0	46,800

Source: Employment Department (from Regional Trends 31, 1996).

It should be noted that as these figures are based on unemployment benefit claimants, the actual number of unemployed people may be higher, particularly for women who may not be 'available for work' due to a lack of alternative child care arrangements.

A number of theorists and researchers suggest that economic hardship forces some individuals to seek illegal means of acquiring the material goods necessary to enjoy a reasonable standard of living. Cantor and Land (1985) refer to strain theories, conflict/Marxist theories, labelling theory and social control theory as all pointing to a

positive correlation between unemployment and crime. Scarman (1982), Dickinson (1993), Routledge (1994) and Wells (1995) all report a link between unemployment and offending among males in England. Kennedy and McIvor (1992) found unemployment and financial gain to be important in their study of young offenders in Scotland. Carlen (1988) found poverty to be one of the major factors explicitly identified by her study group of 39 women in England as being a prime constituent of their law-breaking. In Morris et al.'s (1995) research on female prisoners in England, 60% of the women had been living solely on benefits.

Box (1987) argues that income inequality is strongly related to criminal activity, with the exception of homicide; and that those who have been unemployed for a long period of time are the most likely to turn to crime. Cook (1989) stresses that poverty *causes* fraud, a particularly common offence amongst females.

Others believe that unemployment bears little or no relationship to crime. Reviews of the existing literature by Long and Witte (1981) and Freeman (1983) found a weak connection, and a review by Tarling (1982) of relevant research found no connection. Young (1996) argues that rising crime is not caused by unemployment, but that statistics show merely that the unemployed are more likely to be stopped or arrested by the police. Orme's (1994) study found that recorded property crimes began to increase before unemployment started to increase. Farrington et al. argue that unemployment 'did not seem to cause basically law-abiding youths to commit crimes' (1986, p.351). Further, as Box (1987) points out, there are many other potentially destructive responses to unemployment, including depression, drug addiction and suicide.

Farrington et al. (1986) argue that in order to draw conclusions about individuals, it is necessary to carry out research based on individuals. Gormally et al.'s (1981) self-report study discovered that the unemployed admitted more offences than the employed. Moynihan and Coleman (1996) argue that there are many variables which can make an individual prone to both crime and unemployment, for example a criminal record obtained by a young person before he or she officially enters the labour market may adversely affect job prospects. Farrington et al. (1986) found that unemployment was associated with a

higher rate of committing crimes for material gain, and not other kinds of crime, suggesting that one link in the chain between unemployment and crime may be financial need.

It can be seen, then, that the link between unemployment and crime is very complex. However, little has been written on female unemployment and offending. Some writers have been explicit about their male bias (such as Lea and Young 1984), 'although the caveat disappears in their general discussion' (Naffine and Gale 1989, p.145). Other writers have been less forthcoming about the masculinity of their viewpoint, even though, Naffine and Gale (1989) argue, it is essential to their argument. A significant exception to this criminological neglect of women is the work of Box and Hale (for example, Box and Hale 1983, 1984, 1985; Box 1987), who have also drawn attention to the fact that the unemployment theory of crime basically constitutes an explanation of the offending of young males, and that it is predicated on cultural assumptions about what represents success for the male, not the female. Thus the implications of female unemployment for female offending remain poorly understood.

Naffine and Gale (1989) note that writers interested in drawing lines of connection between women, crime and the economy have tended to focus on the impact of improved opportunities for offending by women as a result of their participation in the labour force (see Adler 1975). The available evidence on the socio-economic status of known criminal women suggests that poor job chances, rather than career success with its associated illicit opportunities, supplies the incentive to offend (see Chapman 1980 in the USA, Box and Hale 1984 in the UK).

The problem posed by such findings, argue Naffine and Gale (1989), is that if unemployment precipitates offending there are clearly countervailing influences at work in the case of females, who are more law-abiding than males despite high rates of unemployment. One possible explanation may be that young unemployed females sometimes opt for early domesticity rather than criminal solutions (Wallace 1984). Another explanation is that the criminal justice system is likely to be less punitive to the unemployed female, believing her to be less of a threat to the community than the male and therefore not processing her as a criminal (Box and Hale 1985). Alternatively, it may be

that sex role socialisation explains the greater conformity of females (Naffine 1987). However, research shows that work, rather than the traditional domestic role, has become the central concern of young women (Alder 1986a). Another explanation of the low crime rates of girls despite their poor employment prospects is that young females have come to accept their situation (Alder 1986b).

Despite the many interesting questions raised by the connection between female unemployment and female crime, criminologists have shown little specific interest in exploring the subject. Naffine and Gale (1989) seek to rectify this with their study in Australia. Whilst acknowledging the shortcomings of research based on official crime figures (for example, their survey period spans three pieces of legislation) and on official unemployment figures (such as many women become housewives by default and are then not counted as part of the official labour force; Windschuttle 1979), Naffine and Gale (1989) found unemployment rates higher for females and crime rates higher for males. They conclude: 'If (criminologists) had proceeded from female data, or thought to compare the behaviour of the sexes, they would necessarily have reached different conclusions about the links between unemployment and crime.' (ibid., p.151).

Merton argued that where material success is denied by legitimate means, some individuals adapt in such a way as to bring them into conflict with the criminal law. However, Merton did not attempt to apply his structural theory to women (Leonard 1982), yet, within his theoretical framework, there should be at least as much crime by women as by men, since most women are concentrated in low-paid and low-status jobs and opportunity structures are less open to them (Morris 1987). Morris (1964) suggests that the goals of women may be relational goals rather than the financial goals sought by men. Leonard (1982) argues that women are traditionally socialised to have very low aspirations (marriage and a family) and their goals are extremely accessible.

However, research indicates not so much an acceptance of these relational goals as an awareness of the lack of realistic alternatives to them (Lees 1986). Morris (1987) points out that in schools girls achieve well initially; reduced achievement occurs for many only after they reach adolescence. This seems due partly to pressure on girls to adhere to traditional

role definitions and partly to the internalisation of the low expectations which our culture holds for them. But this does not mean that the goal or aspiration to succeed is abandoned, she continues; rather, it may mean that women experience conflict in these aspirations. Further, Morris (1987) notes that marriage for women could be considered a legitimate means of achieving financial goals. If marriage is the goal of most women then, whether the goal is a financial or a relational one, or both, it can be argued that as most women marry their goal is accessible. However, many marriages end in divorce, and it is estimated that half of all marriages are touched by wife abuse (ibid.). Because of the romanticised notions of marriage, it is plausible that the reality does result in frustration.

Rather than attempting to analyse the crimes which women commit within the 'goal of marriage' framework, it may be better to consider their crimes as part of Merton's original economic model. But the question as to why women's recorded crime rate is not higher than men's remains unanswered by anomie theorists, who argue that the dominant goal in (American) society is financial success. Perhaps Box (1983) has the answer: he suggested that girls' response to blocked opportunity structures is likely to be different from boys' in that they will 'internalise blame' since 'they have been socialised to *endure* the female's lot in life'. In consequence, '... women's disorganised and spontaneous 'protests' are more likely to be channelled away from innovative criminal behaviour and into retreatist and self-defeatist adaptations' (ibid., p.181).

Research on links between unemployment, poverty, and crime is far from consistent. Unemployment may well be one of a number of variables associated with crime; the evidence is not conclusive, but on balance the studies suggest a causal relationship. However, why there are a large number of women unemployed and/or living in poverty and yet relatively few female offenders needs to be carefully studied.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

### Mental illness

Although Lombroso and Ferrero's (1895) work on women's criminality was the first such study (see Chapter One), it was the medical profession which set the parameters of - and responses to - women's deviance (Edwards 1984). Offending women have long been studied by medical and psychiatric professionals, not only because of their supposed uniqueness but also because of the supposed threat they pose to the social order of stable, family relationships (Sim 1990). Whilst it may be that mental illness is an alternative deviant 'outlet' for women (see Smart 1976 for a discussion of this), of relevance to this research is the argument that mental illness accompanies criminal behaviour by women.

Studies have shown that women are more likely than men to be diagnosed as suffering from mental illness (for example, MacDonald 1981, Vrandenberg et al. 1986, Showalter 1985). This statistical fact may be interpreted in a number of ways. One argument is that women's role in modern society is responsible for their high rates of stress and mental illness. Adler (1975) argues that women are having a difficult time coping with the new status for which they have striven. However, this ignores the stresses occasioned by the dual role of homemaker and breadwinner many women have, and not necessarily through their own choice (Smart 1976). Gove and Tudor (1973) are critical of the low status of women in advanced industrial society. Before puberty, boys and girls suffer depression to an approximately equal degree; about five in 100 teenagers are seriously depressed (Graham and Hughes 1995). By the age of 15 or 16, the rate is twice as high for girls as for boys. Graham and Hughes argue that girls respond to stress with depressive reactions more often than boys, because they are more emotionally involved in relationships.

Heidensohn (1985) has noted the social control of women, which operates as constraints on their everyday lives. That women are also controlled by their socialisation has been well-documented (see for example Kagan 1964, Nicholson 1984, Tischler 1994). These controls and bonds are highly effective in that they make criminality a difficult course for women to take (Heidensohn 1985). Whilst recognising the mechanisms which might keep women out

of the courts, the price that is paid in mental and physical health and in personal fulfilment must be noted (Mathiesen 1980, Cain 1989).

Gelsthorpe (1989) points out that much of the evidence of mental instability amongst women has been derived from institutionalised samples. Numerous studies (for example, Cowie et al. 1968, Richardson 1969) have noted high rates of 'psychiatric disorder' for institutionalised female delinquents (higher than samples of institutionalised male delinquents; see for example Goodman et al. 1976). Both Gunn et al. (1978) and Coid (1984) have noted that high levels of stress are frequent among prisoners. Further, Blackburn (1993) points out that although it would appear that a third or more of prisoners show some form of mental disorder, this is mainly a reflection of high rates of alcohol and drug abuse and personality disorder. It is unclear whether the rates of disorder in prisoners are significantly different from general population rates. Rates for lower socio-economic groups, from which prisoners are more likely to be drawn, are higher than for higher socio-economic groups (Blackburn 1993).

Although official figures show that more women than men have been admitted to psychiatric hospital in Scotland over the last ten years (Scottish Health Statistics 1996), first admissions for females have been consistently falling, and have risen for men, during this period. In addition, for the 15-44 age group over the last decade, males have had a higher admission rate than females (*ibid.*).

Smart (1976) discusses the significance of the process by which women become defined as mentally ill. She notes that mental illness may be treated as accompanying criminal behaviour in women, with the consequence that attention is devoted to 'treatment' focused on the individual. This, she says, is serious, particularly when the treatment is oriented towards their resocialisation into their 'correct' social role.

Women appearing before the courts are approximately twice as likely as men to be dealt with by psychiatric means, even though disordered female offenders are regarded as less disturbed than their male counterparts (Allen 1987). 'The fashionable preference for consensual and community based treatment actually makes it easier to offer medical



treatment to those offenders who seem least disturbed' (ibid., p.114). Allen argues that sentencers are reluctant to recognise and treat mental disorder in male offenders. Further, Dell et al. (1993) found in their study of prisoners remanded for possible psychiatric intervention, that a greater proportion of women than men were referred for a second opinion and women were more likely than men to be offered a bed. At an even later stage in the criminal justice system, Grounds (1991) found that women are more likely than men to be transferred from prison to special hospitals, with, notes Maden (1996), inappropriately high levels of security.

It has been suggested that psychiatric explanations for criminal conduct are more frequently invoked in women than men (Prins 1982). Milne et al. (1995), in their study of sex differences in patients admitted to a Regional Secure Unit in England, found that women were less likely than men to have a prosecuted offence associated with admission, with the exception of arson. Why there should be a psychiatric explanation for the offence of arson is unclear. Although it has been noted that more boys than girls are found to have committed the offence of fire-raising (see Age above), this is also true of a number of other offences (see Offences Committed by Women, below).

In summary, it is unclear whether women are in fact more likely than men to suffer mental illness, yet offending women are more likely to be perceived as suffering from a mental illness than are offending men.

### Alcohol and drug abuse

The drinking of alcohol is not of course illegal *per se*, but there are a number of drink-related offences, such as drunkenness and drunk driving. In addition, it is argued that alcohol abuse can lead to (other) criminal activity.

Alcohol consumption is deeply embedded within British culture. The average age of first trying alcohol is 12 years for both boys and girls (Boseley 1997). Nearly all (94%) 15- and 16-year olds in Britain have consumed alcohol (Miller and Plant 1996). Ten per cent of

boys and eight per cent of girls aged 15-16 drink more than the recommended adult limits (Boseley 1997). McKeganey et al.'s (1996) research into self-reported drunkenness amongst school children in Dundee also found a high level of alcohol abuse, with 87% of their sample of 12- to 15-year olds using 'designer' (white) ciders and alcoholic fruit juices ('alcopops') to get drunk.

Alcoholism is known to impair health and social functioning (Barracough and Hughes 1987) and is associated with depressive illness (Sainsbury 1988). Carlen (1988) found this of women in her study who admitted to a past or present alcohol addiction (five out of 39 women). The majority linked this to severe depression engendered by their bleak living circumstances. Further, spousal violence by men is a strong predictor of women's excessive alcohol consumption (Miller et al. 1989).

In his study of the relationship between alcohol and crime, Ramsay (1996), who looked at young male drinkers in England, notes that most alcohol consumption is not associated either with violence and disorder or with acquisitive crime. Other studies (for example, McMurrin 1986) suggest that the abuse of alcohol and drugs by offenders prior to imprisonment is extremely high.

There are two issues concerned with the abuse of drugs other than alcohol. Firstly, the use of controlled drugs is, in itself, illegal. Nearly half (42%) of all 15- and 16-year olds in Britain have tried illegal drugs (Miller and Plant 1996). Graham and Bowling's (1995) self-report study in England and Wales on young people and crime found that every second male and every third female admitted using drugs at some time, but that most drug use was confined to using cannabis. In Scotland the figures are significantly higher, with 60% of boys and 47% of girls reporting they had used cannabis (Miller and Plant 1996).

Lower figures were found by the 1993 Scottish Crime Survey, with 17% of respondents admitting they had used a controlled drug at some time (Hammersley 1994). Cannabis was the most widely used, with 14% reporting some use (17% of men and 10% of women). Men generally reported more drug use than women and the under 30s more than the over 30s. There were no significant differences in reported drug use experience by social class.

Those who reported any drug use also reported more other offending behaviour than did those who reported no drug use. However, Hammersley argues against a simple causal link between the two: drug users must to an extent be willing to break the law, and this 'may predispose them to recognise and admit more borderline offences' (1994, p.30).

Although it appears that more men than women abuse drugs (cf. Maden et al. 1990), the Scottish Drugs Forum have argued that the ratio could be reversed if prescribed tranquilisers were taken into account (Clouston 1994). Work in the USA by Flowers (1995) suggests that many women use drugs with the intention of 'numbing out' rather than for pleasure, which indicates that women drug abusers use drugs for different reasons than men. Those who abuse drugs often report histories of sexual or physical abuse (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 1997) and use of drugs may be seen as a coping mechanism (Stermac et al. 1991).

The second issue concerned with drug abuse is that of crime 'caused' by drug habits, such as theft to obtain money for drug purchase and assault as a result of the affects of a drug. A strong association has long been believed between illegal drug use and predatory (material gain) crime (see Sutherland and Cressey 1970). The prevailing view continues to be that drug use drives addicts to income-generating crime because they need money to buy drugs (Gandossy et al.1980). However, research reveals many contradictory arguments, such as that a substantial number of casual users are not heavily involved in crime (Robins et al. 1980), and nearly half (47%) of long-term offenders in self-report surveys of male prison inmates have never used drugs (Chaiken and Chaiken 1982). Chaiken and Chaiken (1990) note that no single causal relationship is now believed to relate drug use to predatory crime. Rather, different patterns appear to apply to different types of drug users (Chaiken and Johnson 1988).

North American research shows that among populations involved in drug abuse and predatory crime, predatory criminality occurs at least as commonly before starting using drugs as after (Kandel et al. 1986). Females who use drugs frequently are less likely than males to commit violent crimes (Chaiken and Chaiken 1990), but are more likely to resort to prostitution and shoplifting (Sanchez and Johnson 1987). Variables intervening between

drug use and (other) offending, such as destructive factors in the environment (for example physical abuse) or the absence of traditional social controls (such as lack of parental attention) appear to be relevant (Fagan and Weis 1990).

Evidence of an association between substance (alcohol and drug) use and aggressive behaviour is pervasive (see Fagan 1990). However, research on intoxication and aggression often has overlooked the non-violent behaviour of most substance users (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969). Further, there is only limited evidence that use of substances is a direct, pharmacological cause of aggression (Watters et al. 1985). For example, Wikler (1952) found that alcohol had a weak and inconsistent pharmacological effect, although behaviours would emerge during intoxication that did not appear under any other circumstances. Wikler (1952) concluded that other factors were necessary to explain the association between intoxication and aggression.

Age and sex appear to be relevant to the intoxication-aggression relation. Gandossy et al. (1980) argue that violence while intoxicated is the province of young males. However, Jessor and Jessor (1977) report that youths who are aggressive while drinking also are aggressive while sober. Fagan (1990) discusses the complex relation between substance use and aggression, notably the type of substance, personality factors, situational factors and socio-cultural factors; for example, personalities predisposed to substance use also suffer from severe conflicts, and substance use either strengthens or dampens these conflicts. Contemporary explanations of the intoxication-aggression relation offer only a limited explanation.

To conclude, both alcohol and illicit drugs may be responsible for a considerable amount of crime. Research in Scotland (Loucks 1998) and in England (Morris et al. 1995) suggests that a significant proportion of women entering prison have alcohol and/or drug problems. Drug-related crime is also particularly high: 70% of current crime in the Grampian Region of Scotland is believed to be drug-related in some way (Grampian Police 1997). However, this includes both the use and possession of controlled substances, as well as offences carried out while under the influence of a substance.

It has been argued that 'Drugs are undoubtedly the major reason for the increase in the number of housebreakings as users and addicts turn to crime to feed their habit' (ibid., p.5), but research shows that predatory crime not uncommonly starts before drug use begins. Involvement in controlled drug use amongst young people is widespread, amongst boys more than girls, with most use being confined to using cannabis. There is some evidence that the reasons for women's drug use, both legal and illegal, is different to that of men.

### Self-abuse

Self-abuse appears to be practised by a significant number of female offenders and therefore will be considered here. However, it should be noted that this section has no comparison with non-custodial populations and no links with causality of offending.

Studies show that lacerations, particularly to the wrists, are the most commonly used form of self-injury (Power and Spencer 1987, Liebling 1992). For abusers, self-harm has a range of useful functions. Often, far from intending the act as a suicide attempt, self-harmers use it as a coping mechanism, by preventing themselves doing even more damage to themselves, and to gain a feeling of some control over their lives (Davies 1996).

Culturally it is not accepted for women, in particular, to attempt to kill themselves (Stengel 1970). Accordingly, suicidal intent is not expected in women. As a result, self-harm tends to be more commonly seen as deliberate self-injury instead, both in the general population and in prison (Dooley 1990). With this caution in mind, Liebling (1992) notes that in the UK prison community women far outnumber men in terms of the number of incidents of self-injury per head of prison population. Coid et al. (1990) found that 7.5% of their Holloway sample had a history of self-mutilation. In her Holloway study, Cookson (1977) found that self-mutilating women were younger than the average general inmate population, they had longer sentences, more previous custodial sentences, more psychiatric treatment, more violent offences and higher hostility scores.

In a study of young males in a Borstal, Cullen (1981) found that self-injury was instrumental behaviour, taking place in an environment in which other 'escape' responses were limited, and was intended to reduce tension, attract sympathy and comfort, to punish oneself or to manipulate a change. The reasons given by the women in the Holloway study (Coid et al. 1990) were an intention to kill themselves, and to relieve tension, anger and depression. The women in this study were found to be more likely than not to have convictions for violence or property damage, to have received psychiatric treatment, to have a history of alcohol abuse and eating disorders, to suffer low self-esteem and to have experienced family disruption, physical and sexual abuse. Other studies have also shown that the role of sexual abuse in childhood is associated with future self-destructive behaviour (Kelly 1988, Widom 1989).

Interestingly, Cookson (1977) found in her Holloway study that only the mother and baby unit had no self-mutilation incidents to report. In her study of suicides in prison, Liebling (1992) found that women suffer more often than men from the problems associated with the loss of families and outside contacts. That close ties are needed to maintain self-esteem may go some way towards accounting for Cookson's (1977) finding.

It appears that self-abuse has many functions, including the release of distress and anger and to gain some measure of control. Self-abusers in custody tend to be female, young, have convictions for offences involving violence, and a history of psychiatric treatment, drug abuse, family disruption and physical and sexual abuse.

## **SECTION II – OFFENCES COMMITTED BY WOMEN**

The previous section looked at correlates with women's offending. This section focuses on the types of offences women actually commit.

During the late 1970s, there were widespread anxieties about economic, social, cultural and moral change in British society (Reiner and Cross 1991). The image of a society in the grip of muggers, hooligans, terrorists, violent pickets and other 'folk-devils' condensed and

made concrete pervasive fears of national decline (Hall et al. 1978). To this can be added the fear of the 'new female criminal'.

Certain writers in the 1970s (notably Adler 1975, Simon 1975) argued that the Women's Liberation Movement precipitated an increase in the amount of crime committed by females. The female role in Western society is seen to be essentially passive, sensitive and supportive. The Women's Movement drew attention to the gender roles of women in society, emphasising that whilst sex may be biologically determined, gender is a social and cultural concept and as such is relative (Elliott 1988).

Simon (1975) identified a significant increase in the proportion of women involved in property offences (such as theft and fraud), but not in crimes of violence. Adler (1975) saw changes in the role of women as breeding a new, assertive, female criminal who participates in crimes traditionally seen as masculine, although Adler's work has been criticised as being based on random speculation (Kirsta 1994). In the 1990s, it may be argued that there is no 'new breed' of violent post-feminist woman; merely that women are beginning to rediscover strengths that were always there, but which centuries of male dominance have long conditioned out of them. Kirsta adds that the 'myth' of the non-existence of violence in women denies that women are capable of the full range of human experience, emotion and impulses, both good and bad, and this myth diminishes women as fully functional human beings.

Others have also questioned a link between the Women's Movement and any increase in female crime. Weis (1976), for example, points out that there is no empirical data which shows that 'liberated' women are more criminal than those who are not. On the contrary, the beneficiaries of the movement, white middle-class women, are poorly represented in the criminal population (Smart 1979, Chapman 1980, Box and Hale 1983). Further, few women actually experienced a significant improvement in their social position as a result of social control legislation - although, as Eaton (1986) notes, this theory proved popular in the mass media, probably because it corresponded with dominant attitudes to the appropriate social control of women. Weis (1976) notes that most reports show that women are not more violent and that therefore the increase in property offences might well be

accounted for by a depressed economy and widespread unemployment. Morris and Gelsthorpe (1981) point out that women could be more involved in crime than previously due to low wages and families to support on their own. It is doubtful whether the Women's Liberation Movement has been powerful in the reality of ordinary women's lives. Female liberation may have had an indirect effect, however. Box and Hale (1983), for example, found a greater willingness to report, prosecute and convict female offenders.

Nevertheless, official statistics for Scotland show that the number of females with convictions is considerably less than the number of men with convictions (see Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3 Persons with Charge Proved, All Crimes, Scotland, 1991-1995**

YEAR	MALES	%	FEMALES	%	TOTAL (%)
1991	142,788	85	25,484	15	100
1992	146,554	84	27,783	16	100
1993	135,156	84	25,113	16	100
1994	135,606	87	21,436	13	100
1995	133,330	86	22,412	14	100

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletins CrJ/1992/6, CrJ/1993/8, CrJ/1994/6, CrJ/1995/7 and CrJ/1997/2.

Official statistics for 1995 show that few women in Scotland were convicted of a crime of violence (see Table 2.4).



**Table 2.4 Persons with a Charge Proved, Scotland, 1995**

MAIN CRIME	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
Non-sexual crimes of violence	3,403	3	241	1
Crimes of indecency	559	0	746	3
Crimes of dishonesty	23,789	18	4,350	19
Fire-raising, etc.	4,691	4	391	2
Other crimes *	11,671	9	1,230	5
Misc. offences **	35,981	27	9,332	42
Motor vehicle offences	53,236	40	6,122	27
Total	133,330	100	22,412	100

\* Includes crimes against public justice

\*\* Includes non-payment of television licences

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin CrJ/1997/2.

Non-sexual violent crimes by women made up only one per cent of recorded crime in Scotland in 1995. Convictions for crimes of violence by women are consistently low, compared to men (Scottish Office 1997a). Further, these figures are lower both in terms of actual numbers and as a percentage than they have been for the last five years (see Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5 Non-Sexual Crimes of Violence, Scotland, 1991-1995**

YEAR	MALES	%	FEMALES	%	TOTAL (%)
1991	2,662	89	332	11	100
1992	3,456	92	316	8	100
1993	3,602	93	285	7	100
1994	3,286	93	266	7	100
1995	3,403	94	241	6	100

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletins CrJ/1992/6, CrJ/1993/8, CrJ/1994/6, CrJ/1995/7 and CrJ/1997/2.

Figures for non-sexual crimes of violence do not show a continually increasing rate of convictions for any of the specific categories over the last five years (see Table 2.6). They do, however, show the female percentage of convictions for handling offensive weapons and for robbery as having risen between 1994 and 1995. Nevertheless, the conviction rate for handling offensive weapons is the same as it was in 1991 and for robbery it is lower than its 1991 figure. In all other categories, the conviction percentages of females are lower than they were five years ago.

**Table 2.6 Non-sexual Crimes of Violence by Women, Scotland, 1991-1995**

MAIN CRIME	1991		1992		1993		1994		1995	
	No.	%*	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Homicide	7	8	8	7	7	6	8	7	6	4
Serious assault	81	8	96	8	92	8	94	6	54	4
Handling offensive weapons	35	3	24	2	35	2	47	2	70	3
Robbery	30	5	31	4	26	3	24	2	36	4
Other**	179	56	157	45	125	47	93	33	75	25

\* Expressed as a percentage of the total number of persons with charge proved.

\*\* 'Other' crimes of violence mainly involve cruelty to or neglect of children.

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletins CrJ/1992/6, CrJ/1993/8, CrJ/1994/6, CrJ/1995/7 and CrJ/1997/2.

When these specific categories are looked at in terms of total number of females convicted, it can be seen that there are fewer female convictions for homicide and serious assault than five years ago (see Table 2.6). Convictions for 'other' crimes of violence have been steadily decreasing since 1991. However, the numbers of women convicted of handling offensive weapons and of robbery are higher than they were five years ago. Nevertheless, as stated above, the percentage of women (vis-à-vis men) with convictions for these two crimes are, respectively, at the same or a lower rate.

The largest single number of female convictions for non-sexual crimes of violence comes under the category 'other', which mainly involves cruelty to or neglect of children. As Guandolo (1985) points out, abuse of children may be one way of coping with the isolation, boredom and unhappiness in the female role of wife and mother. Wilczynski (1993) has noted that little attention has been given to the importance of gender in the perpetration of child abuse.

Kirsta (1994) argues that there is no real evidence that women are inherently less destructive or aggressive than men. As Jones (1990) points out, crimes of violence by men appear as the logical extreme of what passes for 'normal' male sexuality; women seem to be culturally inhibited about behaving in such a way.

On the other hand, women in Scotland have a larger percentage of convictions for property and order offences than for violent crimes, although these are considerably fewer than male convictions for the same offences (see Tables 2.4 and 2.7). The only exception, where women have a greater number of convictions than do men, is crimes of indecency – that is, prostitution. This says more about those who legislate to create such an offence than about the women who commit it. The only category where the number of women with a charge proved is only slightly less than the number of men is the 'other' miscellaneous offences category, mainly evasion of television licence fees. (Women are more likely than men to answer the door while their children are watching the television, and thus they are the ones charged with having no television licence: Gelsthorpe and Loucks 1997).

**Table 2.7 Selected Non-Violent Crimes, Scotland, 1991-1995**

Year	'Other' crimes of indecency*				'Other' misc. offences**				Shoplifting			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1991	224	26	640	74	8988	52	8346	48	4260	66	2146	33
1992	177	19	778	81	10484	51	10208	49	5012	66	2540	34
1993	171	17	862	83	8664	52	7908	48	4910	67	2400	33
1994	187	20	762	80	8101	59	5718	41	4462	67	2041	33
1995	134	15	744	85	8206	57	6094	43	4534	70	1975	30

\* 'Other' crimes of indecency: includes prostitution offences

\*\* 'Other' miscellaneous offences: mainly offences of non-payment of television licences

Source: Scottish Office Statistical Bulletins CrJ/1992/6, CrJ/1993/8, CrJ/1994/6, CrJ/1995/7 and CrJ/1997/2.

The third offence category shown in the table above, shoplifting, is generally considered to be a 'female crime.' Although it is an offence committed by a large proportion of offending females (and, in particular, by those aged under 21: Scottish Office 1997), a greater number of men than women are convicted of this crime. It is often claimed that women's crimes tend to reflect their place in society - that traditional women's crimes are linked to domestic life such as shoplifting. However, as Morris (1989) points out, this does not explain why, as all women shop, only some shoplift, or why men shoplift, which is arguably in conflict with their role. Gibbens and Price's (1962) study found more women than men were accused of shoplifting. Twenty five years later, Munday (1986) found the balance had changed with more men than women accused of shoplifting. Davies (1997) notes that, despite consistent evidence to the contrary, lasting stereotypical images of the shoplifter include the kleptomaniac little old lady, the menopausal housewife and girls tempted by bright jewellery. In-depth interviewing of women shoplifters from the offenders' perspective could usefully be carried out (Davies 1997).

### SECTION III - STUDYING FEMALE OFFENDERS IN SCOTLAND

This thesis argues that there has been comparatively little research carried out on female offenders generally. There are three reasons for the lack of interest and research in this area: until recently the study of crime (as, indeed, the study of many other disciplines) was almost completely a male profession, female offenders represent a small proportion of known offenders (Heidensohn 1985) and female offenders have always been thought of in different ways from male offenders, as less dangerous and less involved in criminal subcultures (Gelsthorpe 1989).

Gelsthorpe (1989) argues that the neglect of women in criminological theories cannot be viewed as systematic neglect, since the history of criminology reveals an erratic development. She points to other 'blind spots' in criminology - for example, the young are studied more than the old, the poor more than the rich. Nevertheless, it is surprising that so little research has been carried out into female offending, not least because exploring why one group apparently commits fewer crimes than another could arguably provide clues for dealing with criminality. As has been seen in Chapter One, theories about male criminality are plentiful. This section discusses the need to study not just female offenders, but female offenders in Scotland.

Kinsey (1993) has pointed to the absence of sustained empirical research and conceptual analysis on Scotland. McCrone has also noted that 'the assumption was that, apart from a little local colour, one society was much like any other. And if 'society' was defined as the British state, there seemed little point in focusing on its under-populated northern half' (1992, p.5). Kinsey argues for 'a distinctively Scottish criminology' (1993, pp.16,19), and this argument needs further analysis.

Certainly, in England it is common for Scotland to be perceived to be merely a region of the United Kingdom - for example, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) has responsibilities which include Scotland. However, in Scotland the general populace regard themselves as belonging to a Scottish nation. This view is endorsed by the existence of separate legal and educational systems. That Scotland is a

separate country has been further recognised by the granting of devolved powers to the Scottish Parliament (The Scotland Act 1998). Therefore it is valid to have a Scottish study, as it would be to examine any other country having its own identifiable characteristics.

Scotland has a small middle-class, relative to that of England, and is a largely working-class country; for example, some 28% of homes in Scotland in 1997 were local authority rented ([www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins)), whereas in England the corresponding figure is 17% ([www.housing.detr.gov.uk/research/hss](http://www.housing.detr.gov.uk/research/hss)). It is to be expected, therefore, that this will result in an increased incidence of those problems associated with working-class life, such as poverty. There is a greater social mix, however, in Scotland than in England, as Scotland has a small population (five million, compared to some 52 million in England and Wales, in 1997 ([www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir)), and thus there is a greater awareness of, and a correspondingly greater concern for, the problems of those in all social classes. This social mix is aided by Scotland's educational system, one priding itself on social equality, where relatively few children attend public or private schools (approximately four per cent of pupils in Scotland in 1997 ([www.scotland.gov.uk/library2](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library2)), compared to some nine per cent in England during the same year; Department of Education 2000) and where a higher percentage of young people go to university than in England (46% of school leavers in Scotland, compared to 32% in England, went into higher education in 1997/98; Higher Education Statistical Agency 1999).

Crime rates for women in both Scotland and England are low, with approximately one per cent of the female population having been convicted of an offence in each country in 1997 ([www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w6](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w6), Home Office 2000). There is also a similar percentage of people in prison in each country (approximately 120 prisoners for every 100,000 members of the general population in Scotland and in England and Wales in 1997; [www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w4](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w4)). However, there is a less punitive social reaction in Scotland to crime (Kinsey 1993); and the country's criminal justice system is considered to be less punitive than its English and Welsh counterpart. The Children's Hearing System in Scotland (outlined earlier in this chapter) is a tribunal system, designed to help children who have offended rather than to punish them. A child who commits a crime under the age of 16 may be prosecuted in court, but the permission of the Lord Advocate is required; and,

even if the offence is a serious one, it may still be decided that the child would be better dealt with by a Children's Hearing (Moore and Whyte 1998). On the other hand, however, it should be noted that there is a history of punitive policy and practice within prisons in Scotland, with exceptionally harsh punishments at Peterhead prison, which included the 'cat' - a multi-thong whip - still available for use in the 1940s, and occasionally used in Inverness prison, the segregation unit commonly known as the 'cages' (Scruton et al. 1992).

Turning to the significance of the Scottish context to this research, the work of Carlen (1983) is relevant. Carlen discusses the importance of the conventions of the family and the kirk, the traditional ethics of domesticity and masculinity, and some 'over-determined presences' (such as alcohol), within Scottish culture and society (ibid., p.15). She stresses that her work, in which she interviewed 20 women in Scotland's only all-female prison, is 'primarily about imprisonment, not about law-breaking' (ibid., p.59). Nevertheless, aspects of her study can usefully be considered here. She found that alcoholism, mental health problems, family violence (usually from husbands or boy-friends) and poverty played a part in the women's criminality, which she argues are linked to certain aspects of Scottish life. It should be noted here, however, that it is unclear whether all the women prisoners in her research were in fact Scots, or whether one or more were other Britons (such as English women) living in Scotland at the time of their conviction.

Carlen continues that historically Scots men 'have had their family roles imbued both with the prudish authoritarianism of Calvinism and the machismo traditionally associated with a hard-labouring, hard-drinking and ... often demoralised and sometimes militant work-force' (1983, p.27). She presents these characteristics as peculiarly Scottish, citing the 'Calvinist legacy of misogyny' and the 'close-knit masculine camaraderie' associated with hard physical work as responsible for the 'cult of aggressive and assertive masculinity' in Scotland (ibid., p.41). Without apparently being aware of the contradiction, she also notes that in the Calvinist faith women are depicted as the source of all depravity, as they are in the Roman Catholic religion (ibid., p.29), and that Scottish working women have usually had to support their families financially whilst being castigated for neglecting them emotionally, physically and spiritually, as have their contemporaries in the rest of Great

Britain (ibid., p.34). The importance of masculinity to working-class life in *Britain* has been noted elsewhere (see, for example, Willis 1977, Brake 1980). Carlen (1983) continues that most of the women prisoners she interviewed stressed that this attitude, of 'aggressive and assertive masculinity', had persisted longer in Scotland than in England. (Some of the prison officers, sheriffs and police officers she also interviewed were of the same opinion). However, it is not clear whether these women (and the professionals she cites) had any experience of working-class life in England with which to make a comparison.

Carlen further states that some of the professionals she interviewed pointed out that in Scotland the women run the homes and the men leave this responsibility to them, even where the men are unemployed. In addition, Carlen discusses Scotsmen's 'drinking habits'; that is, going to the pub to meet friends and leaving their wife at home with the children. Again, it is arguable that these practices are associated with working-class life throughout Britain (see, for example, Tolson 1977). (Some middle- and upper-class women also, of course, experience sole responsibility for the running of the home and the care of the children). Further, although an increasing number of women work outside the home, the view that the man in the domestic household is the bread-winner is reflected in both working-class and middle-class families. The cult of femininity (that is, of non-work-dominated identity) for girls places importance on marriage and motherhood, which are seen as attractive and fulfilling goals (Brake 1980).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Carlen (1983) found that the women talked about a desire for independence – or, at least, independence from the family life as they had known it. However, she reports that the women talked about going back to their man or life with 'the next one'. Although their future dependence on men was stated by the women to be based on economic support (which is not surprising, given the women were interviewed in prison and the central role prison therefore played in their economic support), it does nevertheless suggest that family life is still seen as desirable by the women (albeit they have idealistic views).



## Conclusion

While some of the above studies discuss single causes of crime (such as drug abuse or unemployment), it appears from this review of the literature that offending is multi-causal. Demographic, social and psychological factors are all relevant to criminality. It has been seen that a number of the studies considered in this chapter relate only to male offenders, confirming the arguments made by feminist criminologists in the previous chapter. It is still true today that relatively little research has been carried out on female offending *per se*; some of the above studies which discuss females are part of larger studies carried out on males.

Nevertheless, it is possible to draw certain conclusions on female criminality from the research described above. Female offenders tend to be young and their offending situational. They often have an unstable family background, few if any educational qualifications and are influenced by their friends' offending. Experience of being in care appears to be relevant, as does poverty and drug abuse. All of these variables can be said to be also applicable to male offending.

However, there are additional factors to consider when looking at female offending. Females usually 'grow out' of offending in their teens, when they move away from home and into stable relationships, and relationships appear to be of particular importance to women generally. Females are usually taken into care for their protection, rather than for their offending. Abuse of drugs stems from a different meaning attached to the use: to help them cope with life rather than for pleasure-seeking. Women's offences are mainly those of a property and order type, rather than involving violence. All of these variables are in contrast to variables relating to male offending behaviour. Further, research suggests that women more than men tend to be the victims of sexual abuse, whether as a child or as an adult, or both, and this abuse may be related to their offending behaviour. Women offenders may also be more prone than men to mental health problems, although this is particularly contentious.

As was stated earlier, the aim of this thesis is to assess our current understanding of the nature and causes of female offending. This chapter has attempted to bring together

modern studies of female offending, highlight themes and draw attention to gaps in our knowledge. We need to know, in particular, about the links which operate between offending and schooling, peer groups, experience of care, experience of abuse, relationships, poverty and unemployment, mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, and self-abuse.

Although the study of women and crime has developed considerably in the last twenty years, especially in the USA and in England, our knowledge of the subject is still limited in comparison to the huge amount of work carried out in the area of male criminality. Clearly, there is a need for further examination in this field.

That Scotland is a separate and distinct country has been shown above, and a study exploring female offending in Scotland is therefore a valid one. It can be argued, however, that the experiences of women in Scotland are no different from those in England – that certain aspects of life which appear to be relevant to offending, such as poverty, are class-based factors and that other aspects of life which appear to be relevant to non-offending, such as good relationships, are important to women in all social classes across the United Kingdom. This work is concerned with female offenders in Scotland and is therefore looking at their experiences.

Offending women's own accounts are examined in Chapters Four and Five. This research aims to recognise the individual female experience as well as the life events which many of them share. These accounts will be presented, as far as is possible, in the women's own words, and an evaluation will be made of the current research literature presented in this chapter in the light of their accounts.

## **PART TWO - THE RESEARCH**

### **CHAPTER THREE - METHOD OF STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the empirical fieldwork relating to the study, with a discussion of the methodological approach used in this process. Section I of this chapter looks at how the study was carried out, while Section II examines the reasons why the study was carried out in this manner. The following analysis therefore looks in detail at issues such as the case study method and the semi-structured interview, and the actual implementation of the study.

#### **SECTION I - IMPLEMENTING THE STUDY**

##### **THE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

This research was guided by a single premise: that the best information about female offenders would come from female offenders themselves. The women were contacted through intermediaries in various collaborating agencies, including the Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders<sup>1</sup> (SACRO), a local authority social work department and prison authorities. It is recognised that this method of contacting interviewees carries the possibility that the women were self-selecting. It is also possible that the women were being 'chosen' by the respective agencies who were therefore (unwittingly) providing contacts of a particular type. While not denying the issue of response validity, there were in fact so few women offenders referred to the agencies that those recruited to the research were often all the women each agency was in contact with. It is believed that therefore the interviewees were not composed entirely of certain types of individuals but rather recruited at random.

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<sup>1</sup> Now: Safeguarding Communities and Reducing Offending in Scotland

The interview was the means of data collection. An interview schedule was used to elicit information about issues of specific interest to the research (see Appendix 1). The interview schedule was developed from three sources: first, from earlier reading on the topic of female offending and, second, from discussions with colleagues. Third, a pilot interview was conducted with a female offender in order to learn more about an offender's perspectives and that the questions were asked in a user-friendly way. The schedule underwent some change in the early part of the study. An interview schedule for follow-up interviews was then developed (see Appendix 2), based on the responses to the initial interview schedule, and implemented with a smaller number of women one and a half to two and a half years after the initial interviews.

## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

### Contacting the Interviewees

The first priority was to contact a number of female offenders. It was decided to interview 25 women and to carry out a pilot study. Thus, 26 women were identified and interviewed. Because of the difficulty in obtaining subjects, small numbers are typical in research such as this, involving a relatively small population and a sensitive topic. As the participating agencies had informed me that few women offenders were referred to them, I decided to interview all women who had at least one conviction for an offence. The women who were subsequently interviewed came into almost every offence category in which women tend to appear (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Last Offence of Which Interviewee Convicted

MAIN OFFENCE	No. OF CONVICTIONS*	%**
<b>Crimes of violence</b>		
Murder	1	3.8
Serious assault	3	11.5
Robbery	1	3.8
<b>Crimes of indecency</b>		
Prostitution	1	3.8
<b>Crimes of dishonesty</b>		
Shoplifting	2	7.7
Theft	1	3.8
Fraud	7	26.9
Embezzlement	1	3.8
<b>Fire-raising, etc.</b>		
Fire-raising	1	3.8
Nuisance telephone calls	2	7.7
<b>Other crimes</b>		
Resisting arrest	1	3.8
Drugs	1	3.8
<b>Misc. offences</b>		
Assaulting a police officer	2	7.7
Simple assault	3	11.5
Breach of the peace	4	15.4

\* Includes three women whose last conviction was for two or more offences

\*\*The figures have been rounded to one decimal place

Interviewing convicted women in prison resulted in access to at least some women who (in theory) either had longer records or who had been convicted of serious crimes. Interviewing offenders in the community gave access to women with convictions for generally more minor offences and therefore helped to ensure a balance between 'serious' and 'minor' offenders.

The initial interview was the first point of face-to-face contact, and in some cases the first actual contact, with the woman. Every woman whose name was given to me by one of the agencies and who agreed to talk to me was interviewed, regardless of geographical location and offence committed.

The 26 interviews were completed at a number of different locations throughout the country over a period of 12 months (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Data Collection**

DATE	SOURCE OF REFERRAL	No. OF INTERVIEWS
May 1994	SACRO Fife	1 (pilot study)
May 1994	SACRO Aberdeen	2
June 1994	Hostel, Glenrothes	2
June 1994	Grampian Regional Council Social Work Dept.	1
July 1994	Hostel, Aberdeen	1
July 1994	Inverness prison	2
September 1994	Grampian Regional Council Social Work Dept.	2
January 1995	Grampian Regional Council Social Work Dept.	3*
February 1995	Grampian Regional Council Social Work Dept.	3**
April 1995	Aberdeen prison	1
May 1995	Grampian Regional Council Social Work Dept.	1
May 1995	Cornton Vale prison	5
Total		26 women

\* Includes friend present at interviewee's house who also agreed to be interviewed.

\*\* Includes two other women present in the prison who also agreed to be interviewed.

The time scale of the study is indicated in Table 3.2. The initial 26 case studies began in May 1994 and were completed in May 1995. Contact agencies sometimes provided one contact and at other times several. Throughout the interviewing period of a year, names and addresses were received concerning a total of 40 potential interviewees in towns and cities in Scotland. However, 14 of these interviews eventually did not take place, eleven due to the woman's unwillingness to take part in the study and three where the woman did not keep the appointment.

## The Collaborating Bodies

It was originally intended to base the case studies on women in prison, in order that each interviewee had the same 'common' experience of being imprisoned. Initially, I approached the Scottish Prison Service Headquarters for permission to interview women in Scotland's only prison for females, HMPI Cornton Vale. The view of the Scottish Office at that time was that the prison had already been over-researched and as a result it was unlikely that my application would be granted. As my research is concerned with offending women's lives before imprisonment, and not with their prison experience, I felt it expedient to withdraw my application, and other avenues were explored.

SACRO was then approached, and the Association agreed to help identify potential interviewees for the research. SACRO's seven projects in Scotland were consequently contacted and three women were subsequently interviewed.

As progress in finding available and willing interviewees was slow, other bodies were also approached. A number of organisations expressed a willingness to assist, but were unable to identify any interviewees. However, interviewees were found through other organisations. Two women at a Christian-based female hostel and one woman at a project working with people with alcohol problems were interviewed. At this stage of the research, the Principal Research Officer at the Central Research Unit at the Scottish Office arranged contact with the governors of those prisons which have female units attached, and three women were subsequently identified and interviewed in prison. A social work department of a regional council willingly and regularly gave time to provide what was the largest number of potential interviewees. Twenty one names were received from this department and 12 of these women were subsequently interviewed.

A small number of the 26 women took part in the research as a result of chain referral: contact was made with two women who referred a total of three others to me. Finally, as the result of a social work contact at a SACRO conference in Edinburgh on women offenders, access was given to Cornton Vale prison to enable the completion of the 26 case studies; the remaining five women were interviewed there.

## Relations with Interviewees

Once contacts with the female offenders were established, good relations with the women were essential. It was important for me to establish myself as 'legitimate'. From the women's perspective this meant two things: I was interested in their story and did not impose my own preconceptions of women offenders on them, and I was not connected with the referring agencies.

The premise of the study was that learning about female offenders can best be accomplished by hearing the women offenders' story direct from the individuals involved. Thus, while an interview schedule was used, elaboration on the part of the women was encouraged.

Some interviews began with the woman acknowledging that she had a conviction (or convictions), but expressing surprise that she was worthy of study as, 'I've only got convictions for breach of the peace and stuff like that.' Other women stated they were pleased to take part in the study as it was important that they and others like them be heard. In almost all the interviews, once the women perceived that the research was fair and objective, they talked openly about themselves.

## Conducting the Interviews

The decision about the location in which the interviews were to be conducted was left to the interviewees. Each woman was asked at the time of making contact whether she would prefer the interview to take place in my room at the university, in the home of the woman herself or at a 'neutral' place such as a room provided by the intermediary agency. None of the women chose the university room; the majority of the interviews were conducted at the interviewee's home (including four women in hostel accommodation) or in prison if the woman was currently being detained (11 interviews in each location). Three interviews took place at the office of the collaborating organisation and one interview was conducted at the woman's place of work. Appointments were made either by letter or telephone direct to the woman, or through the collaborating body at the woman's request; or, where the woman was in prison, through the prison governor, prison social work department or the regional social work



department. None of the women terminated an interview before its natural conclusion. The majority of the women who participated in this research were co-operative and friendly; the collaborating organisations that helped arrange the interviews were always co-operative and friendly. The interview rooms provided by collaborating bodies fulfilled the basic requirement of privacy, and a number of organisations provided rooms which were also comfortable and so conducive to interviews.

At the beginning of each interview I explained to each woman the nature of the research. I emphasised that I was not there as a representative of the agency which had put me in touch with the woman. This was particularly important as a very small number of the women were concerned that an agency member would read the interview notes.

Some of the women in custody, whether serving a prison sentence or on remand, appeared to talk less freely than the women interviewed in their own homes. To an extent this was inevitable. However, other women in custody gave information in an 'open' way, and indeed were keen that I should report their interviews as they wanted their experiences and feelings more widely known.

One long interview, because of the distance to be travelled in a number of cases, was conducted with each of the participants. Each interviewee was also told that the interview would probably take about an hour; in fact, each interview took between one hour and two hours to complete, depending on the interviewee. Unlike a postal survey, interviewees here were not able to reflect on questions at their leisure or to look up records for accurate answers. As a result, each interviewee gave me accurate information as far as she could remember. One woman, however, had a current citation to appear in court and this had a list of previous convictions attached. She pointed out that some of her previous convictions were not on the citation.

At the beginning of each interview, the promise of confidentiality was stressed. At the end of each interview, there was an opportunity for the woman to ask any questions about the research. A number of the women asked for a copy of the finished study, some wanted to know what replies had been given by the other women interviewed to date and others used the opportunity to express grievances about their particular situation. Each interviewee was informed that a copy of the findings of the research would be

made available to them. Brief information was given on findings so far to those women who asked for this information. Every effort was made to ensure that each woman left the interview feeling reasonably positive about her participation. I attempted, as far as possible, to make sure that the women did not feel exploited or were distressed by recounting their (sometimes disturbing) experiences; or, indeed, that their time had been wasted. After the interview schedule had been completed, I did not leave the room immediately but stayed to talk with those women who appeared to want this – for example, to chat about the baby or to drink a cup of tea. In addition, each woman was again thanked for her co-operation and her valuable contribution to the research.

The question of whether to tape-record or record by hand was considered. There was a possibility that some of the women may have not agreed to their interview being taped and I was concerned that each interview be treated in as like a manner as possible. There are a number of practical problems concerning the use of a tape recorder and these include the fear that the machine may malfunction, the tape will run out or the batteries will run down. There may also be technical problems, such as loud or persistent background noise or people who speak very softly (Jones 1991). Although there is some debate about the possible reduction of eye-contact which might result from note-taking, and hand recording will inevitably result in some data being lost, it was felt that the absence of a tape-recorder would probably increase the women's willingness to speak candidly on this sensitive subject (Sarantakos 1994). As Neuman notes, 'machine supplements create disruption and increase awareness of surveillance' (1991, p.355). Therefore, hand recording was used during the interview and as soon after the interview as practicable, often in the car, the train or waiting at the railway station, the notes were fleshed-out while the memory of the interview was still fresh in my mind.

## Interview Schedule Design and Working

As discussed above, data was collected for this research by the use of an interview schedule administered to 26 female offenders throughout Scotland through face-to-face interviews. The interview schedule type, design and implementation had to be carefully considered to suit the objectives of the study.

The length of time necessary to complete an interview and the sensitive nature of the topic precluded the use of a telephone or postal interview. Although data produced in semi-structured interviews is less easy to analyse than data produced using a more structured method, as the research involved a relatively small number of case studies the semi-structured interview style was chosen. This involved constructing an interview schedule with specific questions asked of each interviewee, but the interviewer was free to probe further if necessary. To formulate the questions the literature on the topic was reviewed, colleagues were consulted and a pilot test was carried out.

Two other important factors had to be considered concerning the interview schedule design. First, the questions had to be formed in such a way as to be easily read out, as in a normal conversation. Second, decisions had to be made on the response format - where to use open-ended and where to use closed questions. Closed questions were used for the first part of the interview, concerning basic history matters such as age, marital status and so on. A list of alternative responses to act as prompts were provided with certain questions, for example those relating to accommodation. When developing alternative responses, I had to ensure that the range was exhaustive in order to avoid biasing responses. The pilot study was used to ensure that a thorough range of responses was provided.

The majority of questions in the study were open-ended. The reason for this was that open-ended questions encourage more in-depth answers. Interviewees are not restricted by closed, or fixed-choice, questions. The coding-categories were decided after the study had been completed, in order to assess the range of answers produced by open-ended questions. Once the categories were selected, the raw data was reclassified into these categories.

In any interview schedule the wording of the questions is of fundamental importance. An attempt was made to word the questions carefully using clear, unambiguous, non-leading and useful questions. Validity is of great importance; the questions asked must focus clearly on the subject being examined. Yin (1994) reminds the researcher that she must constantly ask herself *Are the appropriate questions being asked?* There are no 'perfect' questions, but an attempt was made to find suitable questions. In addition, a simple question is more likely to be understood than a long, complex one. A visibly thick research schedule is likely to deter the interviewees, and so at the beginning of each interview the woman was shown that the interview schedule consisted of both questions and blank spaces for answers.

The interview schedule was made up of 26 main questions, with a number of subsidiary questions to be answered where appropriate, and were grouped into four main sections to help structure the interview schedule and provide a flow. The first part consisted of a background history including age, family, education and employment, as stated above. The remaining three parts were made up of open-ended questions about, respectively, relationships, offending and the future.

Additionally, much information was gained from casual conversation with the women after the interviews had been concluded. It appeared that the woman wanted to continue talking, often because she had something specific to say on a topic she had not been asked about. For example, one woman quickly commented that she had not been asked about her sexuality, which she felt was relevant to the interview and certainly to her own situation; and some of the women in prison wanted to talk about conditions there, although this second area was not one within the field of study.

In addition, because participation in the study was voluntary, in compiling the research schedule every effort was made to encourage co-operation in order to obtain accurate answers. All but one woman answered all the questions; this interviewee refused to answer a question concerning her current employment, stating merely that it was 'illegal'. Thus, there was a high response rate from the women interviewed. The format of the interview helped to lessen the impact of personal and threatening topics; because background information of a neutral nature was gathered early in the interview, it was possible to build gradually to the more sensitive areas.

## Pilot Test

A pilot study was carried out first, to identify any deficiency in the design of the interview schedule. The pilot case selected here was selected as a matter of convenience - she was the first female offender to be identified and be willing to take part in the research.

The pilot study did not appear to highlight any problems with the interview schedule. The interviewee was told that she was the first to be interviewed in the study and as such was the pilot study for a larger piece of research. She was interviewed using the interview schedule and then asked for her opinion on the schedule, such as question length and question wording. From her response there did not appear to be any modifications to be made to the interview schedule.

A pilot study is a useful tool because it helps the researcher to refine her data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed (Yin 1994). However, a pilot study will not always highlight necessary changes to be made to the interview schedule. For example, in this study it was the first interviewee after the pilot study who noted the omission of what was, for her at least, a relevant question on sexuality; this was consequently added to the schedule. Further, as a result of a discussion between a social worker and myself, the questions on experience of being in care, self-abuse and sexual abuse were added to the interview schedule from the fourth interview onwards. These three questions were asked of the first (pilot) and second interviewees during their follow-up interviews; but as contact was not re-established with the third interviewee, her experience of these matters is not known.

## Follow-up Interviews

After the initial 26 interviews had been completed, it was decided to conduct follow-up interviews with as many of the original women as possible. I was not aware of any other study of female offenders that had carried out interviews after a period of time had elapsed, in order to ascertain those factors which had prompted the woman to re-offend or to desist.

A problem occurred during this part of the empirical research, which was not entirely unexpected. In some cases it was difficult to re-establish contact with the women. I pursued the initial avenues in an attempt to re-locate the women but was not successful in all cases. Despite attempts made by letter and telephone, only 10 of the original 26 women were re-interviewed. This level of response for follow-up interviews is not uncommon (Richards and McWilliams 1996), and is possibly indicative of a chaotic lifestyle.

Twelve of the 26 women I attempted to contact directly. Four agreed to the second interview, five did not reply to letters and had no telephone number, one letter was returned by the Post Office marked 'gone away', one woman expressed herself to be unwilling to continue with her part in the research and it was later learned from a social worker that the twelfth woman had died the previous year. Attempts were also made to contact the fourteen women who had been referred by one of the intermediaries. Six of these women took part in a follow-up interview. Eight women could not be contacted as the intermediary had no forwarding address. Seven women were interviewed at home (including two in hostels) and three in prison (one in a different prison from where she had first been interviewed and the other two in their original prison).

The follow-up interviews were conducted between one and a half years (four women) and two and a half years (one woman) after the initial interview, with the largest single category of women (five) taking part in their second interview two years after the initial interview. The schedule for these interviews was compiled on the basis of findings from the original interviews, further reading and the wish to learn from these women about possible recidivism. Thus, there were nine basic questions, and a larger number of subsidiary questions, which included updating on matters such as health and the family,

as well as questions on support networks and re-offending or desistance (see Appendix 2). The results have been grouped into five main headings: finances, health, relationships, re-offending and the future.

Although I was not successful in re-establishing contact in all cases, nevertheless the follow-up interviews that were conducted produced useful data.

## ANALYSIS PLAN

### Data Sources and Analysis

The primary data for this research comes from the interviews conducted with 26 female offenders. This data was used for mainly qualitative analysis, with some quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis is straightforward and takes the form of simple frequency distributions. For the qualitative analysis, consideration was given to using one of the qualitative software packages which have begun to appear on the market. The computerised form of analysis was decided against due to the relatively small number of interviewees. Therefore the data reduction process employed used the traditional 'by hand' method. First the answers from the interviews were examined. Then all of the sections dealing with different variables were 'isolated' by recording them onto large sheets of paper. Those themes which appeared most frequently were chosen for analysis and interpretation. This is not to suggest, however, that a subject talked about or simply mentioned by only one woman was considered insignificant. Three themes came into this category and they are dealt with in the relevant chapters: sexuality and the need for excitement are examined in Chapter Four and a perceived lack of achievement is considered in Chapter Five.

The section headings in Chapters Four and Five largely correspond to the area of questions asked of the women. In a few cases, the section headings relate to answers given by the women in response to other questions. For example, direct questions were not asked about the interviewee's peer group. Instead, the data which makes up this section is comprised of answers from other questions such as 'Why did you do it [commit the offence]?' and 'How did you first come into contact with the police?'

The words of female offenders have been faithfully reproduced throughout the work. Where quotes were unclear, words have been added in brackets to clarify the meaning and grammatical marks have been added for the same purpose.

## ETHICAL CONCERNS

I was aware of and kept in mind at all times the ethical considerations involved in doing this research - that is, not to encroach upon privacy any more than was necessary, to obtain each interviewee's permission, to keep replies confidential and to inform the women of the objectives and the results of the research. A further consideration is that there should be no harm to those interviewed. As discussed above, it was acknowledged that some of the women interviewed might suffer personal anguish when recalling painful past memories. Sarantakos (1994) stresses that there is no way for the researcher to ensure against possible psychological injury to the participants, but that he or she must be aware of this danger and guard against it. This I attempted to do, as noted above. In addition, Sarantakos states that the researcher should have the firmest of scientific grounds for asking questions which are likely to produce unpleasant effects for the interviewees; such questions asked of interviewees in this research (on offending behaviour and the experience of being a victim of certain behaviour or events) were indeed necessary for this research.

The ethical problem of protecting information was also considered. A person interviewed about her past criminal activities possibly could reveal information unknown to police. The view taken was that past acts do not pose a current threat.

I have attempted to overcome some of the problems of conventional scientific methods in which the researcher uncovers the intentions of, and then speaks for, her subjects, by allowing the women in the present study to express their own complex attitudes, using extensive quotation.



## SECTION II - RESEARCH JUSTIFICATIONS

The empirical study, reported in Chapters Four and Five, used the qualitative research method. In this section an examination will be made of the appropriateness of the method which was chosen to investigate this particular research problem.

### Research Issues

This study was guided by an important premise: that the best information about female offenders would come from female offenders themselves. The initial question was, why do women commit crimes? Several key questions formed the basis for the interview schedule. The study revolved around a number of variables that the interviewees were likely to have experienced. It is impossible for the researcher to collect 'everything' relating to a life history. Therefore the research must concentrate on specific events to stay within feasible research limits. I wished to learn more about the original motivation to offend, the immediate situational reason for offending, the effect offending had on their lives, life events which might make them vulnerable to offending behaviour and motivations to continue offending or to desist. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that traditional social institutions play an important role in the lives of female offenders. Thus considerable attention is devoted in this research to discussing the part played by school, work, peers and families in the lives of female offenders.

### Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to 'get close to the data' (Filstead 1960, p.6). A qualitative approach was used in this research as it is better suited to the exploratory type of study which was being carried out. Whilst it may be noted that qualitative methodology is not always recognised as a legitimate source of either data collection or theory construction, it is an approach that is so constructed as to yield verifiable knowledge about the empirical social world (Gelsthorpe 1989).

Both Reinharz (1979) and Keller (1980) argue that quantitative methods cannot convey an in-depth understanding of or feeling for those being researched and that they often ignore sex and gender differences or look at them without considering other mediating variables. However, as Gelsthorpe (1990) notes, the problem is perhaps not quantification itself but insensitive quantification.

Bernard (1973) notes that the production of quantified data has more 'prestige' than the production of qualitative data. This is not only because of the nature of the data produced, but, she argues, also because it is primarily men who are involved with the former and women with the latter. However, as Stanley and Wise (1993) note, some feminists find the production of quantitative, 'hard' data perfectly acceptable or even preferable; they reject the identification of particular methods with men and masculinity. Further, as Morgan has pointed out, the qualitative approach has its 'own brand of *machismo* with its image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths, the mean streets' (1981, p.87).

Stanley and Wise (1983) also note that qualitative approaches have their own problematics. These assume that researchers' descriptions are representations of reality, but, they argue, the researcher is an active presence and she constructs what is actually a viewpoint: 'We feel that it is inevitable that the researcher's own experiences and consciousness will be involved in the research process as much as they are in life...' (Stanley and Wise 1993, p.58). However, they go further and argue that a close relationship between theory, experience and research is not only inevitable but also desirable. May (1993) is of a similar opinion; he stresses that our very membership of a society is a necessary condition for understanding the social world of which we are a part.

Stanley and Wise (1993) note with approval that social scientists are beginning to discuss more personal aspects of involvement within research, and this I have attempted to do.

## The Case Study Method

Dixon et al. (1987) identify five basic research designs: case study, longitudinal study, comparison, longitudinal comparison and experiment. The case study has long been stereotyped as a 'weak sibling' among social science methods (Yin 1989). Investigators who do case studies are regarded as having deviated from their academic disciplines, their investigations having insufficient precision (that is, quantification), objectivity and rigour (ibid.). Despite this stereotype, case studies continue to be used extensively in social science research and can be argued to be a rigorous method of research.

The case study research design was adopted because it was deemed more useful to 'dig deeper' than to make a more superficial examination of a large-scale sample. 'The case study is the social research equivalent of the spotlight or the microscope...' (Hakim 1987, p.61). Yin (1989) notes that it inherently deals with a wide variety of evidence, which other strategies, such as surveys, do not. This research method aims to provide the answer to a particular question: *What is happening?* The key element in a case study is that one group is focused on and that no comparison with another group is made.

A case study can take one of two forms: either an *hypothesis is tested* (there is a relationship between X and Y), or a *descriptive study* is made (no hypothesis is tested but the study results in a list of factors, perhaps to formulate a hypothesis for later study). Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that hypothesis-testing may be appropriate to the kind of data processed by the natural sciences, but social variables are intrinsically more difficult to isolate and test. A researcher's prior definitions of concepts and hypothesis may impose a meaning on social relations which fails to pay proper attention to participants' meanings (Silverman 1985). Therefore, this research uses the descriptive method, which was felt to be more profitable as a way of studying social conditions, relationships and behaviour.

There are two main arguments for the case study method. These are that it provides a rigorous method of research and is particularly useful when 'how' or 'why' (as opposed to 'who, what, where') questions are being asked and the focus is on a contemporary phenomena; and it provides a richness which does not exist with quantitative research.

There are a number of arguments against the case study method, the main one being that it is not representative. Dixon et al. (1987) state that the group studied must be representative of the larger population to give reliable information. Yin (1989), however, points out that case studies would have to cover both the area of interest and its context, thereby yielding a large number of potentially relevant questions, which would require an impossibly large number of cases.

Another argument against this method is that generalisations cannot be made from a single case or a small number of cases. Yin (1989), however, argues that the investigator's goal is to expand and generalise theories and not to enumerate frequencies. Unlike survey research which relies on *statistical* generalisation, case studies rely on *analytical* generalisation. Thus the investigator's goal is to generalise a particular set of results to a broader theory, rather than to the other case studies.

A third argument against the case study method is that there is insufficient precision (see Yin 1989). However, the contrary argument is that the case study approach allows flexibility and thus this 'disadvantage' can be turned into a positive virtue. The analysis will address the *most significant* aspects of the case study. There is a multiplicity of factors that have occurred leading up to the offending behaviour. The value of the case study lies not only in what it tells us about an unknown or under-researched part of society, but also in how it relates that part to the whole (Eaton 1986).

### The Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured type of interview sits between the two extreme types of interviewing, namely, at one end of the continuum, the *structured* type, in which a questionnaire is strictly adhered to for all respondents, and, at the other end, the *non-standardised* interview, in which the interviewer has a list of topics to be covered in the interview. The structured type is more suitable where the researcher is working with a large sample. The non-standardised type is suitable mainly for studies where little is known about the topic.

There are many advantages to using semi-structured interviews. Firstly, they provide the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply, to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts from informants that are based on personal experience (Palmer 1928). As Cottle states: 'Without allowing people to speak freely we will never know what their real intentions are, and what the true meaning of their words might be.' (1978, p.12). The researcher is also able to follow up any interesting ideas: '... conversation and elements of everyday life often go unrecorded within formal interviews; yet these provide basic data' for the researcher (Burgess 1982).

Secondly, the interviewer is able to guide the interviewee through the schedule, ensure that the interviewees are interpreting the questions in the manner intended, establish rapport with the interviewee and generally have a high degree of control of the interview situation.

Further, the social distance between interviewer and interviewee is minimised by assuming a conversational style, rather than a more formal interview style. As Palmer, amongst others, has written: 'The conversations of human beings are an important part ... of social research technique' (1928, p.169). Due to the relatively small number of interviews, a single researcher can be responsible for the interviewing, rather than delegating this to a number of assistants. As a result, a degree of consistency in the interviewing style is attained.

The interviewer may also be able to record more than simply the content of the interview. In the present research, the interviewer was able to note comments where the interviewees spoke about their particular situation once the interview schedule had been completed.

Finally, statistical studies using data from surveys and official sources cannot give the range of information and depth of understanding that can be obtained by observing and talking confidentially to an interviewee.

The disadvantages of semi-structured interviewing include the following. Firstly, it can be a time-consuming process. A number of potentially collaborating bodies had to be

contacted, appointments had to be made with potential interviewees and many hours in total were spent on travelling and interviewing, before all the case studies were completed. Further, the analysis of semi-structured interviews is more difficult and time-consuming than that of standardised interviews because the data are not so easily coded (Selltitz et al. 1964). On the other hand, during data collection the investigator is able to take advantage of unexpected opportunities to explore new areas of questioning. Thus, there is a fuller and more flexible involvement with those from whom or about whom the data is being collected (Allan 1991).

Secondly, reliability is an important factor: the objective is to be sure that a different researcher using the same measuring device would get the same results if measuring exactly the same event again. However, an attempt was made to respond to all interviewees in the same manner and to keep an open mind.

Thirdly, interviewees' responses can be distorted by 'fleeting' relationships to which interviewees have little commitment and so can fabricate stories. The difficulty of penetrating private worlds of experience, the relative status of interviewer and interviewee, and where the interview was conducted (for example, the woman's home or in prison) may all also have an effect on interviewee responses. Since the women were being asked to give information of a very personal and sensitive nature (the interview schedule contained questions on matters such as sexual abuse), a potential problem is that interviewees may lie about or exaggerate the topics discussed in the interview schedule, in order to try to justify whatever crime they had committed, and this possibility makes the evidence-gathering method unreliable. Prisoners in particular have the reputation for being more prone to fabrication and manipulation than other groups (Scully 1990). It is probably not surprising that prisoners may attempt to respond in a manner they think will gain them approval. In addition, confined women are not likely to trust other people, including a researcher who may be seen as an agent of the state.

There is no way of knowing whether such deception occurred. The impression of the researcher was, however, that this was not the case. Most respondents spoke hesitantly about experiences which had often been deeply painful for them and, initially at least, erred towards reticence. Almost certainly, as other interviewers in a sensitive field argue

(such as Boswell 1995), there are experiences of events such as sexual abuse which remain denied or undisclosed by some interviewees.

There is some evidence that females do feel more ashamed of their misdemeanours and consequently they tend to under-report them, particularly in comparison to boys who tend to exaggerate their illegal acts (see for example Morris 1964). However, subsequent studies (such as Box 1981) have not found strong support for this argument. The scope of this study did not allow me to check the women's accounts. It was felt that there was little to be gained by fabrication of the number or type of offences; further, many of the other replies involved matters which could not easily be checked, such as the issues of self-abuse and sexual abuse. A number of self-report studies have shown high correlation between an individual's report of his own delinquency and his official police record (see for example Campbell 1981, Farrington 1982).

However, in order to ensure that the questions were answered as accurately as possible, it was stressed at the beginning of each interview that the researcher was independent and therefore did not represent 'the establishment' (that is, the collaborating body). In addition, although some questions involved more detailed answers than others, no question was given emphasis and therefore there was no one question which the interviewee could have felt was the crucial one. By guaranteeing the women's anonymity, by assuring them that I was an independent researcher and by trying to present myself to the women as a non-judgmental witness to their stories, it was hoped that interviewee responses were as accurate as possible.

A fourth potential criticism is that there may be inaccuracies due to poor recall on the part of the researcher. Notes were made as detailed as possible during the interview and these were added to as soon as possible after the interview was completed and while memory was still fresh.

Finally, there may be a problem concerning general rapport and co-operation during the interviews. The relationship which is established between the interviewer and the interviewee is important in determining the quality of the data. In the present study, I recognised that a measure of hostility was possible, arising from a perception by some Scots that the southern English (I was born in London) are automatically 'middle class'.

However, I felt no hostility; further, no interviewee prematurely terminated the interview and all but one woman answered all the questions. The success of such research hinges on the ability to develop a good working relationship with each interviewee within a very short period of time. Because the focus of the research was on illegal behaviour, often a difficult subject to discuss, the way in which the questions were asked was important. Answers are more likely to be given to threatening topics if long introductions and open-ended questions are employed (Bradburn and Sudman 1979). Rapport was established with most women early on in the interview. The women were prepared to talk, with varying degrees of openness, to an interested, supportive, non-judgmental outsider.

Yin (1989) provides a useful basic list of commonly required skills for an investigator during data collection. Every effort was made to adhere to these: they are be able to ask good questions and to interpret the answers; be a good 'listener' and hear the exact words used, capture the mood and understand the context; be adaptive and flexible, so that newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities; have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, in order not to miss important clues; and be unbiased by preconceived notions, and thus be responsive to contradictory evidence.

#### Other Methodological Advantages and Limitations to This Research

The reasons for the women volunteering are not known, but probably included providing a break from their usual routine, the opportunity to talk from an expert's point of view, being in need of a confidante, a desire to help and a belief that their participation could be seen as a positive thing by the collaborating body or that their refusal to take part might be viewed negatively by the collaborating body. In any event, some of the women said it had been good to talk to another woman about their experiences. As well as this possible therapeutic role of some interviews, such comments also enhance one's faith in the validity of the answers. The interviews conducted in the women's own homes were particularly fruitful. In the majority of these, the woman made coffee, appeared to be relaxed and the interview time tended towards the two hour rather than the one hour time period. In contrast, the interviews conducted in prison with women who were serving short sentences tended to be the shortest. This



may have been due to their not seeing the prison as 'home' and therefore they were not as relaxed as those women with more personal accommodation.

The effect of the interviewer's and the interviewee's sex is an important methodological question. When the topic is neutral, it makes less difference whether the interviewer is male or female. However, research on client-counsellor relationships indicates that female counsellors provoke greater self-disclosure and emotional expression (Rumenik et al 1977). This suggests that women (and men) are more likely to confide in women. Further, female researchers have often noted their enjoyment and ease in interviewing women. Although femaleness alone may not ensure access to all female worlds, speech and language are central to interviewing and same-sex interviews are believed to produce a difference in the quality of interview (Jones 1991).

Finch (1984) notes the danger that feminist researchers interviewing informants 'woman to woman' could be exploitative because information is elicited that would not otherwise be obtained. Stanley and Wise (1983) also discuss the power dimensions of the research relationship. They claim that traditional relationships involve treating people as mere objects for the researcher. Whilst they recognise that there might be no alternative to the traditional notion of 'us', the researching elite, and 'them', the researched, they stress that at the very least feminist social scientists must be aware of the power dimensions of the research relationship. Cain (1986) points out that feminist theory may identify some relationships as oppressive while the subjects of research do not.

The ability to listen is obviously essential to establish rapport; paying attention to how one looks is a less obvious strategy (Jones 1991) and care was taken to wear appropriate clothing. It was important that the interviewer did not look like a member of 'the establishment' and so smart but casual dress was worn. It is possible that voice, manner and look may change from interview to interview. I was aware of this danger and did my best to minimise the temptation to make any changes.

Although an attempt was made to be objective, it is recognised that this may not be possible. Indeed, Roberts (1981) notes that objectiveness may not in fact be *desirable*. In adopting the concept of 'reflexivity', the researcher involves herself in the process of thinking and communicating the interactions and feelings evoked during the research experience.

It is recognised that external conditions might produce different case study results. It was not possible to control or limit the influence of conditions which were not a part of the study, such as the types of crime committed or the marital status of the interviewees, due to the difficulty of obtaining a satisfactory number of respondents. However, as a result, a larger number of cases have been studied than is usual using the case study method.

It is, of course, arguable that these interviews may not constitute evidence that can be generalised to the wider female offender population. It should also be noted that most female offenders do not go to prison and thus this research involves a disproportionate number of female offenders in custody. The data are presented as background factors rather than as a cause of female offending behaviour, which is highly problematic to establish. Clearly, however, the interview process provided an authenticity which, whatever the pitfalls, was seen as useful in providing the broad picture which this study seeks to provide. The emerging theory points to the next steps.

This section has examined why the study was carried out in this particular manner, stressing the relevance of qualitative research, the case study method and semi-structured interviewing.

The next stage in the empirical fieldwork involved the presentation and analysis of the data collected. The results of the study are presented and analysed in the following two chapters.

## PART TWO - THE RESEARCH

### CHAPTER FOUR - UNDERSTANDING FEMALE OFFENDERS

#### Introduction

One of the limitations of previous research on offenders has been that writers fail to distinguish female offenders from male offenders. Most studies have written about 'the offender' while actually examining male offenders, so that it is impossible to know whether the alleged characteristics of 'the offender' are merely reflecting characteristics of the male offending group from which they are drawn. Female offenders may have a different profile from male offenders on which 'the offender' profiles have been based. It is apparent from previous and the existing research that various factors have a different impact on men and on women, and that female offenders differ in significant respects from male offenders.

Further, as has been seen in previous chapters (Chapters One and Two), many writers have taken one theme and tried to assess its contribution to an understanding of crime. By contrast, this work seeks to show the complex, multi-causal reasons for offending by women. In this chapter, an analysis of the factors relevant to female offending is presented, in the context of studies examined in Chapter Two and on interviews carried out with female offenders. Follow-up interviews were also conducted, and factors relevant to female re-offending are examined in Chapter Five. The results presented in the present and the following chapters constitute the main findings of the research project.

The women in their own words describe the experiences of their lives and their offending. It should be noted that these women may not, in practice, represent the majority of women who commit offences; however, as Carlen argues, 'there can be no such thing as the 'typical' criminal woman' (1985, p.10). There are as many different types of 'criminal' women as there are 'non-criminal' women, and an offender must also have non-offending aspects to her life.

It is clear from the material presented in previous chapters that few researchers have given voice to women's own accounts and thus too little attention has been paid to any understanding of female offenders' lives from their own perspectives. This raises the question: how can reasons for offending be put forward when questions have so rarely been asked in this way of female offenders? (Tyler 1997b).

The research examined in this chapter looks at the importance of a number of variables. Section I examines social characteristics of the women, namely age, marital status/children, siblings, parental relationships, other relationships, schooling, peer group, residential care, sexual abuse, partner abuse, employment/unemployment and financial problems. Section II considers psychological characteristics: mental illness/psychiatric contact, alcohol and drug abuse and self-abuse. Health is considered in Section III. Section IV presents the offences committed by the women and the sentences they received. Their most recent and any previous convictions are examined, including their first contact with the police and the women's own reasons for committing their last offence. The effect on the women of their sentences is also discussed. Finally, how the women see their future is considered in Section IV.

This research attempts to aid the understanding of the causes of female offending, rather than be predictive. Predicting offending remains an imperfect operation; understanding it is more likely to provide guidance as to its prevention. The aim of this chapter is to examine female offending, to explore characteristics and feelings the women have in common, and to try to reach an understanding of their behaviour.

The names of the women have been changed, to a pseudonym chosen by each woman herself.

## SECTION I - SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

### Age

According to official statistics on conviction rates in Scotland, the peak ages of offending for females (and males) is 18 years (Scottish Office 1997a). However, young people tend to begin offending at a much lower age (Kennedy and McIvor 1992). The work of Graham and Bowling (1995) suggests that offending by females decreases sharply in their teens.

At the time of the first interview, the ages of the 26 women in the present study varied from 18 to 53 years. Five of the women interviewed were between the ages of 18 to 20. The largest number, 14 (53.8%), were between 21 and 30 years of age. Seven were over the age of 30, including one woman in her 40s and another in her 50s.

The age at first conviction varied from 14 to 41 years. The largest number, 14 (53.8%), were under the age of 21 when they received their first conviction, 10 women were between 21 and 30 years and two women were aged over 30 (with one woman in her 30s and the other in her 40s when she was first convicted). There were convictions for every age between 14 and 21 years.

Although the women in this research were not selected to be a cross-section of the female offending population, and therefore more younger than older women may have had reasons for agreeing to be interviewed, this research provides some support for the contention that most female offenders stop offending when they reach their late teens.

### Marital status/Children

Eight of the 26 women were single and had no children. The remaining 18 (69.2%) had either partner or children, or both (see Table 4.1). Two of the 26 women were pregnant at the time of the interview. One of the women was living with her female partner (problems associated with sexual identity in adolescence are considered in Schooling, below).

Table 4.1 Marital status/children

MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	No. OF WOMEN	%
Single	No	8	30.8
Single	Yes	5	19.2
Cohabiting	No	1	3.8
Cohabiting	Yes	5	19.2
Married	No	1	3.8
Married	Yes	5	19.2
Divorced	Yes	1	3.8
Total		26	99.8*

\* The total does not add up to 100% because of rounding to one decimal place

Five of the women did not have all their children living with them. The eldest of the three children of one woman was in prison and the only child of another woman had been cared for by the woman's mother since the woman herself had been in prison some 18 months earlier. Of the three other women, all of them had at least one child which had subsequently been adopted. In one family it was the first of two children, when the mother 'couldn't cope'. In another family both the children had been adopted:

*Both my boys were taken into care, the first aged one year and the second at birth. Both because of my drinking. I went into labour drunk the second time. I didn't abuse the boys. I loved them. They're both now adopted. I think about them every day.*  
(Kathy)

The fifth woman had a fragmented family:

*The middle two were taken into care when I was on a three-day binge. They were staying with a friend of mine. The oldest and youngest ones were still at home. The older one blames me. He despised my husband when he was little. I no longer see him. That hurts; and the fact that he's been hurting all these years ... The three are now with foster parents ... The social workers took 'last photos' of us together. The girl [the youngest] is legally adopted. I don't know why I listened to all that garbage from the social worker. They said I'd be able to cope better. I'd treated the social worker as a friend and she repeated all the problems I'd told her. She [daughter] was seven months when she was adopted. The [eldest] boy must have thought, 'When's my turn?' He was*

*at her birth and he fed the baby. He ran away three times from care, to 'get his bike'. I kept putting him back; another reason for his hatred of me. But I didn't think I was going to lose him. (Heather)*

These last two women in particular talked about the sadness of losing their children. For these women, the loss of their children was not only a major event in their lives at the time when the children were taken into care, but today is still of great significance to their view of themselves as not 'good' mothers and consequent feelings of low self-worth and some unhappiness.

Graham and Bowling (1995) argue that young women tend to stop offending as they leave home, form stable relationships and have children. Although this may be the case in the general female offending population, the majority of the women in the present research were in stable relationships and/or had children.

### Siblings

Unlike the work of Farrington (1995) into young offenders, but in line with the work of Graham and Bowling (1995), the number of siblings each woman had in the present study did not appear to be relevant. The largest number of women (nine) had two siblings. This was closely followed by the number of women (seven) who had three siblings. (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Number of Siblings

No. OF WOMEN	%	No. OF SIBLINGS
3*	11.5	0
1	3.8	1
9	34.6	2
7**	26.9	3
1***	3.8	4
2***	7.7	5
1	3.8	6
2****	7.7	7
Total*****	99.8	26

\* Includes one woman who did not know if she had any siblings

\*\* Includes one family with adoptive children

\*\*\* Families include step-siblings

\*\*\*\* Includes one family where her 'brothers' were her uncles, and one family containing step-siblings

\*\*\*\*\* The total does not add up to 100% because of rounding to one decimal place

Each woman's relative position in her family also did not appear to be significant. The largest number of women (10) had both older and younger siblings. Eight women were the eldest child in their family and five women were the youngest in their family. Two women had no siblings and one woman, who had been in care since a baby, did not know whether or not she had any brothers or sisters.

### Parental relationships

The family is a major mechanism of social control, not only for its younger members but also for adults. The influence of the family emerged as a powerful factor in the women's lives in the present study. For the vast majority, the family was perceived as an important safety valve in times of stress. In response to the question asking who helps them when they have difficulties or worries, almost all (92.3%) of the women talked of support by family members (parents, partner, children, and/or siblings). Four of these women included friends in their support network and one other woman added hostel and medical staff (see Other relationships, below). This compares with one woman who said she confides only in a friend and her social worker, and another woman who replied



that she had no close relationships (neither family nor friends).

Previous research has suggested that young people living with both natural parents are less likely to offend than those living with one parent or in a step-family (Tripp 1994, Graham and Bowling 1995). Thirteen (50%) of the women in the present study had experienced family separation and had not been brought up by both their natural mother and father (see Table 4.3).

*My parents split when I was eight. I see dad a lot, but not mum. (Kelly)*

*Dad brought us up. Mum came and went - she and dad were often arguing. We speak on the phone but we've not got a close relationship. I did have with my dad but he died five months before my second son was born. (Kathy)*

**Table 4.3 Parental relationships**

RELATIONSHIP	No. OF WOMEN	%
Natural parents separated	10	38.5
In care from birth	2	7.7
Adopted as baby	1	3.8
Parents together but 'didn't get on' with them	4	15.4
Parents together but physically assaulted by father	2	7.7
Parents together but physically assaulted by both parents	1	3.8
Good relationship with parents	6	23.1
Total	26	100

Of these 13 women, one was adopted as a baby, two spent their childhoods in care, three were brought up by their mother, four by their father and three by their grandmother. One of the women brought up by her grandmother had believed that the older woman was her mother. Children's lives can be seriously affected if they feel different because of 'abnormal' family relationships, such as discovery that their 'mother' is in fact their grandmother. This discovery was not uncommon in times when the stigma attached to unmarried motherhood was so great (Devlin 1995). Mary, a middle-aged woman, learned the truth about her birth when she was 14 years old:

*'I overheard a conversation between my brother, he was usually away in the*

*army, and my mother. They were arguing over money for me. He was my father and she was my grandma.'*

Some of the parents had a new partner but others remained alone. Even for those women who had lived with both their natural mother and father, three had suffered violence within these family groups:

*My mum battered me until I was 12 or 13. I never hit back. She battered my brother too. She stopped on him earlier because he hit back. In later years, late teens, when I was a cheeky brat dad battered me. My dad went for me and my brother would go for my dad. (Ashley)*

*I didna blame ma for the beatings [of Cara and her sister by their father]. She got beaten if she said anything - she still gets beaten. We had bruised, burst heads. (Cara)*

*I was sexually abused as a child by my father and my mother was a bitch. (Jenny)*

All of these 20 women (76.9%), then, had a poor, or non-existent, relationship with at least one parent.

Graham and Bowling (1995) found that children who ran away from home before the age of 16 because they did not get on with their parents were particularly likely to offend. The most common age for starting to run away from home is 14 years (ibid.). Although not specifically asked about the topic, eight women (30.8%) in the present study talked about running run away from home, on a regular or fairly regular basis, and all starting at a younger age than 14:

*I ran away a few times, not for any length of time, and from foster parents. The first time my mum had just died. I was about eight. Me and my little brother and two next door neighbours decided to head for the beach. We got down there, which was pretty bloody amazing, but we couldn't find our way back. And it was bloody freezing. I was really scared. A young couple came along; we were huddled in a doorway in our*

*swimming costumes. I think they sussed out what was happening. They got the police to take us home. Another time I walked from [town] to [city, about 16 miles away]; I got a lift from a man at [within city boundary]. I was about 15, I think. My foster family ... treated me different from their own kids. (Rose)*

*I first ran away from home when I was nine. And I carried on until I was 16. I'd do it once a week or once a month. When I was nine, it was to get away from grandad. My parents didn't know he was abusing me. I was always caught and taken home. (Judy)*

*I was always running away a lot. The first time I was 11 or 12. I'd go on my own or with a couple of friends. Sometimes I got caught, but usually I'd hand myself in to the police. I never stopped [running away] until I left the kids' home. (Louise)*

Low parental supervision, which is strongly related to the quality of relationships with parents, has also been found to be a strong influence on starting to offend (Graham and Bowling 1995, Young 1996). Only four of the women were living at home with their parent/s when they received their first conviction; these women were all under 21 years of age. Others were living alone, with friends, in hostels or with a partner (see Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4 Where living at first conviction**

WHERE LIVING	AGE	No. OF WOMEN	%
At home with parent/s	14-21	4	15.4
On own	17-25	4	15.4
With partner (cohabiting or married)			
- 21 and over	21-41	9	34.6
- under 21	16-20	4	15.4
With friends	14-16	3	11.5
In hostel	15-19	2	7.7
Total		26	100

Farrington (1994) argues that parental criminality is the most powerful of all the predictors of juvenile crime. Only one of the women in the present study mentioned parents who had offended. This woman had a family history of criminality: mother,

father, grandmother, aunt, uncle and a male cousin had each offended or were still offending, the offences ranging from non-payment of fines to homicide. However, more than half, 17 (65.4%), of the women had a present or recent association with friends or family members who had offended (see Peer group, below).

For the women in prison, relationships outside the prison were, not surprisingly, difficult. Liebling (1992) has noted that women in prison find lack of access to their families to be one of the main problems of imprisonment (the men in her study reported 'bang up' as more difficult). Various writers (such as Coyle 1991, Peart and Asquith 1992) have reported how visits from relatives and friends tend to decrease the further a prisoner gets into his or her sentence.

In sum, the present research confirms earlier studies which found that family separation and family violence featured heavily in the lives of offenders when they were children. However, it did not find parental criminality to be a relevant factor. In spite of their histories of dysfunctional families, or more probably because of them, present family relationships were important to the women.

#### Other relationships

When the women described their close relationships, they mainly talked about friends and relatives. In addition to parents (discussed above), partners were particularly important (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Close relationships

RELATIONSHIP	No. OF WOMEN
Partner (spouse/cohabitee/boy-friend)	13
Parent/s	13
Siblings	7
Friend/s	4
Children	4
Ex-partner	2
Partner's parents	1
Social worker	1
All relationships	1
No close relationships	1
Total	47*

\* Many of the women talked about more than one close relationship.

However, some women talked about the close relationships with their partners as being previously poor:

*With my partner - yes, now. It wasn't to start with. Before, he was offending.*

(Jane)

Importantly, one woman reported no close relationships:

*None. My best friend died last year. I feel like I've lost ---. She had a massive heart attack while under local anaesthetic. She left four kids. I despise her husband - my cousin - because he let his mother take the kids. I've had no-one since [friend] died.*

(Heather)

Heather expressed great sorrow and some bitterness that she felt alone. She had lost touch with her children (most of them had been taken into local authority care when young), she did not feel she could confide in her husband (whom she described as being violent on occasions) and her close friend had recently died. Gilligan (1982) has noted the particular importance to women of close friendships. Heather had a number of convictions, particularly for being drunk and disorderly, and she also talked about feelings of depression. Carlen (1988) found that of those women in her study who admitted to a past or present alcohol addiction, the majority linked this to severe

depression engendered by their bleak living circumstances.

The women in prison serving other than short-term sentences found that not only was it difficult to maintain contact with the outside world, as discussed above, but also relationships inside prison had their difficulties. One woman mentioned certain prison staff as a main support provider, while another stressed that relationships were not encouraged between fellow prisoners. Dobash et al.'s (1986) work discusses this first finding. The young women prisoners in their study talked about how a 'good attitude' allowed certain privileges and therefore 'You have to like the staff, or not show that you don't' (1986, pp.143-4). Both Dobash et al.'s and Carlen's (1983) studies confirm the latter finding. They found that attempts to form friendships in HMPI Cornton Vale were deemed inappropriate and detrimental to good prison discipline. In addition, for mothers in prison, the loss of their children – whether temporarily, or permanently with the children being taken into care by the local authority – is a major cause of concern (Lloyd 1995). Female prisoners, then, tend to experience a close form of individual confinement with few possibilities for developing friendships and with decreasing significant contact with the outside world.

It would appear that close relationships, with family members and with friends, are significant in relation to the ability to cope with life. Where such relationships are lacking, women tend to feel impoverished, with a consequent sense of loss (Gilligan 1982). Carlen (1988) argues that where women see no rewards emanating from 'familiness' and thus they have few close ties, they may feel they have nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain by offending. In contrast, the majority of the women in the present study talked about close ties. Sometimes these bonds of affection and responsibility were directly related to the offending (such as stealing to provide for one's children – see Financial problems, below), and often they were cited as part of the women's hopes for the future (see Section V, below).

## Schooling

Links have been made between educational failure and future offending behaviour (Devlin 1995, Morris et al. 1995, Audit Commission 1996). Devlin (1995) found that the vast majority of her prison inmate respondents had failed in, or had been failed by, the education system. Multiple schooling, unnoticed special needs, social disadvantage, bullying, truanting, peer group influences and punishment at school were all influences that shaped her respondents' lives.

Ten (38.5%) of the women in the present research had no educational qualifications. Comments here included 'I failed all my exams' and 'We didn't get exams at school. They didn't educate you very well'. Eight women had one or more Standard grade or 'O' levels (five of these had four or more passes, including two women who each had seven passes). The two women who had Higher grades or 'A' levels each had four passes. Six women had 'other' qualifications - that is, vocational and/or professional qualifications (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Educational qualifications

QUALIFICATIONS	No. OF WOMEN	%
None	10	38.5
Standard Grade/O level	8	30.8
Higher Grade/A level	2	7.7
Other	6	23.1
Total	26	100.1*

\* The total does not add up to 100% because of rounding to one decimal place

Seven women left school or full-time education aged 15 or under and five left aged 17 or over. The most common leaving age for the women was 16, with 14 women (53.8%) leaving at this age (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Age left school or full-time education

AGE	NO. OF WOMEN	%
14	1	3.8
15	6	23.1
16	14	53.8
17	2	7.7
18	2	7.7
20	1	3.8
Total	26	99.9*

\* The total does not add up to 100% because of rounding to one decimal place

Various reasons were offered by the women for leaving education. The woman who left aged 14 did so when she was in care:

*... when I went into the secure unit. I hardly went to classes. They were offered but it was basic Primary 2 stuff. (Robyn)*

One woman left school aged 15 when she became pregnant. Another who left school aged 15 and three who left aged 16 specifically stated that they did so because they wanted to work or had jobs to go to:

*I wasn't interested in school. I was at that age when you want to be with other folk. I wanted to work instead. (Jane)*

Two others who left aged 16 said they left because their friends did:

*I left because it was time to leave. No friends stayed on. (Kelly)*

*I don't know why I left school at 16 ... everyone else was doing it. (Margaret)*

Another who left school at 16 did so because of relationship problems:

*I left school because I moved from my parents' house to my boyfriend's. Mum*



*said I had to choose between the two. (Judy)*

Three others who had left aged 16 later went back to full-time education; one of these was at college when she offended.

One woman who left school at 17 did so to go onto a vocational training course and another woman left college aged 20. One woman left school aged 18 and went on to college, but:

*I dropped out in the fifth week. I went off the rail a wee bit ... I just stopped going. I had hundreds of pounds of stuff my family bought me. I got in with the wrong crowd. The art course was because of pressure from my family. But it was a hobby for me. (Suzanne)*

Findings in England and Wales (Graham and Bowling 1995, Audit Commission 1996) and in Scotland (Asquith et al. 1998) suggest that persistent truancy is a strong indicator on starting to offend. Although not specifically asked about the subject, 11 (42.3%) of the women talked about truanting at some time during their school years. The reasons given by the women varied. Two women said they had truanted because their friends did:

*I wanted to be the same as my pals. (Mandy)*

*Skiving school ... I was about 14. I didn't do it often, just a few times. There were mixed reasons - whether friends were doing it. If they were, I'd just go along or whatever. (Lisa)*

One woman talked about boredom and truanting in her last year of school, which was after the minimum school leaving age:

*Just [missed] some lessons, mucking about. I was with a pal - me and my best friend. Then I decided to leave. I just lost interest really. (Ashley)*

Six women talked about specific problems. For one, a steady boy-friend and a change of

school played a part in her truancy:

*[I truanted] in my last year at school. I was going then with my husband. He'd grass me off to the truancy officers and they'd send me back to school ... At the beginning of the year, it [truanting] was a couple of days here and there. Towards the end of the year, it was much more. I shifted school for the last three or four months [of school life] and it was hard at the new school ... I was five months pregnant when I left school. (Michelle)*

One woman had been expelled from school:

*It started as a teenager. I was expelled from three secondary schools, for flooding the toilets, being cheeky to teachers and so on. I was off school for two and a half years. Then I went in a kids' home, for kids with behaviour and learning problems. There was a teacher there in the mornings only. (Louise)*

Two women truanted while in care:

*Truanting was the only thing I could do, to say 'no' to the people looking after me [a children's home]. I went to four different schools because I truanted. (Heather)*

Two women talked about feeling isolated at school:

*At first I did it [truanted] occasionally. Then I realised nobody really bothered, so I did it fairly often. I'd go to school, wearing the uniform, then go off to town. I thought I didn't fit in. I wanted to, but I only could on the sports field. I felt I was not clever enough or too clever to be there. I had one special friend but we fell out. High School was posh and I wasn't. She felt I was trying to get in with the posh folk, but I didn't feel working class or middle class. I hated secondary school; I was on valium, my face broke out, my hair fell out, I felt unsettled. I was happier on my own. (Jenny)*

The second women who talked about feeling isolated at school discussed bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator:

*I never fitted in. I was always bullied at school because of my posh - well, English - accent and being badly dressed; clothes from Marks and Spencer. Always expensive clothes but old fashioned. I was slagged to bits. I was about 11 then, I think. It [truanting] was nearly every day by that time. I used to go into town by myself and shoplift, especially from Woolies, with my padded jacket on and stick things down the jacket. Make-up and things like that, which was stupid as I couldn't use them. I gave them away. I was not popular at secondary school either. I don't know ... After a few years I turned it round and bullied back. (Rose)*

A survey by Kidscape (1994) reports that 92% of young offenders in two institutions said they had been bullies at school. Bullies are more likely to come from families where there is domestic violence and hostility (Devlin 1995).

Two women reported isolated occasions when they had truanted:

*Once a few of us decided we didn't want to go to school. We took the afternoon off and went to the park and were smoking. Towards the end [of schooling] I began to like school, actually (Kathy)*

In summary, just over a quarter (28.5%) of the workforce in Scotland have no educational qualifications (Employment Department 1992). A higher percentage (38.5%) of those with no educational qualifications was found in the present study. The majority of the women (21, that is 80.8%) had left school at or before the minimum leaving age and the majority of the women reported having truanted at some time during their school years. Unlike other research (such as Carlen 1988), it was found that the majority of the women (16, that is 61.6%) held some educational or technical qualifications. However, almost half (10) of the women in the study had no qualifications at all, a further six had no academic qualifications and three women had three or less Standard grades, making a total of 19 women (73.1%) who could be said to have been poorly educated. These findings confirm the work of Devlin (1995) amongst others.

## Peer group

Responding to 'dares' and getting into minor trouble with friends is often part of normal childish behaviour and most adolescents simply 'grow out of it' (Devlin 1995). But for some of the women in the present study, peer pressure led to their first - and continued - brush with the law.

Kennedy and McIvor (1992) found the influence of the peer group to be relevant in their study of young offenders in Scotland. The National Prison Survey for England and Wales found that 57% of prisoners said 'getting in with the wrong crowd' was the reason for their offence (Walmsley et al. 1992).

Carlen's (1988) work found the quest for excitement to be one of the major factors explicitly identified by her study group of 39 women as being a prime constituent of their law breaking. Seventeen of the 39 women had, as young teenagers, been members of gangs. The main activities of all these groups had centred on a variety of crimes involving property and/or fighting. In some cases, these 'buzz'-producing activities had become habit-forming; in all cases they had resulted in a criminal record. In contrast, not one of the women in the present research talked of feelings of excitement generated by her offending.

In the present research, when looking at age of first conviction and where or with whom living at the time, the largest single category concerned those aged 21 or over and living (whether married or cohabiting) with a partner. Further, those of any age living with a partner made up half the total number of women in the study (see Parental relationships: Table 4.3). The actions of a male partner were frequently relevant to the offending behaviour of the woman, whether or not she was married to or cohabiting with him, and regardless of the woman's age.

Earlier research has found that an important predictor of offending is associating with others involved in offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, Farrington 1994). Nineteen (73.1%) of the women in the present study had either past or present partners, friends or family members who had offended (although not all had convictions). Two women had married their husbands while the men were serving a prison sentence.

Relationships had been relevant in the commission of crimes by 17 (65.4%) of the women. Four women had committed an offence with a male co-accused: one had been with her boyfriend when he went house-breaking, another had occasionally gone offending with a male friend and two others had regularly gone stealing and had taken drugs with their boyfriends.

In their work on understanding the sentencing of women, Gelsthorpe and Loucks (1997) found that some magistrates believed that, where there were male and female co-defendants, the woman had been coerced by the man into committing the crime; and that male offenders used women in crimes, such as to pass stolen cheques, in the belief that, if caught, the women would be dealt with more leniently. Five of the women in the present study specifically stated that they were forced into at least one offence by a male known to them:

*I went down town one day, to get my hair cut. A boy, a friend of my boyfriend, came up and asked me to do him a favour. He had a list of names, numbers and codes for the bank. He was in debt. I refused lots of times and walked away. Then a number of boys came up and dragged me to the bank. I went in, filled in a slip and took it to the teller. (Mandy)*

*I was threatened by my boyfriend's brother. He's now in jail. He told me I'd better do it or he'd get someone to batter me. My boyfriend didn't know and I wasn't allowed to tell him. He gave me a switch card and I had it for four days. He was selling the stuff I got from the card. I really didn't want to do it. Fraud's a serious crime. I only do prostitution and I don't see this as a crime. (Jane)*

*I cashed postal orders at four post offices. My husband asked me to do it. Let's just say that he's got a way with words. (Heather)*

*It was a robbery which went drastically wrong. [Partner] hit the woman and she died. We had planned to use violence if necessary but I was surprised at the violence. He was an animal. It was his idea and I had to be involved as otherwise I could grass on him. (Ashley)*

Three other women gave male behaviour as a relevant factor in the commission of their crime. Two were threatened by men, one by her co-habitee and the other by an acquaintance, and each woman had responded by attacking the man. Suzanne had stabbed a man threatening to rape her. Sharon A had acted to protect her child:

*He'd been physically abusing me. One morning he came home drunk and set the bed on fire with our son in it. I just flipped. I don't know why I didn't just go ... I stabbed him. (Sharon A)*

The third woman, Alexandra, had been working to keep the family together in the face of her husband's behaviour:

*My husband was gambling and he was a heavy drinker at the time. He sold everything in the house. The style card was an easy answer. (Alexandra)*

However, it was not just relationships with males which were important in offending. Three women had committed an offence with a female co-accused; all had been shoplifting:

*The first time I went on my own. Then I went with a mate; she [Danielle] also shoplifted. She was learning from me. (Michelle)*

One of the three women also had a conviction for drug dealing with a friend and for assault with friends:

*I battered three girls in town. I didn't know them. There were three of us and I was worse - I put a quine [female] in hospital. (Lisa)*

Two other women spoke of the 'encouragement' of female friends to commit a crime:

*A friend, well a 'friend' at the time, encouraged me to write out the cheques. She was with me and fifty per cent of the things I got she took. (Samantha)*

*My mate offered me £20 to get this woman out of the house. (Rose)*

One woman talked about feeling confused over her sexuality and its effect on her relations with her peers:

*I was unhappy at secondary school because the girls at school were always talking about boyfriends. At primary school I knew my sexuality was different, but I didn't know the word lesbian until I was 18 or 19. Sex education was male-female and no use. (Jenny)*

Heterosexuality is the dominant ideology in most, if not all, societies. It is premised on a model of gender intelligibility, that assumes for bodies to make sense there must be a consistency between sex and gender, that is, that males are masculine and females are feminine (Butler 1990). However, this has led to the fear of homosexuality and a contempt for homosexuals which arises from this (Plummer 1988), arguably because homosexuality challenges cultural norms of what is 'natural' and right. Such fear can lead to people having to conceal their sexual identity or even to deny them for fear of social sanction (Thompson 1997). The importance to young people of peer group culture has been emphasised in Chapter Two. Being excluded from, or not feeling part of, a group can be particularly distressing to an adolescent, and young gay and lesbian people often feel extremely isolated (Kent-Baguley 1990).

Thus, some of the women reported being excluded from friendship groups as children, or of feeling different from other children. Other women in the research had had a close relationship with their peer group, to the extent that they had truanted with friends (see Schooling, above).

The experiences of the women in this research emphasise that peer pressure, and in particular association with offenders, is relevant to their own offending behaviour, confirming Sutherland's (1939) work on differential association. Pressure from males appears to be more powerful than is female peer pressure.

## Residential care

Walmsley et al. (1992) in the National Prison Survey for England and Wales found that more than one third of young offenders had had some previous experience of being in local authority care before they were 16.

Thirteen (50%) of the women in the present study had spent time in local authority residential care (Tyler 1997a). The majority (six) had gone into care when in the young adult (12-17 years) age group. However, almost the same number had been taken into care as babies (0-4 age group), and a few had gone into care when of primary school age (5-11 years old) (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Time in care

WOMEN	AGE INTO CARE	TIME IN CARE
Samantha	Baby	1 year
Mary	Baby	1 year
Danielle	Baby	15 years
Louise	Baby	16 years
Heather	Baby	16 years
Michelle	4 & 5	1 year (in total)
Sharon B	9	9 months
Cara	12	3 years
Robyn	13	3 years
Nicolle	13	1 year
Lisa	13	6 months
Rose	14	2 years
Margaret	15	1 year

A small number were in care for a relatively short time, but the majority stayed in care for a number of years. Three were in care for all, or almost all, their entire childhood:

*I went into care when I was born and I came out when I was 16 or 17. (Louise)*

*I went into care as a child - I can't remember my age. I came out when I was 15. (Danielle)*

*I was 9 months old the first time. I was in thirteen children's homes until the last*



*place, then I came here [town] until I was 16. (Heather)*

Having a number of different homes was not unusual for the three women who had spent most of their childhood in care. They had all experienced foster care followed by children's homes. This continual movement from placement to placement suggests that for every 'normal' child there is an appropriate placement (Carlen 1988), thereby increasing the sense of difference, guilt and isolation for those children whose placements 'didn't work' (Carlen 1983). Independently of actual experiences in care, the fact of being looked after by the local authority creates a feeling in the child that she must have done something wrong to be so 'unwanted', and the (old) social work practice of separating children in care from their siblings increases the sense of isolation.

Louise, who had been in care all her childhood, believed that her experience of care was in part responsible for her long history of psychiatric problems:

*They say it's my upbringing that caused it. I had foster parents and they weren't awfa good to us.*

She now lives in a hostel, which provides her with the necessary support: *I've got the security I need in here.*

Heather, who had been in care for many years and had had a large number of homes during those years, specifically mentioned the difficulties she experienced in coping after leaving care:

*I wasn't good with money. It dates back to childhood. I hadn't seen an electricity bill until I was 17 years old.*

The constant moving around, and the lack of opportunity to make and maintain relationships and to become independent, had had lasting effects on these women.

The reasons for the women having been in care as children were either for matters beyond their control or as a result of their behaviour (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9 Reasons for care

NAME	REASON FOR CARE AS EXPLAINED BY INTERVIEWEE
Samantha	Adoption
Mary	Abandoned
Danielle	Unknown to Danielle
Louise	Unknown to Louise
Heather	Mother needed rest
Michelle	Parents separating
Sharon B	Re-house family
Cara	Beaten by father (CH)*
Robyn	No stable address (CH)
Margaret	Truanting (CH)
Lisa	Running away (because beaten by father) (CH)
Rose	Truanting, stealing (CH)
Nicolle	Truanting, stealing (CH)

\*CH indicates that the woman was taken into care through a Children's Hearing

Two women had been taken into care due to their offending behaviour:

*When I was 14 and a half I went into care because I was truanting and stealing.*

(Rose)

*I was truanting and I stole from them [parents].* (Nicolle)

Three further women had been taken into care as a result of their own behaviour, other than under the offence ground specified in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (now the Children (Scotland) Act 1995):

*I went into a children's home when I was 15, for not going to school.* (Margaret)

For two of these three women, their behaviour - which had led to the local authority care - was primarily as a result of another's actions:

*My dad was an alcoholic and he battered me. I started running away. Then I*

*was taken into care. (Lisa)*

*I was kicked out of dad's house when I was 12. I don't get on with dad's co-hab. - I battered her. I went to stay with my auntie. Mum came over from the USA and took me back there. She brought me back here and then to the USA again. Eventually, when I was 13, social work picked me up at the immigration office. (Robyn)*

However, the majority of women, eight (30.8%), had been taken into care due to family problems rather than offending or similar activities. One had been in care briefly before being adopted as a baby; two others entered childhood-long care as very young children and knew little, if anything, about their natural parents. The remaining five spent one or more periods in care, four placed in 'voluntary care' due to parental inability to look after their child and the fifth taken into care through a Children's Hearing:

*I was nine months old the first time. My mum was pregnant and it was to give her a rest. (Heather)*

*I was in voluntary care for nine months, while they re-housed mum. Our house had got on fire. (Sharon B)*

*The first time I went into care I was about four, before I went to school. The second time was after I started school. My parents were splitting up at the time. (Michelle)*

*I was abandoned when I was three months. I went into care until I was one and then I was brought up by my grandmother. I thought she was my mother. (Mary)*

*Dad hit us. It started as young as I can mind [remember]. He always had a stick or something in his hand to beat us - for no specific thing, he'd go mental. When I was 12 I went to the police station and told them about dad. They came with me to the house and I sat in the police car waiting ... We [children] came back home for a trial period, a month, but it didn't work. (Cara)*

These experiences show a fractured home life for the women: childhoods which

included a lack of (non-institutional) support and of financial problems for their parents, marital breakdown and child abuse.

Stein and Carey (1984) found in their study of 79 young people leaving care that 16% had committed offences and a further four per cent were in custody. Carlen's (1988) work found being in residential care to be one of the major factors explicitly identified by her study group of 39 women as being a prime constituent of their law breaking. Although the majority of the offences committed by the women in her study were property offences, only 12 of the women saw poverty as having been even part cause of their criminal activities. Eleven women believed that, their poverty notwithstanding, they would never have been in trouble with the criminal courts had they not spent considerable parts of their childhood in care. Twenty-two of the women in Carlen's (1988) study had been (or were still) in residential care: 11 for family circumstances, eight for 'status offences' (such as running away from home) and three for criminal offences.

In contrast, none of the women in the present study identified having been in care as a factor relevant to their offending behaviour. Nevertheless, experience of being in care, regardless of the reason for that care, appears to have had a negative effect on the lives of some of these recipients of care. Disrupted family relationships, a sense of isolation and of difference, and difficulties in establishing independence were experienced by the women in this study who had been in care, and thus it can be argued that being in care may have an indirect effect on their offending behaviour.

### Sexual abuse

Walmsley et al. (1992), in the National Prison Survey in England and Wales found that 60% of women in prison had been subjected to sexual abuse, from their parents, husbands or partners, before coming into prison.

Thirteen (50%) of the women (possibly an under-estimate, due to reluctance to discuss such a sensitive topic) in the present study stated that they had been the victims of some form of sexual abuse. Ten women had first experienced sexual abuse as children and three as young women. The type of abuse experienced ranged from frequent 'touching'

to rape, from a single occasion to frequent abuse and from a young age to recent abuse. Some of the women talked specifically about rape, touching and harassment. Others used the term 'sexual abuse' or 'sexual assault' and therefore the exact nature of this abuse is not known.

The majority of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are not strangers to the children, but usually live in the home and are often in a position of authority or trust over the child (Waterhouse et al. 1994). Seven (26.9%) of the women in the present research had been abused by a friend or relative, or by someone in a position of trust:

*I was sexually abused by my foster-mother. I was taken away from them and went into homes after that. (Louise)*

*I was badly sexually abused when I was young, six or seven, by my uncle. My sister was only little, two years younger than me. We were in bunk beds. I knew it happened to her, and she knew it happened to me, but I only talked to her about it in recent years. He was living with us and it stopped when he left the house. I only told ma and dad a few years ago. (Cara)*

*I was raped when I was 13. I knew the person. I told friends but not the police. (Samantha)*

*My foster-father sexually abused me, when I was 14 to 15 years old. I reported it years later. He was struck off the fostering list. That's all that happened to him, I think. (Rose)*

The negative impact in child sexual abuse cases comes from the depth of the betrayal (Salter 1995). When the perpetrator is a loved or trusted adult, the negative impact on the victim must be correspondingly greater.

Five women had been victims of more than one perpetrator of sexual abuse. Three of these women knew both or all of the men involved:

*I was sexually abused as a child by my father. My mother was a bitch. She used*

*to scream and shout. My father was drunk and used to abuse me, but I could put that in a box and keep it separate ... When I was 13 or 14 I was raped by my best friend. We were at his house and I was drinking. (Jenny)*

*Between six and 13 my grandad touched me. It stopped when he died. When I was 14 I was raped by three guys; I knew them. I was on my way home, about 10 o'clock at night, and I was stopped by them and they asked me for a fag. They raped me. I didn't report it immediately as I was afraid it was my fault. I went to my boyfriend's house and stayed there. The police came looking for me, as my parents were worried. The three boys were reported to the Procurator Fiscal, but he decided to take no action as I'd been glue-sniffing and he thought that had happened before the rape. It happened after; I did it to forget what had happened. (Judy)*

*I was raped when I was 28, and before that the first time when I was 19 by the guy I was living with. It's always by someone I know. (Heather)*

The other two women had been sexually abused by males known to them, and they had also been the victims of rape by a stranger:

*When I was 10 I was raped by a stranger. I was too frightened to tell gran as I'd not been at school. The second time was when I was 23. I was raped by my 'brother' [uncle]. I'd been sexually harrassed - touching - by him since I was 13. The neighbours, upstairs and next door, heard my screaming but they didn't come. They were frightened of him. I didn't involve the police. I got pregnant as a result of the rape. The baby was stillborn. (Mary)*

*The man across the road used to expose himself, from when I was six to about 12 ... A man at work had intercourse with me when I was about 14 or 15. I thought it was my own fault. I knew what he was doing at that age. I didn't want it to happen ... I was raped when I was 21. I didn't know the four. It happened in a DHSS hostel in [English town]. I told the police, but the men weren't caught. (Kathy)*

The thirteenth woman had no history of sexual abuse but her conviction related to sexual assault:

*I was threatened sexually by two men ... he had a knife; he was going to rape me. I stabbed him. (Suzanne).*

The effect of child sexual abuse tends to manifest itself in women in later psychiatric problems, rather than in aggressive behaviour (Boswell 1995). Although approximately half (seven) of the 13 women who had been sexually abused had convictions for violence, five women who had not been sexually abused also had convictions for violence. Depression, self-abuse and drug and alcohol misuse were also talked about by women who had been victims of sexual abuse. (Psychological characteristics are discussed in detail below).

These findings have limitations, of course. This research is based on the women's own accounts, with the possibility of non- or false disclosure, and therefore generalising should be avoided. Nevertheless, sexual abuse may be a relevant, direct, factor in the offending behaviour of the women, when psychological characteristics are also considered.

#### Partner abuse

In Britain, some 100,000 women a year seek help from Women's Aid refuges; it is believed that they represent the 'tip of the iceberg' as many women are, for various reasons, unwilling to report domestic violence or to seek help (Ghazi 1994). Walmsley et al. (1992), in the National Prison Survey for England and Wales, found that 80 % of women in prison had been subjected to violence, from their parents, husbands or partners before coming into prison.

In the present study, 11 women (42.3%) had been, or were still, the victims of domestic violence. Some of the women appeared to accept this as a (distressing) part of life:

*My [first] husband beat me; I learned to be quiet .... My [second] husband is aggressive when he's overdoing drugs. The door's been kicked in three times by him. I've been in a woman's refuge. I'm sometimes beaten, but the threat is always there. I'm constantly going round on edge. Me and [husband] have to work things out, or he has*

to go. *It's not as easy to do as that ...* (Heather)

*My mother had died and I moved in with him within two weeks of knowing him. I had twelve years of hell. He mentally and physically abused me and the older boy. When I told him I was leaving him - he was running about - he threw me out of our flat window.* (Mary)

*It happened over a period of time, when I was aged between 21 and 25 years ... I had to give up everything - friends, even my diaries, photos, letters, everything. He just didn't want any of my past ... He had power over me. I couldn't stop it [offence] at the time, but just wanted not to do it in the future. 'You were scared, [own name]. It was real.'* (Ashley)

*Every relationship I've had with a man has ended up that way ... I must be attracted to these idiots, you know. It's not because they want to hurt you, but they can't control you.* (Suzanne)

Others, whilst seeming to dismiss the beatings as 'nothing serious', have been ready to involve the police when matters have gone further than the woman feels she is willing or able to accept:

*I've been to a refuge twice, when he's beaten me up or we've had a very big row. He's got a very bad temper. But his bark's louder than his bite. He shouts and he'll slap or punch me but he's never really violent. I had him charged with assault once, when he punched me on the face.* (Jane)

*My husband used to beat me up. He'd slap me about - nothing too serious. I called the police and got him locked up for it after the first boy was born.* (Margaret)

Jane's comment that 'he's never really violent' and Margaret's statement, 'nothing too serious', even though both husbands had consequently been convicted of assault, reinforces a finding made in Carlen's (1998) work. She cites a female prisoner who called childhood violent play-fighting with her brother 'nothing serious'. These women, in both Carlen's work and the present study, tended to see violence in the family as



normal behaviour.

Two other women had dealt with the matter themselves:

*A previous boyfriend - a violent bastard - ended up stabbing me above the eye [showed scar]. Every time I came back at him, he came back twice as hard. He hit me so many times I didn't even feel that he'd stabbed me. The screwdriver was covered in blood. But I got my own back, as a mate beat him up. I took him back after he stabbed me. I've always felt contempt for women who do that. He got a jail sentence [for another offence], so I dumped him then. I've never went through that for others. Others wouldn't dare! (Rose)*

*I'd been living with him for five years. He was violent to me for most of that time ... One morning he came home drunk, at 2am, and set the bed on fire with our son in it. I just flipped. I don't know why I didn't just go. The offence happened at 6am. He'd put the fire out, in the quilt, and he'd taken our son into bed with him after we'd had an argument because he was drunk and I wouldn't go to bed with him. When he was asleep, I got my son, got his clothes, into the car, went back and did it - stabbed him in the neck, I meant to kill him. I told the police this! I had no solicitor at this time and I was very upset at what I'd done. I went to friends, asked them to take my son to my mum and then told the police. I was thinking all the time about my son. I didn't want him to see me stab him or be taken away by the police. (Sharon A)*

For Sharon A, her co-habitee was a direct 'cause' of her offence. Other women reported threats from their partners as the reason for their offending (see Peer group, above). The 'battered woman syndrome', which has been discussed in Chapter Two, argues that women stay in abusive relationships as a result of practical reasons, little self-esteem and emotional ties. This last point links back to the importance of relationships, discussed above.

Partner abuse, then, whether perceived by the victim as serious or not, was a factor in the lives of many of the women in the present research. These findings confirm Walmsley et al.'s (1992) findings of a link between victims of partner abuse and offending behaviour by the victims. However, as stated above (Sexual abuse), there

may not be a simple, direct link and other factors also need to be considered.

### Employment/Unemployment

The majority of the women, 23 (88.5%), were not in employment at the time of the interview. Thirteen of the 26 women had children of primary school age or younger living with them, and/or were pregnant, and so it could be considered not unreasonable for them not to be employed outside the home. One of the 13 women specifically stated she was not working outside the home at present because she was a mother. However, the majority of these women had a history of temporary, part-time work, which indicates a wish to be in some form of paid employment. Two of the 13 women had been working until they went to prison. Of the three women out of the 26 who had some form of work, two of them were mothers with children of primary school age.

In addition, 11 of the 23 unemployed women were interviewed in prison (some on remand and others serving a sentence) and were not, therefore, employed at that time. Five of the women in prison had been employed prior to prison but had lost their job as a result of being sentenced to custody:

*My last job was in a pub, cooking food and behind the bar. I lost the job as I was in prison. (Nicolle)*

*I worked as a chef immediately before here and I can go back ... I love the job ... I left to go into prison. (Alexandra)*

The other six women interviewed in prison had not worked for some time prior to their prison sentence. Two women had left their shop work because they had become pregnant and one woman had been sacked:

*I was a shop assistant, two years ago ... I was there for six months ... I was sacked. I wasn't getting on with the boss. He sacked me for eating in the shop. He was looking for an excuse. (Sharon B)*

Another woman, interviewed while on remand, was currently involved in part-time, illegal work and did not wish to say what this work was. She added:

*I've had a couple of jobs in the past year, the last one in hospital catering ... It started to bore me, so I left. I liked the independence, but then I went back to my normal self. I left because there was not enough excitement in it. (Lisa)*

In her study into female offending, Carlen (1988) found that the quest for excitement was one of the most often mentioned factors as being an immediate circumstantial reason for law-breaking. In the present study, however, a lack of excitement was mentioned by only one woman as being even in part responsible for her offending. This can be compared with work by sub-cultural theorists, such as Cohen (1955), who stress that excitement is an essential part of life for the (working-class) teenage male, and work by Campbell (1991) which did not find such a focus on excitement in her study of young women in gangs. The desire for excitement, and the relative lack of such a desire, may, therefore, be a male/female difference.

The remaining two women interviewed in prison had given up their employment for various reasons; one because the work (care assistant) involved travelling and she had transport problems, and the other because *I had difficulty getting up in the morning. I didn't go in for ages. I think they realised I wasn't coming back. (Rose)*

The twelve women who were not working at the time of the interview and not in prison, also talked about their last job and the reasons for leaving it. Three women reported that they had left work because they had not liked their last, factory-based employment:

*I last worked three years ago ... I didn't like it - I prefer waitressing, I did that before - but I wanted a job. I left because the work was too hard, standing all day and always stinking of fish. No matter how many baths you had, you still stink. (Jane)*

*My last job was three years ago, working in the fish. I was half a day there and I cut off the top of my finger. My boy-friend used to abuse me, so I went home to mum, got the fish job, left it and went back to my boy-friend ... Both of us were [drug] dealers and didn't have to work. (Judy)*

Three women left due to health reasons, one as a result of depression:

*I worked as a bar-maid. I left two years ago and have had no jobs since ... I left because the court thing was coming up. It was a fill-in job. I'd left my main job [catering] when I committed the offence. I moved into the hostel and went into depression. The police came in the bar often, as it was a rough pub, and I felt they were coming in for me. (Jenny)*

Another was on long-term invalidity benefit:

*I last worked years ago, dishwashing, I think ... I left because of psychiatric problems. (Louise)*

and a third woman gave up her work due to her drink problem:

*I was a care assistant. It was a 'training for work' job, not a job. I left a few months ago, because I started to drink again. (Kathy)*

The pattern which is emerging here is that a number of the women in the study had had poorly-paid jobs, they had not worked for some time and they were suffering from poor mental health. Lack of satisfaction in their work life (which was non-existent), coupled with little income and feelings of depression, all operate to produce bleak living circumstances.

One woman had been sacked:

*My last job was as a receptionist ... I didn't like it ... I got sacked. I'd split up with my fiance, got thrown out of our home by him and I wanted time off work to find somewhere to live. He [boss] didn't want this, so he sacked me. (Natasha)*

and another had been sacked, then reinstated, but left anyway:

*I was a chamber maid ... for five months, three years ago. I didn't want work to*

*know about the methadone. I begged my husband to bring it down by 12 o'clock, but he didn't. He was 'green' - that's a pun. I was also taking uppers and downers ... I argued with the boss, she exploded. I was a good worker - she almost immediately took back having given me the sack - but I was cross. (Heather)*

Employment in 'traditional female occupations', such as catering (six women), shop work (four women), care work (four women), fish factory work (three women) and office-related work (three women) dominated their job experiences. Such employment tends to be poorly paid and repetitive, sometimes with unsociable hours, and often with little or no job security or opportunity for promotion. One further woman had been a college student and had worked as a cleaner for a few hours a week. Two women had had almost no employment: *I left school when I was pregnant ... I did casual work at the end of last year. (Michelle)*. One woman stated simply that her work was illegal.

It is perhaps not surprising that, given the nature of their work, most of the women in this research did not talk about a career or job satisfaction. As stated above, the overall picture that emerged was that the majority of the women had a history of short-term jobs and a number had not worked for some years. Two women had never had a job:

*I've never had a job. My [first] child was born when I was 17. (Cara)*

The three women who were in some form of employment in the community at the time of the interview were also doing 'traditional female' work. They had been, at the time of interview, of short duration:

*I'm an assistant manageress at a children's play centre ... this is my third job in the past year ... the last was door-to-door sales. I like the job; I've been there only three weeks. I didn't like the last job, trudging from door to door, and getting doors slammed in your face. There was no future in it. (Samantha)*

*I'm a care assistant, I'm a volunteer at present, to start paid from next week. My last job was care assistant, one and a half years ago ... I loved it, but I split up with my cohabitee. It was shift work, so I had no child-minder. (Mary)*

This last comment underlines the problems faced by mothers of young children, who want paid employment. Other women in this study did not wish for employment outside the home as they considered themselves first and foremost to be mothers and home-makers. Research by Graham and Bowling (1995) shows that female offenders who become socially mature adults, including taking up stable employment, are significantly more likely to stop offending than those who do not. However, there are a number of possible reasons for unemployment. These include not only a lack of qualifications and child care problems, but also not actively looking for work and a criminal record. Thus, employment may not be possible or even desired, and therefore the discussion becomes a circuitous one. However, the findings in the present study confirm the earlier research, in that the majority of the women were unemployed. More importantly, this factor relates to money concerns (see Financial problems, below). Finally, a number of the women stressed that they would like 'a decent job', which indicates that they wished for stable employment, if not at present then in the future (see Section V, below).

#### Financial problems

Despite Wilson's (1985) argument that unemployment seems to bear little or no relationship to crime, others detect a relationship between recession in general, and unemployment in particular, and criminal behaviour (see for example Scarman 1982).

Economic factors are usually given little consideration when examining crimes by women. However, financial gain (poverty or otherwise) was found by Carlen (1988) to be one of the major factors explicitly identified by her study group of 39 women as being a prime constituent of their offending. The majority of the offences committed by the women in Carlen's study were property offences. The majority of these were committed at those times when the women saw crime as the best method of both solving their financial problems and getting some control over their lives. Property crime was chosen because certain types (such as shoplifting) were seen to be 'easy'. Of their own admission, 32 women had committed at least some of their crimes primarily for financial gain.

In the present study, poverty, rather than otherwise (need rather than greed), motivated the woman to offend. Eighteen women (69.2%) talked of financial problems. Eleven of the women reported that they had committed their last (or only) crime because of financial problems. These ranged from 'stealing to survive':

*I'd moved in with my boyfriend. That was the year that there was no longer benefit for 16 year olds. We were stealing food, stealing things to sell, stealing to survive ...I stole mum's credit card, then did the fraud to pay her back, £200 stolen from her and other debts and drugs. (Judy)*

through 'being short of money':

*Because of money ... I went to the shop - it was so easy, you could just help yourself. I tried small things first. Eventually I got caught. (Michelle)*

to 'the money is good':

*The money's very good. There are very few pimps in [city]. Most of the women live with their husbands or boyfriends. A few are single. Most have kids. (Jane)*

For six of these 11 women, their last conviction was for fraud. This is comparable to the wider female offender population, in that women tend to commit crimes involving dishonesty (and in particular shoplifting), rather than crimes of violence (see Chapter Two: Tables 2.4 and 2.7). There may be various reasons for this, including the relative ease in which women may carry out minor property offences. For example, women in both Carlen's (1988) and the present study talked about shoplifting as being 'easy'. Further, getting fined for shoplifting was seen as precipitating acts of dishonesty:

*I don't like getting fines as that means going out stealing. (Cara)*

Importantly, too, the six women whose last conviction was for fraud saw these crimes as the best method of solving their financial problems:

*I was in debt with friends, my mum, mum's catalogue and Christmas was coming*

*up. I'd seen everybody with money and you had none in your pocket. Everybody had money there [at hostel]. To make it worse, they'd tell you how much they had. I was on the dole. It [hostel] had a high rent, considering I was unemployed. It was reduced because I was unemployed, but it still took a large amount of my money. (Mandy)*

*It was the end of being a student. I had a student loan, two overdrafts, no grant left and money owed to others, money I'd borrowed from them. ... I wrote a very large number of bad cheques - over four days, about £3000. It wasn't premeditated. Then I got very scared about it and ran off, which didn't help. (Samantha)*

*We couldn't live on what we had: £47 for the two of us. We were under the poverty line and my husband wasn't working. (Heather)*

*I committed the offence because I had no money and [child's father] didn't pay maintenance. I was not working at the time - I was on benefits. I wanted [child] to look nice and have nice clothes. When [partner] left, he left the cheque book with me. He hadn't paid maintenance but he always wanted to see the child. I used the cheques and ordered catalogues in a different name - clothes for me and [child], crockery, and so on. I intended to pay. I ignored their letters, then they stopped coming and I forgot about them. (Nicolle)*

*I wasn't working at the time and was trying to bring up three children. My husband would sell everything in the house and he was a heavy drinker at the time. I had difficulty paying the mortgage and my husband was gambling. (Alexandra)*

Two women had their most recent convictions for shoplifting:

*I took stuff to sell, to get money ... The goods were worth a lot of money and it was all done in one day ... I had five kids to feed. (Michelle)*

Michelle's offence, and the reason given for it, confirms the view of the magistrates in Gelsthorpe and Loucks' (1997) research into the sentencing of female offenders, that women steal items which they, or particularly their children, need.



Two women had last convictions for violent offences, one for assault and robbery:

*I didn't get enough [money]. I was on the social ... and in bad company. The money ran out and we got up to no good. (Sharon B)*

and one for murder:

*We had trouble paying the mortgage. I was unemployed and he was not responsible with money. We did it [committed last offence] for the money. (Ashley)*

Seven other women talked of financial problems, some severe, but did not claim that these problems had been a major reason for their offending. Nevertheless, their accounts reveal poverty to have been a relevant factor in their offending:

*Basically, I had no money. When the council put us [Natasha and her partner at the time] into B and B, we could only be in the room from 6pm to 9am and then we were thrown out. We had to buy our own food, so we weren't eating. At the time, both of us had drug problems, too. And we were both unemployed as NFA [no fixed abode]. (Natasha)*

*I was in a lot of debt. I had food to buy, smoke and dope. The wife [woman] came to the door every Monday, from Shopacheck [money lending company]. Sometimes I'd steal - the kids clothes normally and my own. It's not enough for three kids to live on. (Cara)*

*I'd never been taught how to manage money. I'd been institutionalised since 14. I was not used to [managing] it and benefit was not enough. (Robyn)*

Robyn's account of her financial problems being in part caused by the difficulties of coping after having been in care, has been discussed elsewhere (see Residential care, above).

Of the 18 women who talked about financial problems, only three discussed this in relation to a need for money to buy drugs, and only one of these three said this was the

reason for her offending. This finding can be compared to Morris et al.'s (1995) research in England, which found drug use to be the most common feature of imprisoned women's accounts of their re-offending. In Scotland, Lowe and Shewan (1996) found that the need to get money to buy drugs became the main focus of the methadone clients in their study. Loucks (1998) found that approximately a quarter of the women in HMPI Cornton Vale had offended to support their habit.

Unemployment, insufficient state benefit, debt and the need to feed children were the major causes of poverty suffered by the women in the present research, and financial need was often directly related to their particular offending behaviour. Although the research does not confirm findings of earlier work that women tend to steal in order to fund a drug habit, this research does confirm findings of other, earlier work on poverty 'causing' crimes of dishonesty.

## **SECTION II - PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

### **Mental illness/Psychiatric contact**

Women, more than men, are traditionally seen as prone to suffer from mental illness (Showalter 1985). However, although official figures show that more women than men have been admitted to psychiatric hospitals in Scotland over the last ten years, admission rates for women are decreasing (Scottish Health Statistics 1996). In his work on prisoners, Blackburn (1993) points out that although it would appear that approximately a third of prisoners show some form of mental illness, this is mainly a reflection of high rates of alcohol and drug abuse. Further, he notes that rates of mental illness for lower socio-economic groups, from which prisoners are more likely to be drawn, are higher than for higher socio-economic groups.

In the present study, seven (26.9%) of the women reported some form of depression. Six women had been, or were still being, treated for psychiatric problems, mainly depression. Three of these women specifically talked about their offending in relation to their depression:

*I don't really know myself. I was depressed at the time. I had nobody. It [Giro] was there and I took it, in the mail box. I just collected the mail and there was the Giro at the top ... All my pals had left me. My family - we weren't speaking at the time. My pals hated me for some reason, I don't know why. They all got together ... The temptation was there. I didn't want to do it and I felt really horrible after it. (Mandy)*

*My mental health is not very good. There's been the stress of waiting for my case to come up. Plus, depression before the offence was committed. The company I worked for were building up and I'd developed a lot of training programmes. They were quite successful, they took off all over Scotland. The company offered me a seat on the board of directors. After two years, it was not forthcoming. I was suffering from stress and depression; I'd lost my first child with cancer. I was on anti-depressants, then on hormone tablets and they led to manic depression, I was out of control. I took the money for revenge; I didn't need it. The psychiatrist wrote to the local court! - but it didn't help. (Gloria)*

*I'm on anti-depressants - a high dose and for the foreseeable future. It started two and a half years ago. I was working all the time and I got promotion. I didn't want it, then I offended through depression. And I suffer from hypochondria. The doctor checks me with each worry. If I think I have high blood pressure, she'll take it to show me I'm OK. Being honest with her has helped. It's better, too, as it's made me more rational in my thinking. I cancelled the health magazine as I thought I had everything - every illness - in it! (Jenny)*

Jenny was given probation with a psychiatric requirement for her first offence of fire-raising. Research into fire-raising has been dominated by investigation of male fire-raisers (Roberts 1996), which has shown they are more likely to be motivated by revenge, fraud, acts of vandalism and, in a tiny percentage of cases, pyromania. Very little work has been done on the female fire-setter, perhaps because this is a particularly uncommon offence for women to commit. Stewart (1993) studied 28 fire-setters in a female prison in England. She found that abuse had occurred in over half the cases and the vast majority of all the women she studied had long histories of behavioural and psychological difficulties.

Concerns about the 'psychiatrisation' of crime have been paralleled by concerns about the 'criminalisation' of the mentally ill (Blackburn 1993). Singleton et al. (1998) have shown high prevalence rates of mental disorders among female (and male) remand and sentenced prisoners in England and Wales. Singleton and colleagues looked at neurosis, psychosis, alcohol and drug dependence, personality disorder, deliberate self-harm and intellectual functioning, and the co-morbidity of these disorders. They found that 40% of both the remand and the sentenced female prisoners reported receiving help or treatment for their mental health before entering prison (double the proportion reported by their male counterparts). Over 96% in all groups had experienced at least one stressful life event (such as serious money problems, the breakdown of a steady relationship or a history of sexual abuse) and about a half had experienced five or more stressful life events. It can be argued that the deinstitutionalisation of mentally ill people has led to more of them being processed by the criminal justice system.

In the present study, another of the six women had a long history of psychiatric problems, and had received both in-patient and out-patient care:

*I first had the problem when I was about 18 or 19. They say it's my upbringing that caused it. I had foster parents and they weren't awfa good to us. And my [natural] mother suffered from mental problems, and my brothers, apart from one, but I don't know what. I was in [psychiatric hospital] for over a year. I'm in and out of psychiatric hospital quite a bit. I'm still under a psychiatrist - I go every two to three months. I took a bad breakdown a few months ago. I was worried about [boyfriend] - he cut his throat - and I was worrying about moving on from here [hostel for ex-offenders]. I've got the security I need in here. The breakdown suddenly happened. The psychiatrist says it was something organic - I took too many pills. But the GP says it was depression. I go up to [psychiatric hospital] for my jag, with a member of staff from here. I've been told I've got a 'personality disorder' - nothing can be done for me. I'm described as being mentally handicapped, mentally impaired, mentally ill, psychotic - they kept changing the category to put me under. (Louise)*

All but one of Louise's offences were committed when she was living alone in the community:

*I was in and out of court nearly every week. I was in my own flat then and I couldn't cope. There was no support in the community; it was like a nightmare. I knew I was making the phone calls but I couldn't stop. One judge said I was a psychiatric problem, not a court problem. (Louise)*

Nevertheless, Louise has spent time in prison - on remand, as a fine defaulter and serving a longer prison sentence. *'There are a lot of women in [prison] with psychiatric problems, who should be in a psychiatric hospital getting help. If they don't get help when they get out, they will re-offend'.*

Ironically, although HMPI Cornton Vale was established as a 'therapeutic' institution, earlier research states that little therapy appeared to take place (Dobash et al. 1986). Researchers have noted the psychiatric needs of female prisoners (see for example Dobash et al. 1986, Liebling 1994, Loucks 1998, Singleton et al. 1998), findings which consequently question whether such offenders should be in prison at all.

Before she committed her last offence, Louise stated that she:

*(W)as depressed or high - one of the two. On medication, mood swings just happen, the mind goes, I can't control it. I had problems at the time because I wasn't happy here [hostel for ex-offenders]. I wanted to move on. It's not an appropriate place - they don't deal with psychiatric folk. Now the psychiatric services just ask me about my medication, but they don't want to know about any problems. They say it's up to the court to deal with. (Louise)*

Louise stressed her need for security and the implications for her if this is lacking. Her numerous convictions are for nuisance telephone calls, which she makes when she feels in need of attention and help. It appears that neither the health service nor the criminal justice system feel they can take responsibility for her psychiatric/offending problems, and that the responsibility for her is moved from one authority to another.

Two women talked about continuing problems with their 'nerves':

*I have personal problems - [husband]'s ill (he's on drugs) and my nerves.*

(Heather)

*I'm on tranquillisers because of problems with my nerves. (Kathy)*

Various researchers have examined the high use of prescribed drugs by women in prison (see for example Owen and Sim 1984, Mandaraka-Sheppard 1986, Genders and Player 1987, Madden 1996). There are a number of possible interpretations of their findings, some of which are applicable to women in the community (Kessler et al. 1981). These interpretations include medication as a means of acclimatising women to their 'role' in society, the readiness of GPs to provide medication to females, women's greater likelihood of reporting symptoms of distress and of expressing a desire for treatment compared to men in a similar situation, and women's tendency to accept medical intervention. This is not to dismiss the mental health problems reported by the women in the present study, but to note women's tendency to ask for, be offered and accept medical intervention in the first place.

Importantly, women tend to use drugs as a means of coping with painful memories, the trauma of repeated abuse or as survival strategies (Lightfoot and Lambert 1992). In addition to 'problems with my nerves' (above), Kathy also reported that she had to have psychiatric help for a while after she was raped aged 21 years.

The seventh woman talked about an unhappy time in her life:

*Over four days, I spent about £3,000. But it wasn't just that ... I went crazy really. It wasn't pre-meditated. Then I got very scared about it and ran off, which didn't really help ... I had money problems. I defrauded the bank. I wrote a very large number of bad cheques and then cleared off. I had split up with my previous fiance, my best friend had been killed and I thought I'd failed my exams. (Samantha)*

Whilst not specifically mentioning their mental health, various other women had self-abused: some had attempted suicide and others had cut or otherwise deliberately hurt themselves (see Self-abuse, below).

To conclude, women may suffer disproportionately from mental health problems. The

stresses occasioned by the dual role of home-maker and bread-winner many women have may result in mental health problems (Smart 1976, Mathiesen 1980). However, women tend to be more willing to ask for, be offered and to accept medical treatment. It is not known whether the rates of mental illness in female offenders are significantly different from general female population rates. However, women tend to use drugs as a coping mechanism, and the women in the present research all reported stressful life-events (see Discussion and conclusion, below).

### Alcohol and drug abuse

Earlier research (such as McMurrin 1986) suggests that the abuse of alcohol and drugs by offenders is high. The present research confirms this finding. Sixteen (61.5%) of the women interviewed talked about past or present alcohol and/or drug abuse (see Table 4.10). Alcohol problems were defined by the women themselves, rather than defined as drinking a minimum/maximum number of units a day. In addition, although there may be a difference between binge drinking (which can be seen as a matter of choice) and addiction (which is treated by the medical profession as an illness) (Gelsthorpe and Loucks 1997), no distinction was made between these two in the research. The women simply talked about 'drinking problems'. The use of controlled drugs is, of course, in itself illegal. Thirteen of the 16 women who talked about alcohol or drug abuse reported either a conviction for drug dealing or that alcohol had played some part in facilitating the offence (for example, '*There's no way I would do those things when sober*').

Table 4.10 Drugs/alcohol abuse in the lives of the women

TYPE OF ABUSE	No. OF WOMEN	%
Alcohol abuse	6	23.1
Drug abuse	5	19.2
Both alcohol and drug abuse	5	19.2
No reported abuse	10	38.5
Total	26	100

Alcohol consumption is so deeply embedded within Scottish culture (Eren 1995) that it is not surprising that a number of the women referred to times in their lives when they had been drinking heavily. Eleven (42.3%) of the 26 women reported a past or present drinking problem. The majority stated that they had begun to drink as teenagers with their friends, but for some of these women serious events (such as rape and abortion) had precipitated the heavy drinking.

All six women who had alcohol only problems also had convictions relating to offences committed when drunk. These were serious assault:

*We all went drinking as a crowd, when I was about 14. It wasn't social drinking. After the rape when I was 23, my drinking problem started. I feel abandoned and not having anyone. My mother abandoned me and sometimes I ask myself why. After the [marital] split and the throat [cancer] and the house [cohabitee left house stripped], there were too many problems. I started drinking again ... She [drinking pal] went at me with a vodka bottle and I blacked out. I can't remember getting the knife and chasing her up the stair. (Mary)*

*I stabbed someone and endangered their life. I didn't think about it at the time, but when it was done I realised. The police doctor was totally amazed at how much alcohol there was in me, and this was a week after [the stabbing] ... Drinking was getting a serious problem. The week before I offended, I had a termination. I heavily hit the bottle when I had the termination. I was walking about with a bottle. I was drinking every day, like drinking a cup of coffee. I went into jail - what a mess. (Suzanne)*

and breach of the peace:



*I started [drinking] when I was 14, with mates and on my own. I was raped when I was 21 ... I had to have psychiatric help for a while afterwards. The drinking got worse after it. I felt dirty, I blamed myself. I've been here [hostel] for two months. Before that, I had a relapse at a friend's house. I knew I needed help. I knew I had to stop. (Kathy)*

The statements by the above women confirm the findings of Carlen (1988), who found that the majority of those women in her study who admitted to alcohol addiction linked this to severe depression engendered by stressful life-events.

Fiona specifically recognised that alcohol consumption impaired her social functioning and led directly to her offending (breach of the peace, assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest):

*It's through drink I'm in here [on remand]. I never commit an offence when I'm sober. When I drink I become violent. I've tried having soft drinks only but it doesn't work. And I've tried not going out. It's social drinking - all my pals are drinking. When they've been drinking, they go to sleep. I become a lot more active. There's no way I would do those things when sober. (Fiona)*

Five (19.2%) women in the present study had misused only drugs. Unlike the alcohol users, only one of the drug users had committed her crimes under the influence of drugs:

*I left [city] when I found out I was pregnant. I had a drug addiction, as others did there, and I didn't want to be around them because of the baby. My health is better than it's ever been - since I was pregnant, I've not been on drugs. I used to take a protein drink as I couldn't eat because of methadone. I came off the drugs by myself - it wasn't easy. I can't remember half my offences because of drugs. (Robyn)*

Three of the five women who had misused only drugs had drug-related convictions:

*I'm still dabbling in drugs. I've been on a methadone programme for the last eight months ... I was shoplifting in [town] and I forgot I had speed on me, so I got a*

*year in jail for that ... A chum came up to my house with smack [heroin]. I was found guilty of helping her wrap it. (Lisa)*

In contrast to earlier research (such as Loucks 1998), only one woman in the present study admitted to offending to fund a drug addiction:

*I was introduced to drugs at primary school. Then I was a tomboy and I didn't enjoy the company of girls. Guys there were sniffing gas. I started sniffing glue when I was 10; it was gas before that. Then I went on to hash and heroin. We were both [she and boyfriend] dealers and on drugs. I had a bad drug habit. I was in debt, I got drugs on credit, and I went to prostitution to pay for the drugs. I stole mum's credit card, then committed fraud to pay her back. (Judy)*

Five further women (19.2%) had had both alcohol and drug-related problems at different times in their lives. Two of these women had both alcohol and drug-related convictions, including being drunk and disorderly and being in possession of a controlled drug:

*I feel like I'm caught in a cage. I have to take the green stuff [methadone]. It's my own fault but the time has passed whose fault it is now. I've been eight years now on methadone. I was also taking uppers and downers. (Heather)*

*I was always drunk when I hit out. I was hitting police and others; everyone - mostly men - I fought. I was on a methadone course, but now I'm on temazepam. I go to the doctor every two weeks for temazepam, to help me sleep at night. I got it on condition that I came off methadone. I can't see a psychiatrist until I'm off drugs - 'nobody will see you,' said the doctor. (Cara)*

Cara is attempting to address her drug problem, yet it seems that she is trapped in a 'vicious circle'. Her G.P. will not refer her to a psychiatrist until she is no longer abusing drugs, yet her drink (and drug) problem may arguably be related to her mental health problems. It appears that society is saying it cannot, or will not, help her, with the implication that she feels she must continue to offend.

Four of the women talked about the problems associated with their alcohol and drug

misuse:

*My drink problem started when I was 15. I got the DTs [Delirium Tremens] - I was seeing things if I stopped drinking. My social worker found that if I didn't drink for four days before my period, I had less chance of offending. I like to take dope sometimes ... being on probation makes me aware of the law and what I'm doing. I know if I breached it - ... I don't do it [drugs] now. (Jenny)*

*I started drinking when I was 15. When I was younger I'd hang about with the drinkers. Then drugs - I tried a bit of everything. I was smoking hash when I was 16. After a couple of years, I started drinking again and I couldn't handle hash. I got into a lot of trouble because of drink. When I got drunk, I thought I was invisible. I wish I'd kept with the hash. (Rose)*

Yet, whatever the relationship between drug and criminal offence, the women mentioned depression or poverty as being associated factors. Carlen (1988) notes that this is not to assert that only the poor or depressed take drugs (alcohol or controlled drugs), but that, whilst drugs are easily available, those already living on the margins have a higher likelihood than others of being casualties of drug abuse. Carlen found drug (including alcohol) addiction to be one of the four major factors explicitly identified by her study group as being a prime constituent of their law breaking and criminalisation. Twenty of the 39 women in Carlen's study had committed drug-related offences: two because of the high financial gain; nine to finance or supply their own habit; eight had committed at least some of the crimes when they had been under the influence of a drug, and one of these women had also been convicted of being in possession (for her own use); and one woman could not remember why she had forged prescriptions. The present work confirms Carlen's findings, in that alcohol and drug-related problems indicate (potential) offending behaviour and that there is a link between drug abuse and bleak living circumstances; but it does not confirm earlier research findings that women tend to commit (property) offences to finance their drug habit.

## Self-abuse

Self-abuse is defined here as cutting, bruising, suicide attempts and eating disorders. (Alcohol and drug abuse can also be defined as self-abuse, but these have been dealt with above). Fourteen (53.8%) of the 26 women reported that they had self-abused: six had cut and/or bruised themselves, six had made suicide attempts (two of these women had also cut themselves) and six women reported eating disorders (one of these women had also cut herself and another had both cut herself and attempted suicide). In Liebling's (1992) study on suicide and suicide attempts in prison, most of the women (56%) cut their arms. In the present study, various cuts on arms were spontaneously shown to the researcher.

In their study in a female prison in England, Coid et al. (1990) found that women with a history of self-mutilation gave as reasons for their behaviour the relief of tension, anger and depression, and an intention to kill themselves. Although in the present study only two of the women in prison talked about self-abuse (both of these women reported eating disorders), Coid et al.'s work can usefully be considered here. One of the women in the present study had deliberately hurt herself to relieve tension, anger and depression:

*I was confused and angry and had PMT and was drinking and lonely. I used to cut myself and give myself bruises. (Jenny)*

Six of the women had made suicide attempts. Two claimed that these attempts were not serious ones and they had not intended to bring about their death:

*I once overdosed - when I was 17. I wanted attention; I didn't want to die. I told others immediately I'd done it, and I was taken to hospital. (Kathy)*

*I made a suicide attempt, it was not serious, to scare my partner into realising that things were wrong. (Sharon A)*

However, the other four women who had made suicide attempts stated that they had intended to kill themselves:

*I took an overdose when I first moved here. It was deliberate, not a cry for help. I was suffering from depression, isolated, not knowing anyone, unemployed, alone in the house with two young children. (Mary)*

*I swallowed a whole load of anti-depressant tablets when the crime came to light, to save my family any shame ... I was trying to cop out in some way. (Gloria)*

Cullen (1981), in his prison study, found that self-injury was intended to attract sympathy and comfort, manipulate a change, reduce tension or to punish oneself. The actions of two of the women in the present study were designed to seek sympathy and comfort:

*I cut myself on the wrist - it was a cry for help. (Louise)*

*I cut my wrists when I was 14, on the run from the [children's] home. I rang dad, he was cross that I'd run away, I cut my wrists then phoned for an ambulance as it hurt. (Robyn)*

Another woman acted to bring about a change:

*When I was 16 I slashed my wrists, to stop a fight between two of my brothers. (Mary)*

One woman may have been acting in such a way as to reduce tension or to punish herself. Cara simply said:

*I used to punch my nose so hard that it would bleed. I used to cut my arms all the time. And I'd rub the back of my hands until they blistered and then the blisters burst. (Cara)*

Cara also talked about being regularly sexually abused as a child and her self-injury may have been occasioned by this abuse. Other studies have shown that the role of sexual abuse in childhood is associated with future self-injury (Kelly 1988, Widom 1989).

Only four (15.4%) of the self-abusing women said they had no experience of either sexual abuse or partner abuse. Five of the women who had self-abused had also been the victims of both sexual abuse (see Sexual abuse, above) and partner abuse (see Partner abuse, above), four women who had self-abused had also experienced sexual abuse, and one woman who had self-abused had also been the victim of partner abuse. This is a very complex area. Although few women in the present study linked their experience of one type of abuse with their experience of another, or their experience of abuse with their offending behaviour, it was argued earlier (Chapter Two) that having experienced abuse as a child or young person, a woman is more likely to become the victim of other types of abuse, including self-abuse.

Coid et al. (1990) found that the women in their (prison) study tended to have a history of eating disorders. Six women in the present study talked of eating disorders; three of these women reported their eating disorder taking place in prison:

*I would binge and then not eat for six days, due to sheer depression. I've been doing this all through life. I started just after grandma died. (Mary)*

*Since I've been in prison. I'm still doing it [bulimia]. (Kelly)*

*When I was in prison last year, I was eating and then making myself sick as I was putting on too much weight. (Lisa)*

*I was anorexic years ago. Then I had a slight stage of bulimia but my hair and skin were completely bugged up ... On some days here [prison], now, I eat, and then don't for days. This has been going on for years. (Rose)*

The self-abuse found in this study, whichever form it took, appears to confirm earlier research findings that it is instrumental behaviour, taking place when other 'escape' responses were limited, and that there is a link between self-abuse and being the victim of other types of abuse. As discussed earlier, stressful life-events featured heavily in the lives of the women in this research.

### SECTION III - HEALTH

All the women were asked how their health had been over the last 12 months. Five women reported that their health had been good:

*Better than it's ever been. Since I was pregnant, I've not been on drugs. (Robyn)*

*Good because I've been here! [prison]. Normally probably rotten as I'm a heavy drinker. (Sharon G)*

Thirteen (50%) of the women said their health had been fairly good; nevertheless, various health issues were talked about (see Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11 Health issues noted by the women over past 12 months**

Rheumatoid arthritis/arthritis  
Mental health problems  
Epilepsy  
Drug problems  
Drink problems  
Eczema  
Back problems  
Asthma  
Pneumonia  
Pre-menstrual stress  
Pregnant  
Stomach ulcers  
Teeth abscesses  
Gynaecological problems  
Weight loss

Eight (30.8%) women stated that their health had not been good over the past 12 months (see above table). One talked about drug abuse and two, mental health problems. A further woman talked about epilepsy:

*I've had quite regular fits over the last couple of years. The last couple of months I've been better, as medication controls it, but I had to leave my last job.*

*Epilepsy is stress-related; I was paid commission only, which was stressful. (Samantha)*

Another woman had a number of health problems:

*The last three years have been not really good. It started just before we [she and partner] split up. Then, a few months after the split, I found I had cancer in the throat. I had deep depression, the split, a derelict house [partner had stripped it before he left] and a mortgage. I'm just beginning to feel better now. I'm all clean now, but I still attend hospital. (Mary)*

Three other women described how their health had deteriorated since they had gone to prison:

*Terrible since I've been here. I've had an ovary out since I've been in here. Normally I'm of good health. In November I was ill; the operation wasn't until February. I'm still in pain every month. I see a doctor here. (Alexandra)*

*Dreadful. I've had stomach ulcers, teeth abscesses, I've been menstruating for months, and had a bad chest infection which is just now clearing up. I was healthy before I came in here. (Ashley)*

*I'm not quite sure [what the problem is]. It's physical. I'm seeing the doctor. I've been on antibiotics for about a year. I was in good health before I came here. Then I was nine and a half stone. Now I'm eight stones. The Health Centre sucks - they don't treat you like people. (Suzanne)*

Dobash et al. (1986) found similar symptoms and views amongst the women they interviewed at Cornton Vale. They found that the rate of GP consultation was about twice that of the average community, and that many of the complaints which prisoners took to the doctor could be connected with the extreme stress suffered in prison, such as eczema, asthma and ulcers. In addition, Dobash et al. found that the women did not feel that their complaints were treated seriously.

Further, Sykes (1969) has identified 'the pains of imprisonment', namely loss of liberty



(including lost emotional relationships and boredom), deprivation of goods and services (the average inmate finds herself in a Spartan environment), frustration of sexual desire (creating both physiological and psychological problems), deprivation of autonomy (notably the regimentation and rigidity of the regime and rules) and loss of security (the individual prisoner is forced to live in prolonged intimacy with other women who may have a history of aggressive behaviour). These deprivations or frustrations of the modern prison, notes Sykes, may be the unavoidable implications of imprisonment, but it must be recognised that they can be as painful as the physical maltreatment which they have replaced. For the imprisoned women in this study, then, these situations pose profound threats to her personality or sense of personal worth; and physical, as well as psychological, suffering is perhaps not surprising.

To conclude, physical health problems were discussed by 21 (80.8%) of the women in the present study. Health problems can be seen as part of the bleak living circumstances experienced by the women, as discussed earlier.

#### **SECTION IV - THE WOMEN'S OFFENCES AND SENTENCES**

This section considers the most recent offences committed by the women in this study and the sentences they were given for these offences. There is also some consideration of previous convictions and sentences.

The previous sections in this chapter have examined the life events experienced by the women in this study, which have adversely affected their lives. However, there is also a need to consider the reasons given by the women themselves as their reasons for offending, and these reasons are also examined in this section.

##### **The offences**

The choice of the particular interviewees was dictated by availability and willingness of the women to participate in the research (see Chapter Three). However, the women interviewed came into almost all the main areas of offending in which offending women

in general participate. At the time of the interview, the 26 women between them had convictions for a wide variety of crimes and offences. (See Table 4.12 for a breakdown of the interviewees' last conviction(s), and Chapter Two: Table 2.4 for official statistics on charges proved against women (and men) in Scotland).

**Table 4.12 Last offence of which interviewee convicted**

MAIN OFFENCE	No. OF CONVICTIONS*	%
<b>Crimes of violence</b>		
Murder	1	3.8
Serious assault	3	11.5
Robbery	1	3.8
<b>Crimes of indecency</b>		
Prostitution	1	3.8
<b>Crimes of dishonesty</b>		
Shoplifting	2	7.7
Theft	1	3.8
Fraud	7	26.9
Embezzlement	1	3.8
<b>Fire-raising, etc.</b>		
Fire-raising	1	3.8
Nuisance telephone calls	2	7.7
<b>Other crimes</b>		
Resisting arrest	1	3.8
Drugs	1	3.8
<b>Miscellaneous offences</b>		
Assaulting a police officer	2	7.7
Simple assault	3	11.5
Breach of the peace	4	15.4

\* Includes three women whose last conviction was for two or more offences.

Women in Scotland have a smaller percentage of convictions for violent crimes than for property and order offences (Scottish Office 1997b). Twelve (46.2%) of the women in the present study had present or previous convictions for violence against the person. One of the women had a conviction for assaulting her partner. None of the women had a conviction for child abuse, whether physical or sexual. Twenty (76.9%) of the women had committed property offences at some time in their lives. (The women's respective convictions, including all previous convictions, are listed in Appendix 4).

Eight (30.8%) of the 26 women had no previous convictions; their convictions were for fraud (four women), serious assault (two), embezzlement (one) and murder (one

woman). The collective previous convictions of the other 18 (69.2%) women were numerous and various, and included at least one of the following: serious assault, prostitution, housebreaking, theft of motor vehicle, shoplifting, theft, fraud, embezzlement, fire-raising, vandalism, perverting the course of justice, drugs, trespassing (a conviction for glue-sniffing before it became an offence), assault, breach of the peace, drunkenness, non-payment of a television licence, nuisance telephone calls and a driving offence. The sentences for these previous convictions varied from admonition and good behaviour bonds, through fines, probation and community service, to imprisonment. Six women had been to prison for their earlier offences, either as a direct result of their sentence (four women) or as a result of non-payment of a fine (two women). In their study of the sentencing of women, Dowds and Hedderman (1997) found that there is a tendency towards less use of custody for women offenders. However, they also noted that magistrates are reluctant to fine women; and that, even if this difference was found to be inspired by a desire not to penalise financially a woman's family, it carries a risk that missing a step on the sentencing ladder will lead to a more severe sentence – such as custody - being imposed in the event of a subsequent conviction.

#### First contact with the police

Although the women could not always recall the order and types of their crimes, all of them could remember their first contacts with the police. For 17 women, (65.4%), their first contact had been as a result of their offending. Other reasons given were through having brothers in trouble with the police, being the victims of abuse, running away from home and other problem behaviour (see Table 4.13). For some of the women, their behaviour had taken them into the Children's Hearing System (see Residential care, above).

Table 4.13 First contact with the police

FIRST CONTACT	No. OF WOMEN	%
Offending	17	65.4
Running away from home	3	11.5
Through their brothers	2	7.7
Victims of abuse	2	7.7
Problem behaviour	2	7.7
Total	26	100

Two women said their first contact had been as a result of the activities of their brothers:

*I knew the police because of my brother - drinks, drugs, stealing. They came to see me at my friend's house. (Mandy)*

*I was always in contact, through having my brothers. (Mary)*

Three women reported that their first contact with the police was when they had started to run away from home:

*I used to run away from [local authority] homes when I was younger. They just brought me back again. They used to lock me up until someone came to collect me. (Louise)*

*When I started running away from home. I'd go away by myself but knock about with others. Friends could stay out all night and I wanted to too, I didn't want to go home and face my step-mum ... We stayed in a nice area by this time but I mucked about with friends from our previous area. My mother had allowed me to stay out but my step-mother didn't. The police were called, I was taken back, I went out again. (Robyn)*

*Running away from home. First when I was nine and then until 16, once a week or once a month. When I was nine, it was to get away from my grandad - my parents didn't know he was abusing me. He used to babysit me. (Judy)*

Two other women had been the victims of abuse, one parental:

*When I went to the police station and told them about dad. Then I was 12. They believed me and came with me to the house. I sat in the police car waiting. Dad said he wasn't coming out, he was threatening them. He'd trained his dogs to attack, including us kids - he'd say 'kill' and they'd bite us. He didn't put us to hospital as he ken [knew] what would be coming up. (Cara)*

and one spousal:

*When my husband used to beat me up. He'd slap me about, nothing too serious. I called the police and got him locked up for it. (Margaret).*

Family conflict and an early history of problems were therefore apparent for many of these women and were likely to contribute to their later offending.

Nineteen of the women had their first contact with the police as a result of their problem behaviour. Two of the women were not charged:

*When I was 14, just before I went into foster care. I ripped up sheets, and was smoking, in the children's home ... Rebellious smoking; burning holes in sheets and nighties. I knew I would get shit for it. We barricaded ourselves in the room, five or six of us, all girls. Next morning, I woke up and 'oh shit'. (Rose)*

*A fight at school. I wasn't charged with that. (Nicolle)*

For the remaining 17 women (65.4%), their first police contact was connected with their offending. Six women (23.1%) reported that this had been through their only conviction. These convictions were for mainly for crimes of dishonesty - fraud (three women) and embezzlement (one woman), but also for crimes of violence - serious assault (two women). The four women who had convictions for crimes of dishonesty all reported emotional difficulties as well as financial problems at the time of their offending, and the two women with convictions for crimes of violence had each attacked a man when either their own safety or that of their child was at risk from the man.

Ten women (38.5%) said that their first contact took place with their earlier convictions. Three of these ten reported convictions for shoplifting:

*Shoplifting ... I was with friends, it wasn't for money. For the thrill of stealing something. Perhaps to block out memories of what was happening at home. I didn't see it [shop-lifting] as a bad offence. (Lisa)*

and seven talked about other convictions:

*Waking up in cells in [named] prison, drunk. (Jenny)*

*Down the shore. I'd given up my daughter for adoption. I couldn't decide if to keep her or give her to ma, but the social work department had to push me. My daughter went into foster care when she was one and a half years old, until two years old. I was seeing her, but I couldn't cope. But I couldn't make up my mind. So I gave her up ... I felt confused, I didn't know what to do with myself. I walked out of waitressing and went to the fish factory. My neighbour above was a prostitute. I turned to the bottle but that made it worse. So I went with her - the money was easy to earn. (Jane)*

*Before I was stopped for having no driving licence, someone reported me. After that, the police were always stopping me for the same thing. Eventually I went to the police station to complain and then it stopped. (Kelly)*

*A breach of the peace. I was in the street with friends, drunk. (Kathy)*

*The Christmas hamper ... embezzlement, years ago. (Danielle)*

*The night I was trying to stop getting a guy lifted ... Only me was charged - there were six of us - as I didn't shut up when we got to the police station. They'd dirtied my dress ... I just saw four or five people, I didn't know if they were the police or not, I just dived in. (Heather)*

*A party on New Year. When I drink I become violent. I broke a neighbour's window and he called the police. Until I was about 16 or 17, I hung about in the local area. Then I passed my driving test and so did my pals, so we went to [town]. There's a police station there. Before, I got drunk, and did things, but I was not caught ... The drinking was social, all my pals were drinking. When they've been drinking they go to sleep. I become more active. (Fiona)*

The remaining woman could not remember her first contact with the police:

*I can't even remember. I've always been in trouble with them. (Sharon B)*

In summary, first contact with the police for the majority of the women had been as a result of their offending behaviour. For a minority of women, however, first police contact had been through other problem behaviour (such as running away from home), family associations (having brothers 'in trouble') or being the victims of abuse.

#### Reasons given for offending

The majority of the women were clear about the reasons for their offending. Money was the reason given most frequently, with 11 of the women stating this. Depression, alcohol, drugs and retribution were other factors mentioned by more than one woman, while four women gave different and individual reasons (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14 Reasons given for committing their last offence

REASON GIVEN*	No. OF WOMEN	%
Money	11	42.3
Depression	7	26.9
Alcohol	6	23.1
Drugs	4	15.4
Retribution	2	7.7
Partner violence	1	3.8
Argument	1	3.8
Helping a friend	1	3.8
Self-defence	1	3.8

\* Eight of the women gave more than one reason.

In their work on the sentencing of women, Gelsthorpe and Loucks (1997) found that one explanation which magistrates gave for differences in the sentences given to men and women was that their motives were rarely similar. In the opinion of the magistrates, men who stole tended to do so out of greed, whereas women were usually providing for their children. Carlen (1988) found that the female offenders in her study described themselves as stealing through need and through having responsibility for dependent children. However, neither Carlen's work nor Gelsthorpe and Loucks' (1997) study shows whether women offenders differ from men in either respect. As Gelsthorpe and

Loucks point out, examination of court records to see if male and female offenders are matched in these ways has proved difficult because records do not hold such information consistently.

In the present research, the financial considerations of the women ranged from 'stealing to survive' through 'being short of money' to 'the money's very good':

*We (boyfriend and Judy) were stealing food, stealing things to sell, stealing to survive. (Judy)*

However, Judy went on to say that she also needed money for drugs:

*I was in a lot of debt through drugs, I had a very bad habit at the time and I was keeping my boyfriend going. (Judy)*

Jane, on the other hand, stressed that she did not take drugs and that the money she earned through prostitution was to support her family.

Three of the 11 women also talked about feelings of depression as being relevant to their offence, for example:

*I had no money ... I was depressed at the time. I had nobody ... I just collected the mail and there was the Giro at the top ... All my pals had left me. (Mandy)*

Seven women gave depression as a factor in the commission of their offence, one stating that this feeling was the sole reason for her offending:

*Just because I was ill, things were getting on top of me. I lost a lot of weight, I was not eating because I was feeling depressed ... I knew I was making the phone calls but I couldn't stop. (Louise)*

Two women talked about depression and drink problems:

*Probably because I couldn't ask for help and I was confused and angry and the*



*PMT and drinking and lonely. I had a major blow-out ... I never want to hurt someone, I had no plan of what I was going to do, it just seemed to happen ... Out of the blue. I was as surprised as anyone. I only once did it as vengeance. At other times I just did it. I don't set fires - use accelerant - I just set fire to something. (Jenny)*

*She went at me with a vodka bottle and I blacked out. I can't remember getting the knife and chasing her up the stair. I'm glad she wasn't facing me and that it was just her leg ... I feel abandoned and not having anyone. My mother abandoned me and sometimes I ask myself why. I was not told til I was 14. I overheard a conversation, arguing over money about me, between my father - my 'brother' [the man Mary knew as her brother was, she discovered as a result of the argument, in fact her father], usually away in the army - and my grandma. I have no contact now at all with him. (Mary)*

Six women gave alcohol misuse as a reason for their offending:

*I can't stop offending when I'm drunk. (Fiona)*

and four women talked about drug abuse, three of them in connection with financial problems:

*It was done under the influence of drugs ... And I was homeless. (Natasha)*

Retribution was a reason given by two women for their offence:

*The company I worked for were building up and I'd developed a lot of training programmes. They were quite successful and took off all over Scotland. They offered me a seat on the Board of Directors. After two years, it was not forthcoming. I had stress and depression; I'd lost my first child with cancer. The hormone tablets were causing manic depression. I took the money for revenge. I didn't need it, I was well paid and so is my husband. (Gloria)*

*When [partner] left, he left the cheque book with me. He hadn't paid maintenance but he always wanted to see the child. I used the cheques and ordered catalogues in a different name, clothes for me and [daughter], crockery, etc. I intended*

*to pay. I ignored their letters, then they stopped coming and I forgot about them ... I didn't even think of it as an offence but getting back at [partner]. (Nicolle)*

Fifteen women each gave a sole reason for their last offence. Eleven of these have already been considered above - namely, money, drink, depression and drugs. The respective reasons given by the remaining four women were partner violence:

*He'd been physically abusing me ... I just flipped. (Sharon A)*

an argument:

*He's a maniac. He was arguing with my uncle. They've been arguing, both families, for the last two years. He swung a hammer at me when I was carrying the baby. He called her a bastard. I put her into the car and ran back to him. His face was covered with blood. I would have killed him. (Robyn)*

helping a friend:

*I chased someone down the road with a knife. They started it. The woman had been bugging the hell out of my mate. She offered me £20 to get the woman out of the house. We fought, she left the house and came back with some mates. I got a knife from the kitchen and chased him. (Rose)*

and self-defence:

*I was threatened sexually by two men. I knew one of them through a pal, he had a knife, he was going to rape me. I stabbed him. (Suzanne)*

In summary, none of the women identified, as a reason for their most recent offence, problems associated with being in care or mixing with people involved in crime (as found by Carlen 1988, for example), or the desire for excitement (noted by various writers, such as Reckless 1961). The reason given by the largest number of women in the present study was a practical ones, that is financial need. Other reasons given by more than one woman were psychological ones, namely depression, alcohol and drug

abuse and retribution (revenge against an employer and an ex-partner). A small number of women each cited partner violence, an argument, helping a friend and self-defence as the reason for their most recent offence.

### The sentences

For their last offence(s), nine of the women had received imprisonment (one as a result of non-payment of a fine), six had been given probation, five were awaiting sentence; and two women had been given an admonition, two a fine and two community service (see Appendix 4).

Fifteen of the women, including five of the nine who had received imprisonment, believed that their last sentence had been a fair one. Six women did not believe that their sentence had been fair. Of these six, one woman stated that she was not guilty of the offence, another claimed that other similar offenders were treated more leniently, a third said she had not struck the fatal blow and three women believed that prison for a first offence was harsh. Five women were awaiting sentence and therefore could not yet say whether they believed their last sentence had been a fair one.

The women were asked how, if at all, their sentence had affected them, their relationships with others and other aspects of their lives. Responses to this question were varied. A small number (five) of women talked about awareness of their possible future offending behaviour:

*It has made me more eager to bide out of here [prison]. (Margaret)*

*I'm careful to behave myself. (Kathy)*

*Well, I haven't done it since! (Michelle)*

*I'm happier being on probation, than in prison. I've made good progress before, so I could see light at the end of the tunnel ... It makes me aware of the law and what I'm doing. I knew if I breached it - I like to take some dope sometimes and if short of drink I would go shoplifting - so I don't do it now. (Jenny)*

*I don't get on as well with my aunt and uncle. He steals, she works and she's on the dole. I can't now. I'm on probation - if I got caught it would appear for the other offences too. (Robyn)*

Five women stressed some improvements in their lives as a result of their sentence. They talked about improvements in accommodation:

*It helped me get into SACRO [housing] having done probation. (Natasha)*

*It's been good. My probation officer got me onto the computing course, he also helped with housing and money. I know I have to see him every week. (Robyn)*

taking steps towards improving their education:

*On probation you are in limbo, you can't move on ... giving me time to think, about going on to further education. I had meetings with my social worker about what I wanted to do. (Sharon A)*

*Going to college. I want to fit in as much as possible before she [baby] goes to school. I'm not stupid, I've always been told I'm more intelligent than my big sister, and she's at university now. I couldn't bring her [baby] up on benefits. (Robyn)*

and improvements in family relationships and friendships:

*It's changed my attitudes to everything, people. I used to take drugs, before I moved to [town]. I wanted to do it by myself and I am ... Just my family. I don't know what to say to them. I thought they would disown me, but they never. (Mandy)*

The fifth woman stated that her sentence (prison) has 'been good for me actually' (Sharon B) because it had not allowed her to continue to drink heavily.

Thus, five women talked about some improvement in their lives as a result of their respective sentences. Accommodation, education, relationships and health were identified as aspects of life which had improved, mainly as a result of the help or

guidance of the woman's own social worker.

Seven women felt their respective sentences had not changed their lives:

*No. I would re-offend again if I was out in the community and if I was nae well. I feel more secure in prison I feel secure here [hostel] sometimes. (Louise)*

*No. It's only loitering [prostitution], nothing really big. I don't mind being on probation as I have my social worker to speak to ... I use protection - condoms and a blood test every three months. I'm not proud of what I do. I hate standing about down the road, although I like the money. I feel disgusted with myself, with my body. But most of the time I put it out of my mind. I look at prostitution as a job and not a crime. I've made a lot of friends down the shore. Other friends are not prostitutes but they don't mind me being one. I don't hide what I do. They take me as I am. (Jane)*

However, 14 women (53.8%) felt that a major part of their lives had changed for the worse. For the majority of these women, friends and families played an important part in these changes:

*My family. My parents think I've done a ridiculous, stupid thing. All they can see is in a black and white way - I'm a bad person. (Samantha)*

*I don't like to go out. No-one knows I'm on probation. It's just how I feel ... (Jenny)*

*I realised my sentences were getting longer. I feel I'm letting my family down. They're being punished more than me. And my boss who got me interested in college, I'm letting him down too ... I've lost a few pals. (Fiona)*

*It affected my family, my mum and dad were really upset. (Nicolle)*

*I don't see the kids. They've not been away from me before. I get one visit a week. The older one cries, the younger one is OK. (Kelly)*

*I was away from home [in prison] for six months. I saw my daughter only three times in those six months. We'd just started to bond. (Lisa)*

*With the wee boy's dad, it's a long time [sentence], eight years, there's no point in him waiting. We're getting back when I get out. We have an open relationship. He's got a life, I haven't in here. My dad has been affected badly and my ma. Your family and everyone that you love is being punished as well. (Suzanne)*

Thus, the majority of the women felt that a major part of their lives had changed for the worse as a result of their sentences. Family relationships in particular had deteriorated: many women felt that they had 'let down' their parents, and the mothers in prison talked about the loss of contact with their children. Some of the women in prison noted their regret that their loved ones were also being punished as a result of the custodial sentence. This finding of unhappiness by the women as to fractured relationships with relatives and friends reinforces the argument by, for example, Gilligan (1982), that women tend to experience the emotional ties of relationships particularly keenly.

Two of the 14 women who reported negative effects from their sentence expressed concerns about employment:

*My perception of myself. If my job found out [Samantha was waiting for her trial to take place], I have a fair idea I would be out of the door, though it's not an offence involving violence. It makes you very nervous. It's always at the back of my mind. There's a chance it will be in the paper and the manager will see it. It's ridiculous that life should be - ... I've not been planning anything in advance. I don't know what the sentence will be. My whole life is on hold. I can't pay the amount back as it's so large. It could be community service. I've been in to the social work office regularly and voluntarily, which should help. (Samantha)*

*I've not been for a job. I'm too truthful for my own good. (Heather)*

Four of the women in prison discussed the negative impact their particular sentence had had on them:

*It's made me a slightly harder person and more aware of what's going on around me ... I'm over the worst now. My life had been on hold for a year. I've done nine months. A complete waste of time. I'm a professional person, of more use to the community ... (Alexandra)*

Alexandra's comment that 'It's made me a slightly harder person' reinforces Bentham's opinion: 'In a moral point of view, *an ordinary prison is a school in which wickedness is taught*' (cited in Hawkins 1976, author's emphasis). Alexandra feels that her custodial sentence (for fraud) was not only a 'waste of time... for a professional person' (reiterating Eaton's (1993) comment that the skills of the women in her study were unused in prison), but also has had a negative effect on her personality. Suzanne and other women expressed similar opinions:

*I'm wiser - I know everything possible now about drugs. I knew nothing before. I know how to play mind games with the staff ... I've not experienced anything like this before. I used to think people should be locked up, but some shouldn't be here, they should be in drug rehabs for example ... some can hardly walk or wash themselves. (Suzanne)*

*At the beginning I was in for nine days. I got a shock, I thought I wouldn't be able to do it. I was depressed and suicidal. I was out for two months, pending appeal, so I was able to prepare my family. I lost my appeal and I returned in January ... I missed [hobby]. I'd immersed myself in it for the last two years, to help me get through. (Gloria)*

*I certainly feel my freedom's away and I certainly don't want to be here either. The psychiatrist suggested my illnesses might be why - stress-related. I'm not mentally affected, but it's coming out physically. (Ashley)*

Deprivation of liberty is the most immediately obvious drawback of imprisonment – not only by confinement to the prison (and consequent isolation from family and friends) but also by the restriction of movement within the prison (and consequent loss of autonomy). These situations have been identified by Sykes (1969) as amongst the 'pains of imprisonment'. As discussed earlier (see Mental illness/Psychiatric contact,

above), Dobash et al. (1986) have pointed to the limited 'therapy' (whether medical, psychiatric or social work practice) which took place within Cornton Vale at that time, despite the prison being described as a 'therapeutic community' (see Dobash et al., p.133).

Despite such criticisms, three of the 18 women with previous convictions stated they had experienced no particular problems resulting from their previous sentences. Most commonly, though, there were various problems experienced by the other 15 women, after their last sentence (including release from prison). The problems most frequently expressed were accommodation:

*I had slept in different houses. When I was out of jail I didn't know where to go.*

(Robyn)

family and friends:

*The last time, the kids were my main fear - someone to look after them. My mother-in-law had the two older ones and the little one came to the prison unit with me. Lack of contact, the family [temporarily] split up. The children didn't know who I was. She wouldn't let them visit and travelling was too difficult, a long journey.* (Margaret)

and financial concerns:

*Financial, when I get a fine. I don't like getting fines as that means going out stealing.* (Cara)

Other topics discussed by the women were drinking:

*Drink having an effect after the split [with partner] and the throat [cancer] and the house [stripped by partner]. Too many problems. I started drinking again. I gave up work as I knew I wasn't coping.* (Mary)

psychiatric matters:



*After my first offence in 1980, I was released into my parents' custody ... I got two years' probation with psychiatric condition ... In [psychiatric hospital] I was labelled as personality disorder. I hated being on drugs but not actually doing anything with me. (Jenny)*

loss of employment and fear of imprisonment.

In sum, the majority of the women felt that the quality of their lives had deteriorated as a result of their last sentence, many of these women citing relationships with family and friends as significantly worse. For the majority of the women with previous sentences, the greatest problems they experienced as a result of their previous sentence were having nowhere to stay, the effect on relationships with their family, particularly with their children, and financial problems.

## **SECTION V - THE FUTURE**

Not surprisingly, some women were optimistic, others pessimistic, about their future. Carlen (1988) found that many of the women in her study were realistic about their future chances in the labour market. Lack of educational qualifications, having a criminal record and high unemployment had already rendered the majority of them unemployed and in financial need. They knew that their work prospects were unlikely to improve. The only immediate and legitimate way 'back in' to the conventional world was via men or motherhood, options not favoured by the majority of the women.

Conversely, in the present study, when the women were asked what were their concerns and their hopes for the future, the family (either existing or hoped-for) was talked about most frequently as the major concern/hope (see Table 4.15). Ten (38.5%) of the women talked about their desire to 'settle down' or of their role of wife and/or mother as their first consideration:

*Settling down with [boy-friend]. I don't know about marriage but I would like children ... and my own house. (Mandy)*

*I'll probably still do prostitution but nae as often as now - maybe once every two weeks. I'm worried about the kids knowing. I tell them when they're grown up, I think. I'm not a bad mother. The prostitution's not for a habit [drugs] ... I'd love to eventually settle right down - get married ... (Jane)*

*It's going to be a struggle. But I'll manage. She [baby] won't get the upbringing I got. I know the figures, the statistics show she's unlikely to be a lawyer or a doctor. My mum's been in jail, and her mum. I won't take jobs in pubs. I'll struggle to get a decent job ... I'd like a council house, with a front and back garden. I'll do [baby's] bedroom up. Have a job and a car. I just want her to be happy. (Robyn)*

*I'm not looking for a job for another four years. I've got kids to look after ... I know not a lot of places would take me on now. I want to be a good mum. (Margaret)*

*I don't know. I'm expecting a few years in jail at the moment. I'll probably lose my daughter - if not through the courts, then as she's used to living with her dad. (Nicolle)*

*It'll take me a wee while to adjust outside [prison]. The cost of things. Life doesn't carry on in here - you remember how it was when you came in. I've got my family. I've grown up a lot. I've got no house or nothing. I've got a two-year old son and I've got to cope. It's quite scary; everyday things ... I've got a son, got responsibilities. (Suzanne)*

Six talked about getting a job, or a better job, as their main priority; four of these specifically mentioned improving their education:

*I hope to go to college in September and be there for two to three years. Do two courses this year, more next year. I want to do care work. Everything that's happened to me, could benefit others. I'm on methadone. I want to stay away from drugs. I've been off eight to 10 weeks now. I've got new clothes, a phone, everything's better. And more money. (Judy)*

*I'm going to lose my driving licence [because of offence]. I'll have a problem*

*getting to college, because of where I live, and to my early morning work too. I still want to go back to college and get a decent job. Get settled down; calm down. (Fiona)*

*I hope to get a decent job. Maybe have a bit of money to buy something I want or go out once a week. It doesn't sound like much but I don't want to set my sights too high. Just to be happy, basically. Improve my housing, education, everything. (Natasha)*

*A job's going to be a problem, with a murder licence. I don't want to go back where my parents are as it's a small town. I don't know where I'll end up going ... It can only get better! (Ashley)*

And a seventh woman was concerned about keeping her job:

*If the boss doesn't see [court report] in the paper, hopefully my job's OK. You're supposed to tell, but I probably wouldn't keep the job. I didn't lie - I wasn't asked when I went for the job and I didn't have to fill in any form ... I haven't really planned anything much. (Samantha)*

Five women talked about accommodation as their main concern:

*... in another hostel, for folk that suffer with psychiatric problems. They are thinking about moving me on. (Louise)*

*When I've been to prison? I'm going to have to move. I'll go to [country] with my sisters; they're there. There will be and there has been gossip from neighbours ... I can't go back. (Rose)*

*I don't know. I can see it getting better. I've got my flat. My landlord said if anything to do with drugs, I will get evicted ... Hopefully I won't be doing years in jail. (Lisa)*

The main concern of two women was that they might re-offend:

*I think I always will have unstability (sic) within myself, insecurity. I try my best*

to keep away from things not good for me - drinking, certain company ... I'm starting to see things a bit better. I think I will do better on my own, have prospects. (Mary)

*I don't know, I can't really say. I have a problem with drink. I ought to be OK but I could fall on my arse and come back in [prison]. I'll give it my best shot ... Stay off the drink; get a house and a job; just be a normal person. And not get into trouble again.* (Sharon B)

One had no clear plans:

*I don't know, I don't know. What I will do when I get out [of prison]! - I'll just hide from everyone. Neighbours write every day; but people in town -. (Kelly)*

And one woman was very clear:

*I would like a lot!* (Danielle)

Table 4.15 The women's main concerns and hopes for the future

SUBJECTS MENTIONED BY THE WOMEN	No. OF WOMEN	%
Family	10	38.5
Work	7	26.9
Accommodation	5	19.2
Fear of re-offending	2	7.7
Unclear	1	3.8
'A lot'	1	3.8
Total	26	99.9*

\* The total does not add up to 100% because of rounding to one decimal place

Secondary concerns - those mentioned second by the women - were also with work (six women), the family (four women) and accommodation (one woman). Of the six women who talked about future employment, two stressed improving their educational qualifications and another two expressed their desire to do counselling work to help others like themselves.

Many of the women shared a modest and conventional desire to settle down in their own house with a husband and children and a 'straight' job.

The findings in this section pose two questions. First, why did these women offend in the first instance, given their expressed desire for a conventional life? This question has been discussed in Sections I to III above, where it was argued that the women's past and present negative life events propelled them towards offending behaviour. Second, what prompts them to re-offend, or stops them from doing so? Follow-up interviews were conducted with the women, to try to ascertain the answers to this question, and the results of these second interviews are set out and examined in the following chapter. Relationships with family and friends have been shown to be of great importance to the majority of the women, and the relevance of such relationships to the women's continued offending is considered in Chapter Five.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

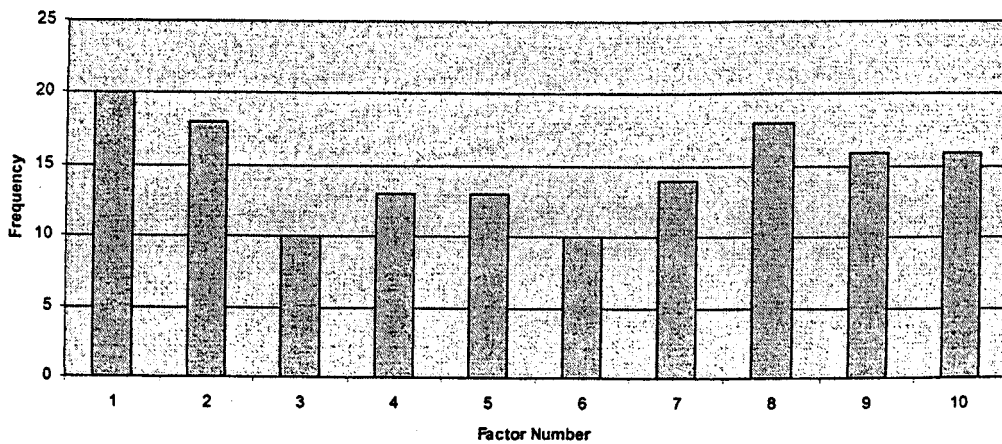
It has been shown that female offenders can often be identified by the extent of the background deprivation they report; and that the most vulnerable women can often be found in the worst situations, such as having no job and poor relationships with family members. The combined effect of their histories, their current situation and their inability to generate a solution to their problems propels females towards offending.

The present study found poverty to have given by the greatest number of women as the reason for their offending, with depression and alcohol or drug abuse cited as a reason by a number of women. When social and psychological characteristics were examined, additional factors presented themselves as preconditional to the women's offending. Unstable family relationships, leaving school at or before 16 years of age, a history of being unemployed or of short-term jobs, alcohol and/or drug abuse as coping mechanisms and association with offenders all applied to over half the women in the present study. Other factors of particular relevance to female offending were also found: namely, sexual abuse and having been in care mainly as a result of family problems (both factors applied to half the women in the study) and partner abuse (just under half the women had been the victims of this). Another finding of relevance to this

research is the importance to the women of supportive relationships, and this is discussed in Chapter Five.

Thus, this chapter has identified ten material circumstances preconditional to the women's offending and these are shown in Chart 4.1 below.

Chart 4.1 Incidence of Factors Related to Female Offending



Key

- 1 Family problems
- 2 Lack of support
- 3 No educational qualifications
- 4 In care
- 5 Sexual abuse
- 6 Partner abuse
- 7 Peer group influence
- 8 Financial problems
- 9 Psychiatric problems
- 10 Drink/drug problems

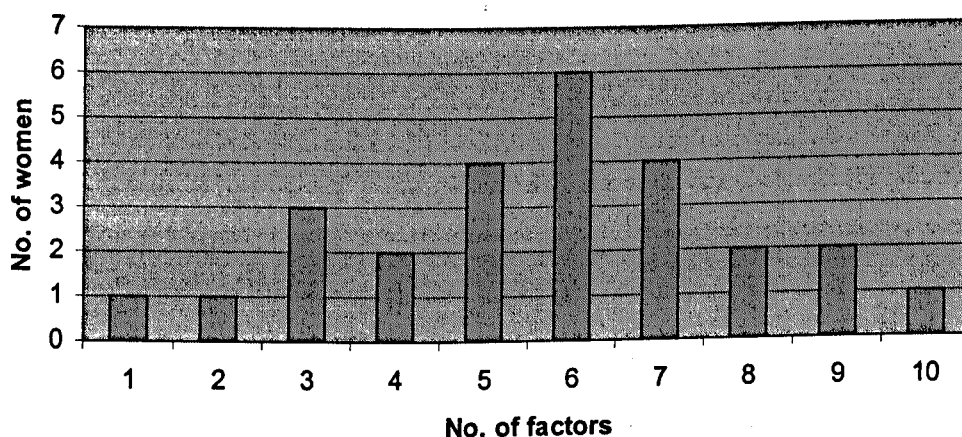
It can be seen that the greatest number of women (20 out of the 26 interviewed, 76.9%) had experience of family problems, with a slightly smaller number reporting lack of support or financial problems at the time of offending (18 women in each category). More than half the women stated they had past or present psychiatric problems, or a drink or drug problem (16 women in each category), while 14 women talked about peer group influence on their offending behaviour. Half (13) of the women reported that they had been in care or had been the victims of sexual abuse. The smallest number of

women (10 in each category) had no educational qualifications or had experience of domestic violence. (See Appendix 3 for a list of the variables pertaining to each woman.)

Dysfunctional family life (namely, family separation and family violence), poverty (as a result of unemployment, itself often related to poor schooling, debt and the need to feed children), mental health problems (associated with stressful life-events), drug (including alcohol) abuse, peer group influence (particularly influence by male friends and relatives), experience of residential care (with resultant difficulties in being able to manage relationships and to become independent) and being the victim of sexual abuse (not uncommonly related to being the victim of other types of abuse) had all been experienced by at least half the women in the study, and therefore emerged as powerful themes.

Only one woman reported just one of the factors above. Commonly, a number of variables were cited by the women. One woman stated that all ten of the variables applied to her. The following table shows the number of factors each woman reported during interview. It can be seen that the largest number of women, six, reported a total of six of the relevant factors (see Chart 4.2).

**Chart 4.2 Number of factors reported by the women**



Turning to the inter-relationship between the multiple influences identified here, a study of this type and size cannot attempt to produce a detailed, inter-relationship analysis. This work is based on qualitative research, and small numbers of interviewees would not be reliable. An analysis using SPSS therefore yielded few instances of strong

correlation between the various factors. However, there were exceptions. A correlation was found between being in care and little or no educational qualifications. Out of the 26 women, 10 women (38.5%) reported both factors. There was also a correlation between little or no educational qualifications and money problems, with 10 women reporting both factors. Finally, there was a correlation between money problems and drink/drug abuse; out of the 26 women, 11 women (42.3%) reported both factors.

Being in care could account for little or no educational qualifications. Having a lack of educational qualifications is not unlikely to cause money problems in later life. Money problems could be related to drink and drug abuse; although only one woman admitted to (property) crime to fund her drug habit, other women also suffered from mental health problems, which may have produced or increased a desire to abuse drink or drugs, and which in turn would make paid employment unlikely. A larger-scale quantitative study could produce a detailed analysis of the inter-relationship between the factors identified here as being relevant to female offending.

There is some similarity between the findings in the present study and those of Carlen's (1988) work with female offenders. In her study, Carlen identified many of the factors listed above as life events affecting the women's lives adversely prior to their offending. In particular, she found poverty, going into residential care and acquiring a dependency on drugs or alcohol to be the major negative life events. However, she did not identify partner abuse or psychiatric problems as relevant negative factors. The reason for the lack of a finding of the former factor may be due to the independent life style claimed by some of the women in her study (see below); the lack of the latter factor is perhaps surprising, given the comments by a number of the women who talked, for example, about cutting as a form of self-abuse and the psychological difficulties of life in care.

In addition to the material circumstances listed above, consideration must be given to those factors identified by the women themselves in the present study as the reasons for their offending. Financial problems, depression, alcohol and drug problems, and retribution were the reasons for offending given by more than one woman (see Table 4.14). It can be seen that all but the last factor have been listed above (Chart 4.1). Again, there is some similarity between these findings and those of Carlen's (1988)



work. Carlen found that the desire for more money, problems associated with being in residential care, heroin addiction and the wish for excitement were the major factors explicitly identified by the women in her study as being reasons for their offending (ibid., p.70). In the present study, lack of money was the reason most commonly cited by the women, and alcohol/drug misuse also featured highly in the reasons given for offending. However, the need for excitement was not stated by any of the women as a reason for offending (although one woman did talk about this during another part of the interview), and residential care was also not given by any woman as a reason for offending (although it had been experienced by half the women in the study).

Other differences between the present study and that of Carlen's include the 'disproportionate' number of women in her study (1988, p.57) who had at some time been convicted of a serious crime either of violence or against property. Such relatively high numbers of serious offenders were not found in the present study (see Appendix 4). As Carlen herself notes, however, her interviewees were determined by the research topic – and investigating women's *criminal careers* necessarily involved seeking out women with longer records. In the present study, contacts were assured that potential interviewees did not have to conform to any requirement other than be women with at least one conviction.

In addition, slightly less than half of the women in Carlen's study were aged 21 or under, whereas just under a quarter of the women in the present study were in that age group. Although Carlen states that, as a sociologist, she was 'looking mainly to social factors' in carrying out this research (1992a, p.204), and she discusses the family as a site of social control, the marital status and the numbers of children of her interviewees are not examined in her study. Carlen (1988) does, however, record in the Appendix of her work that approximately one-sixth of the women in her study were married, 'several' were cohabiting and almost half had children. In the present study, approximately one-quarter of the women were married, the same number cohabiting and over half of the women had children. The smaller number of young women and the greater number of women with immediate family ties in the present study may in part account for the two major factors found in Carlen's (1988) study but not in the present work. These factors relate to a need for excitement and experience of residential care. The lack of women in the present study who stated that they had offended because they

were looking for excitement may have been simply because they were not 'career' criminals in the sense identified by Carlen. Similarly, the lack of women in the present study who stated that they had offended because of their experience of residential care may be because they now focus on their current relationships.

Carlen identifies what she calls the 'gender deal' - the psychological commitment by women to male-related domesticity - and argues that the majority of the women in her study, brought up in situations where no rewards had been seen to emanate from 'familiness', had refused to accept the gender deal. She found that a number of her interviewees 'stressed that from an early age they had experienced a sharp desire to be independent' (1988, p.132); further, although by the time of interview the attractions of the criminal underworld had palled for many of the women, entry to the conventional world 'via male-related domesticity and/or motherhood was rejected by the majority' (ibid., p.134). This was not found to be the case in the present research, where the majority of the women (whether with one conviction or a number of convictions) not only did not claim to feel socially marginalised - much less 'totally outcast' (ibid., p.136) - but also their concerns for the future mainly involved family-related issues. A number of the women in the present study could be said, therefore, to have accepted the 'gender deal' and yet they had also offended.

Carlen also discusses what she calls the 'class deal' - that is, class conformity, with its resultant poverty for the 'working-class.' Although financial problems were stated by a large number of women in the present study to be relevant to their offending, there was little talk of class oppression (in the shape of powerlessness or an excess of official surveillance, for example). However, there appeared to be a strong commitment to obtaining a decent standard of living. Some women intended to achieve this by offending, and other women talked about taking a conventional route, such as education. (Although they had made the 'gender deal', many of the women could not shift responsibility onto their spouse/cohabitee, as the men were also experiencing poverty.) It may therefore it may be argued that, as with the women in Carlen's research, the women in the present study had rejected the 'class deal' - but only to an extent. It should be noted that not all the women in the present study could be described as 'working class', as a small number described a childhood or an adult life, or both, which could be described as 'middle class'.

Elsewhere, Carlen (1983) argues that the social position of Scottish working-class women turns upon a contradiction: they have heavy responsibilities as home-makers, and sometimes also as bread-winners, and yet they suffer repression at the hands of husbands. The present study generally agrees with these findings. Ten of the 26 women in the present study considered themselves to be home-makers – nine of the women were married or cohabiting and had dependent children, and one woman had been married but was now divorced and had dependent children. The majority of these women were unemployed but with a history of temporary, part-time work, indicating at least a wish to be in some form of paid employment. Physical repression by their partner was also found: a number of the women had been (or still were) the victims of domestic violence.

Nevertheless – or perhaps because of the way of life described above – family life was found to be of great importance to the women interviewed in this research and they talked about their role in the responsibility for its happiness and success. A few of the women in Carlen's (1983) study blamed their husbands directly for their law-breaking activities, and many more felt that their domestic situation in general was indirectly to blame for their being in prison. In contrast, in the present study, three of the 26 women stated that their partners were directly to blame for some (if not all) of their offending, but others did not blame their family situation. Nevertheless, the women in both Carlen's study and the present study talked about their family life. Most of the women in these two studies held a notion of the nuclear family as the normal unit of domesticity, although their own experience of family life appeared to have departed sharply from the ideal – for example, the experience of violent husbands or boy-friends and the problems of heavy drinking (the man's or the woman's). However, although relationships were of central importance to the women, the women in the present study had more realistic expectations of domestic life than were shown in the Carlen study. This is almost certainly a result of the 20 year gap between the studies.

From the material examined above, it can be seen that the women experience a considerable degree of deprivation. The deprivation may be historical or current or both; it may relate to circumstances such as poverty or unsatisfactory relationships or to a number of factors. It must be stressed that the characteristics they have in common

may be shared by only a proportion of female offenders, and they may also be shared by many women who do not offend. Nevertheless, in taking seriously women's own accounts of their lives and offending, and recognising the uniqueness of individual female experience as well as the experiences which many of them share, this chapter has aimed to provide an aid to understanding the reasons behind women's offending.

## PART TWO - THE RESEARCH

### CHAPTER FIVE – REOFFENDING AMONGST WOMEN

#### Introduction

The material in this chapter is based on follow-up interviews carried out with a number of the female offenders whose first interviews were presented in Chapter Four. Before looking at these interviews, however, it is important to understand differences in reoffending between men and women, as well as ways of preventing recidivism.

Very little has been written about reconvictions of female offenders. The work of Hobbs (1988, 1995), for example, provides useful insights into the motivations and lifestyles of criminal men and youths, but not women and girls. Sommers et al. (1994) also point out that United States studies of crime desistance have provided information about the criminal careers of male offenders but that much less is known about female offenders. Female reoffending is, however, an essential component in the exploration of criminal behaviour. Females are less likely than males to be reconvicted, according to both small scale research (for example Farrington and Morris 1983) and analysis of the Home Office Offenders' Index (Hedderman and Hough 1994). It is important to discover how this offending behaviour is understood by those women who offend and to what extent possible recidivism can be identified.

Section I of this chapter considers recidivism rates, looking at contemporary studies concerned with community penalties and with imprisonment. It concludes with a brief examination of programmes designed to reduce offending. Section II presents the various problems identified by the women in the follow-up study, which may affect their willingness to re-offend.

## SECTION I - RECIDIVISM

### Recidivism rates and studies

Despite difficulties in carrying out recidivism studies, they can enhance our understanding of the behaviour of offenders (Lloyd et al. 1994). Unfortunately, recidivism studies can only provide an oblique measure of reoffending; reconviction rates do not, of course, include any reoffending that is undetected or does not result in conviction. Therefore, such studies generally focus on reconviction (Cooke and Michie 1997). Nevertheless, reconviction rates remain the best proximal measure of reoffending rates (Lloyd et al. 1994).

Lloyd et al. remark that 'reconviction rates are an essential part of the tools of the trade of the criminologist.' (1994, p.3). However, for many years little evaluative work was undertaken in the UK that made use of reconviction information (Kershaw 1997a). The opportunity to discover 'what works' in reducing offending has now been enhanced by the increased availability of reconviction information in England and Wales. In Scotland, however, both Irvine (1997) and Cooke and Michie (1997) point out the difficulties in carrying out recidivism studies due to a lack of official statistics.

In England and Wales, 53% of all prisoners discharged from custody in 1993 were subsequently reconvicted within two years (Kershaw and Renshaw 1997). Such figures are only an indication of offending behaviour after release, but they become much more useful when broken down into groups (*ibid.*). The chances of reconviction tend to decline with age and increase as the number of previous guilty court appearances increases. In addition, the reconviction rate is lower for women than for men (see Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1 Prisoners reconvicted within two years of discharge, 1989-1993, England and Wales**

YEAR OF DISCHARGE	MALES		FEMALES	
	No.	%	No.	%
1989	52,498	53	2,289	41
1990	45,597	53	1,876	40
1991	46,866	53	1,994	40
1992	43,705	52	1,852	38
1993	45,381	54	2,071	40

Source: Reconvictions of prisoners discharged from prison in 1993, England and Wales. Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 5/97.

Table 5.1 shows that the recidivism rate has remained fairly steady over the last five years, but that the male rate is consistently higher than the female rate. Further, the average number of reconvictions per prisoner within two years after discharge is lower for women (Kershaw and Renshaw 1997). In addition, women with reconvictions feature less in the serious crime categories than do men with reconvictions (see Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2 Prisoners reconvicted by offence on first reconviction within two years of discharge in 1993, England and Wales**

RECONVICTION OFFENCES	MALES	FEMALES
	%	%
Violence against the person	7	5
Sexual offences	1	0
Burglary	18	4
Robbery	2	1
Theft and handling	32	54
Fraud and forgery	3	11
Drugs offences	5	4
Other offences	32	21
Total	100	100

Source: Reconvictions of prisoners discharged from prison in 1993, England and Wales. Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 5/97.

A study into recidivism in a Scottish prison sample found that 72% of the sample were

reconvicted within two years of release (Cooke and Michie 1997). The study found that the period of time between convictions was significantly shorter for female prisoners - half the time it was for male prisoners. However, Cooke and Michie stress that caution must be exercised in the interpretation of these results as the sub-sample of female cases was small.

Most prisoners (male and female) discharged in 1993 in England and Wales and reconvicted within two years were not reconvicted for the same offence. For most offences, reconviction for theft or handling was the most common at first reconviction. However, for those originally convicted of a drug offence, a first reconviction for the same offence was more common (Kershaw and Renshaw 1997).

There appears to be no significant difference between reconviction rates for custody and all community penalties. The figures for reconvictions of offenders given community penalties in 1993 who were reconvicted within two years, are, at 57%, similar to those for offenders given imprisonment (Kershaw 1997b). Similarly, reconviction rates for older offenders (those aged 30 over) tend to be less than those for younger offenders; and rates for women are lower than those for men (48 and 58%, respectively) (*ibid.*, 1997b).

Lloyd et al. (1994) argue that while females have lower rates of reconviction than males, this can be explained largely in terms of differences in age and criminal history. Younger offenders and those with long criminal histories tended to have high rates. As discussed earlier (Chapter Two), females often stop offending at an earlier age than males and commit fewer offences than males. Further, Lloyd et al. (1994), in their comparative study of reconviction rates in England and Wales, found that burglary was a type of crime with one of the highest reconviction rates. Although crimes of dishonesty are common to men and women, burglary is a more male offence whereas women tend to commit fraud and related offences (see, respectively, Chapter Four and Table 5.2 above). It should also be noted that it is difficult to make direct comparisons between male and female reconviction rates, in view of evidence which shows that sentencers may take different factors into account when sentencing men and women - leading to perceptions of both leniency and harsher treatment for women (this is discussed below).



A variety of variables have been identified in the literature as having predictive value in relation to recidivism. Ward (1987) provided a detailed review of over 70 studies which examined potential predictors of recidivism and identified a number of variables: criminological (such as the number of prior convictions), social (such as the stability of relationships) and clinical (such as the presence of drug addiction). Cooke and Michie's (1997) study into predicting recidivism in a Scottish prison sample found six variables, in combination, which appear to be the most effective in predicting reconviction within two years. These are age at first conviction, age at release, adult appearance rate, number of adult convictions, drug abuse or dependency and the rate of violent offences.

The categories which Farrington and Morris (1983) found to be most closely associated with reconviction were a deviant family background, current problems, unemployment, four or more previous convictions, convicted in the previous two years and convicted of burglary or taking vehicles. They found that sex was not related to reconviction independently of these six variables. They conclude that the major reason why men were more likely to be reconvicted than women was not because of their sex but because they were more likely to have been previously convicted. This begs the question: why were men more likely to have been previously convicted? As has been discussed earlier in this section and in the Introduction to this work, men appear to commit more crimes more frequently than do women.

#### Why women do not offend

In any discussion on offending, it is important to consider why women's offending and reoffending rates are considerably lower than the rates for men. Criminologists have in general looked too little at conformity, but this neglect is particularly striking with regard to women. However, Cain cautions against concentrating solely on the question of why women do not offend, 'as if even the criminogenic properties of maleness were normal compared with the cheerful and resigned conformity of women...' (1989, p.4).

To understand fully female criminality, and conformity, Heidensohn (1985) states that an understanding is necessary of the social control of women. The notion of 'separate spheres' for men and women – that men should control public life, while women should

be confined to the home – flourished in the Victorian era and is largely still with us. Heidensohn identifies four constraints which operate on women. The domestic constraint operates to keep women, particularly mothers, in the home, through lack of mobility, money and free time; further, some women are dominated in the home by domestic violence. The public constraint operates to control the behaviour of women in public – such as women's fear of male sexual violence and of losing one's 'reputation'. The third control is in the area of work, with men often holding the controlling power and with growing awareness of the different types of sexual harassment of women at work. Finally, areas of social policy (for example, National Insurance) assume that sex roles, especially in the family, take particular forms for both men and women. This argument, that females' lives typically contain more constraints than do men's, goes some way towards explaining the low incidence of female crime.

Biological differences between men and women have been considered earlier, and biological explanations of offending behaviour have been largely discounted (see Chapter One). Morris (1987) argues that the differences between men and women are often gender rather than sex differences and are maintained through differential socialisation. She disagrees with Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) argument that men are more aggressive than women, and she stresses that aggression – as with all patterns of behaviour – is culturally determined and learned. The relevance of association with offenders was discussed in Chapters Two and Four.

To conclude, the reason women do not offend is a huge question, still debated in the research.

### Rehabilitation programmes

Community and prison based programmes designed to rehabilitate offenders have been criticised over recent decades on two main grounds (Vennard et al 1997). First, that they over-simplify the roots of offending behaviour and take too little account of adverse social and economic circumstances. Second, that there is a lack of research evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of such interventions. However, this 'nothing works' position (see Martinson 1974) is gradually being replaced by a growing body of research

evidence that some forms of rehabilitative work can be effective in reducing reoffending (see Shewan et al.'s (1994) work in Scotland and the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (1990) in Canada). Low self-esteem prior to release from prison has been identified as a strong indicator of potential to re-offend. Low self-esteem is often associated with childhood and adult abuse, poor employment history and poor social support (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 1997). HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales has recently stressed that anyone attempting to help change the patterns of women offenders' lives, including offending behaviour, must be aware that, in most cases, a whole range of issues need to be addressed.

Nevertheless, the use of cognitive-behavioural approaches, which help offenders to modify their patterns of thinking and behaving, are increasingly favoured (Hedderman and Sugg 1997, Vennard et al. 1997). Vennard et al. (1997) warn that offenders need to be assessed and allocated to programmes according to their particular needs and learning styles. This is reiterated by Loucks (1998): she stresses the need to recognise and address the different needs not only of men and women, but also of short-term and long-term prisoners, ethnic differences, and sexuality. In their survey of probation service programmes in England and Wales which draw on cognitive-behavioural methods, Hedderman and Sugg (1997) found a number of improvements were needed to enable such programmes to run more effectively. Bought-in programmes were often not delivered as intended, offenders attending as a condition of a court order and those attending on a voluntary basis were often mixed and thus not well matched to levels of risk and offending-related needs, approximately half the programmes were run without other agencies being involved, a quarter of probation staff had received no extra training and there was little evaluation by probation areas of their programmes.

Job training alone cannot remedy the joblessness produced by the structural labour market conditions that face many ex-offenders upon release - jobs do not tend to be located in the poor urban areas to which many ex-offenders return. Preferential treatment of ex-offenders over other high unemployment groups is not socially acceptable or politically feasible. Jacobs et al. (1984) have reviewed the USA's federal efforts to encourage the employment of ex-offenders, including tax deduction for employers, and conclude that these attempts have been marginal at best. They suggest

the reasons for this might be a lack of publicity, inefficient administration and insufficient subsidies, as well as the inadvertent stigmatising of ex-offenders using this scheme.

A possible option for the future may be the North American programme discussed by Rossi et al. (1980). They found that the programme, which provided financial aid to released prisoners whether they actively sought jobs or not, and which had the effect of discouraging job-seeking, also reduced criminal behaviour. With some re-design work, to increase the incentives to find work while retaining the crime reduction benefits, Rossi et al (ibid.) argue that this effort could work.

Social scientists in both Britain and the USA have criticised the absence of meaningful vocational training for women inmates (Carlen 1983, Chapman 1980). Jurik (1983) examined the effect of economic incentives on the recidivism patterns of 125 women ex-felons. She found that individuals steal largely out of economic need; similar to men, employed women were less likely to become involved in reoffending. However, criminal background and marital status revealed important differences in post-release behaviour. In contrast to Rossi et al.'s (1980) analysis of data from the same project, using a mainly male population, Jurik (1983) found that previous property convictions for women increased the likelihood of re-arrest for economic offences. She concludes that perhaps researchers (such as Simon 1979) are correct in their assertions that the differential treatment of female and male offenders causes only the most hardened women offenders to be convicted numerous times. Further, male romantic attachments appeared to lessen the women ex-felons' economic problems. Although it can be argued that relationships are often settling for male offenders, as well as for female offenders, Jurik (1983) points out that, in the current climate of decreasing job opportunities, attachment to a male may appear to these women as the quickest way out of a financially uncertain, high-pressure post-release situation.

Bates (1995) has pointed to practical matters that need to be addressed to help women (and men) reduce offending. He states that structural difficulties should not be placed in the way of women offenders achieving success, both in terms of completing a community-based disposal and in reducing offending. These obstacles might include, when looking at a probation appointment for example, making the appointment to suit

the organisation, rather than taking account of the family responsibilities of the client and not making provision for young children while their parent is discussing deeply personal and confidential issues.

In her work on the experiences of 34 women after prison, Eaton (1993) describes how the women felt changed by incarceration. The women perceived that prison had stripped them not only of their possessions, but also of their dignity and their identity. The women had also been subjected to a regime which demands docility and their skills were unused. She identifies four structural blocks to positive subjective change in the lives of women after prison. Firstly, housing: many women have experienced insecure accommodation prior to prison (Wilkinson 1988). Eaton (1993) describes the difficulties faced by women made homeless by their prison experience, such as living in 'difficult to let' local authority properties in areas with a high rate of theft, with the obvious dangers and disadvantages of this situation. Secondly, employment: the women who go to prison are usually among the most disadvantaged in terms of educational and vocational training (Carlen 1988). Wilkinson (1988) argues that it is their position as women within the social structure (for example, mothers of young children who cannot find, or afford, child care) rather than their inadequacy as individuals, which accounts for their poverty and unemployment.

The third structural block Eaton (1993) describes relates to social services. Women leaving prison are likely to encounter the social services in two contexts: as a source of income and as the official caretakers of their children. In both contexts, they tend to be experienced by the women as a block to, rather than as a facilitator of, change. Welfare provision in the UK is based on the male bread-winner model of the family, thereby disadvantaging adult women in their entitlement to unemployment benefits (Glendinning and Millar 1992). Wilkinson (1988) found that mothers whose children had been taken into care, felt disadvantaged when attempting to regain charge of their children. Finally, health: poverty is a recognised factor in poor health (Eaton 1993). Although women live longer than men, they suffer more physical and mental ill health (Payne 1991). High levels of ill health among women have been variously attributed to the deprivations, both material and social, which poor women experience, aggravated by the stress of trying to care for others, especially children, with few resources and in unsuitable conditions (Eaton 1993). As Eaton (1993) argues, these material inequalities

need to be recognised and taken seriously, if the women are to be able to turn their backs on crime.

## **SECTION II - UNDERSTANDING FEMALE OFFENDERS: SECOND INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

Having considered recidivism rates and studies above, the remainder of this chapter examines the various problems identified by the women in the follow-up study carried out in the present research, which may affect their willingness to re-offend.

The aim of the follow-up interviews was to examine certain factors in the women's lives since the initial interviews had been carried out. The primary purpose was to ascertain whether each woman had re-offended in the intervening period; if she had, what had prompted her to do this, and if she had not, what had persuaded her to desist? Ten women (38.5%) out of the original 26 took part in follow-up interviews (see Chapter Three for the method of study for the research). These interviews looked at important factors in the lives of the participating women, as well as their responses to any temptations to re-offend.

It is important to recognise that a woman's propensity to re-offend is affected by many factors, such as age and previous criminal history, as discussed above. Nevertheless, relationships and support networks presented themselves as major themes of the follow-up interviews. In the account that follows, as with the initial interviews, the women are talking, in so far as this was possible, in their own words.

### **Economic circumstances**

None of the ten women was employed in full-time work in the community; this did not represent a change from the time of the first interview (see Table 5.3). However, two women were now involved in voluntary work and a third woman had legal, part-time evening employment and was also shortly to start a two year vocational course at college. Four women did not go out to work; two were mothers of young children (one

young mother added that she had 'No choice!' regarding outside employment), and another woman was on permanent disability benefit due to psychiatric problems. The remaining three women worked in prison, as they had at the first interview; two reported they were learning a trade which they hoped to use to secure employment on their release from prison.

**Table 5.3 Past and present work**

WOMEN	WORK AT TIME OF FIRST INTERVIEW	CURRENT WORK
Ashley	Prison	Still in prison
Danielle	None	None
Jenny	None	Voluntary work
Kathy	None	Voluntary work
Lisa	Not given*	Bar-maid
Louise	None	None
Mandy	None	None
Michelle	None	None
Rose	Prison	Still in prison
Suzanne	Prison	Still in prison

\* Merely stated as 'illegal'.

Six women were still in the same accommodation in which they had been living at the time of the first interview: two in local authority housing, two in prison, one in a hostel and one in a rented house, although she was now living there as a tenant in her own right and no longer through the supportive organisation.

Four women had moved since the original interview: one from supported lodgings to local authority accommodation, one from a hostel to another hostel, one from one prison to another and the fourth from one privately rented flat to another.

None of the ten women reported any serious financial problems. Six women replied that they had no money problems, one said her finances had improved, two stated that they 'manage' and the tenth woman reported some money worries. Five of the women re-interviewed had talked about money problems during the first interview. Four of these women reported during the second interview fewer financial problems than before, whilst one woman (in prison) said she still had money concerns.

Of the two women who said they were managing financially, one added:

*I always manage ... we get by. The bills get paid, the kids are clothed ... I've found out that my son has a broken vertebra and a squint spine and a something shoulder. He has to go to the orthopaedic hospital in [city]. There's the travelling back and forth. He's to be hospitalised for some time, six months or something. I need money for that. (Michelle)*

One woman reported an improvement in her financial state:

*It's not bad now. We did have, before he [boy-friend] got his job. I'm sick I'm not out there to help him spend his dosh. (Rose)*

One of the women in prison expressed her concern over her financial dependence:

*You have to depend on your family for everything. It's hard. I'm 28; I find it difficult to ask my family. So, yes, I do have money worries. I don't ask them, but they know they have to, underwear, etc. ... They [ex-inmates] ask if I want them to send in money, a pound. I hate asking for money - even a mere pound - it's difficult. (Ashley)*

Although the situation had improved slightly for three of the ten women, employment prospects continued to be poor for the majority. As Jacobs et al. (1984) have pointed out, ex-offenders tend to have erratic connections to the world of work - with irregular employment histories, low skill levels, lack of motivation, poor work discipline, convictions for violence and dishonesty, and drug and alcohol problems. It is not surprising that employers hesitate to hire ex-offenders; and the job situation is even more difficult for ex-offenders when these problems are combined with high national unemployment.



## Health

Nine (90%) of the 10 women talked about health problems of a physical or mental nature, or both. Seven women had problems relating to their mental health and five talked about physical health problems. Only one woman reported no health problems at all. Since the first interview, there had been some improvement in mental and/or physical health for four women and a deterioration in mental and/or physical health for three women. Two women reported that the situation was about the same, one discussing her physical health and the other her mental health (see Table 5.4).

**Table 5.4 Past and present health**

WOMEN	HEALTH AT TIME OF FIRST INTERVIEW	CURRENT HEALTH
Ashley	Physical problems, stress	Improvement
Danielle	Eczema, epilepsy	Eczema worse
Jenny	Alcohol, drugs, depression, hypochondria, PMT	No alcohol/drugs, other improvement
Kathy	Alcohol, depression	No alcohol, less depression
Lisa	Drugs, eating disorder	No problems
Louise	Long-term psychiatric problems	Worse
Mandy	Depression	Depression
Michelle	Eczema	Same
Rose	No problems	Depression
Suzanne	Physical problems, eating disorder	Improvement

Of the seven women who reported mental health problems, two said that they no longer abused drugs or alcohol, but that they suffered from continued health problems, mainly of a psychiatric nature:

*I've stopped drinking and taking drugs since the last time we spoke. I still get PMT but not so bad. I can control it now without drink. I can't drive when I've got PMT but I'm no longer suicidal. I'm still on anti-depressants, a high dose, and for the foreseeable future, for PMT and depression. There's a need for me to be organised. I'm not so depressed since I stopped drinking, as I'm more in control of my life. I suffer from hypochondria - the doctor checks me with each worry. I told the doctor, being honest with her has helped. If I think I have high blood pressure, she'll take it to show me it's OK. It's better too as I'm more rational in my thinking. I cancelled the health magazine*

*as I thought I had everything, every illness, in it! (Jenny)*

*I've broken my back through alcohol. I was either thrown or I jumped out of the window. The police reckoned it was a 20 foot drop. I'm so lucky, I could have landed on my head. I've got steel pins in my back. I've completely stopped drinking since 27th December last year. I'd stopped - been six weeks sober - before I went to AA. It keeps me stopped, it's a good support group for me to be in. I'm on anti-depressants at the moment ... Now I'm doing things. If I've got nothing to do, I get bored. Before it didn't worry me, doing nothing. (Kathy)*

One woman talked about continued depression:

*I still feel depressed, I'm on tablets, just since having [baby]. I'm trying to come off them now. They're to ease your anxiety. I feel a lot better, it brings me up on days I need them. Some days I don't take them ... No [illegal] drugs now; [boy-friend] helped me through it. (Mandy)*

Another woman spoke of the increased medication she received for her psychiatric problems:

*I'm still on drugs, but on more. I took a bad breakdown. I was getting side-effects - heart palpitations - so they've been reduced. A few months ago, this breakdown happened. I was under a lot of stress, I was worried about [boy-friend] - he cut his throat - and worrying about moving on from here. The psychiatrist says it was something organic, I took too many pills. But the GP says it was depression. It suddenly happened. They changed my sleeping tablets as well ... I go up to [psychiatric hospital] for a jag with a member of staff from here. I only go out when I go to [psychiatric hospital], or in a car with a member of staff. I just freak. I can't walk. I go round the building if it's a fine day. I've had this since I was aged 27, fear of crowds and open spaces ... The fear has got worse over the years. I never go out now. When I was first here I could go out. Now when I go out, I feel dizzy, tired. I'm described as having a mental handicap, a mental impairment, a personality disorder or psychotic. Whatever, I get disability benefit. I'm a psychiatric problem, not a court problem, said one judge. (Louise)*

The three prison inmates talked about their present mental state; one described herself as physically healthy:

*All in all, I've never really been ill in my life. Mentally, I'll leave here [prison] really bugged up. Sometimes recently I wish I could die. If I wasn't pregnant, I'd be dead. Sometimes I've seriously thought about it. But it must just be one of those attention-seeking things. Before I came in [prison], it was speed, amphetamines. But now, not for at least a year after the baby. I used to drink as well. With speed, you don't eat for three days, then you binge for a day. On some days here, now, I eat and then not for days. This has been going on for years. I've been bubbling [crying] all morning. I feel really lonely in here sometimes. But it could just be being pregnant. (Rose)*

The other two inmates described continuing problems with their physical health as a result of stress:

*I had an eating disorder - I wasn't eating. Now I'm seven stone, I'm getting myself healthy again. It started when my man [problems] started. You hold on to the past when you're in here. I'm not hurting myself now with my thoughts. The staff haven't got time and they say I've got a bad attitude ... The social worker and the psychiatrist, they've got time to see me for what I am rather than tagging. I was picking [at food] for weeks, drinking a lot. My family were on at me. I looked in the mirror one day and saw what I looked like. I won't touch nothing [medication], I've had a cold for God knows how long, I won't ask for anything. I stay away. They're just looking for drugs and I don't take those. What is it they say? 'Attitude' - meaning you can only take an attitude being crammed down your throat for so long before you get an attitude yourself. I've had an opinion from day one. They said I was attention-seeking. I tried to get a grip, asking for Complian - I was losing my hair. They checked my thyroid gland. I was told stress affects people in different ways. I dealt with this myself ... Nanna and uncle died. I went to her funeral, but that was it. It hurt me. I took Valium for a day and then said keep them. I was told there was no budget for what I wanted. It was taken as bad attitude - but I've got emotional feelings. I used to be too scared to grieve. You build up feelings and emotions. Then I got tagged with this name [attitude problem]. The system is a total disaster. The government should get the officers to attend cognitive skills to try*

*to understand a wee bit. (Suzanne)*

Both Rose (above) and Suzanne talked about their 'attention-seeking' behaviour. In her work on suicides in prison, Liebling (1992) found that few prison staff moved beyond the 'attention-seeking' explanation. Liebling talks about a 'language of contempt', with expressions such as 'attention-seeking' being used to allow both parties, inmates and staff, to avoid confronting the realities of pain and desperation: 'the language denies their validity, and the distress they express' (1992, p.233). Eaton (1993) has also described how female prison regimes demand docility.

*I still have [problems]. I've been in hospital with my stomach. Stress - I hide my feelings. I see the psychiatrist every three weeks, to address my offending behaviour. I have food poisoning quite regularly. I'm on a special diet, it's taken about a year to get that sorted out. If the food's not cooked correctly, I get food poisoning ... I'm fortunate the Health Centre are good. Other people have to wait days, But I can see them on the same day. I must be dying! I'm not still taking them [tablets]. I would take lots of tablets, whatever was lying in the drawer, when I was with my co-accused, to get away from him. (Ashley)*

Two women reported continuing physical health problems:

*I've got skin problems still. Worse actually. I'm allergic to so many things ... I've got a list of stuff you canna eat and I get cream from the doctor. The epilepsy, it's not any worse. (Danielle)*

In sum, although a small number of women were able to claim some improvement in their physical and/or mental health since the first interview, all but one of the 10 women talked about health problems. Mental health problems featured more commonly than physical health problems, with depression being reported most frequently by women in the community and stress by the women in prison. Eaton (1993) has noted that the high levels of ill health among women have been variously attributed to the deprivations, both material and social, which poor women experience. The present research appears to confirm this argument.

## Relationships

Relationships were seen to be a particularly important factor in the women's lives. For seven (70%) of the women, there had been no change concerning the people with whom they lived. Three of the women were still in prison, two women were still living on their own, one was still with her husband and one with her husband and children. This last woman had suffered a miscarriage since the first interview.

Three women had experienced change. One woman was now living with her boy-friend and they had a baby, another woman lived alone and no longer with her husband and the third woman was 'time-sharing' (living part of each week) with her new partner.

When asked about any changes in family circumstances since the first interview, five women reported that things had changed for the better, three reported the situation was largely the same and two stated that things were worse (see Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Family and other relationships**

WOMEN	FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS	SUPPORT PROVIDERS
Ashley	+	+
Danielle	=	=
Jenny	+	+
Kathy	+	+
Lisa	+	=
Louise	=	+/-
Mandy	-	+
Michelle	=	=
Rose	-	-
Suzanne	+	+/-

Key: + Better, - Worse, = Same, +/- Mixed.

Of the five women who reported an improvement in family circumstances, one woman described improved relationships:

*I'm back in touch with my parents, they're accepting of me as I'm sober. With my brothers and sisters I'm not reconciled yet. I did bring the family into disrepute. It will take a while to see I'm reliable again. One brother is OK, he's less judgmental than the others. He's been in trouble himself in the past. I've sent letters and birthday cards to them. One sister remembered mine. The letters are tentative, but better. We're re-establishing a relationship. It's not important to me as they've got their own lives. I'd like them to see me as just Jenny again. (Jenny)*

Another woman talked about the final break-down of her marriage and the adoption of her children, but the improvement of relations with her wider family:

*My husband is in [city]. Things don't work out while he's drinking. My marriage was to be quite honest a disaster ... We were on the streets drinking. We never really got on. It was just drink after drink. He went away to [city]. He phones now and again ... I'm going to get a divorce when I'm feeling stronger. My children, they're adopted, all three. I felt very angry and resentful to begin with, but now I realise I couldn't look after myself, let alone children ... I want to get on with my life. I'm 27 now. Since 16 upwards, I've been not knowing where I was going to wake up. I'm 27 years old and there's nothing really to tell people about myself. I don't want to lead a life of waking up in a police cell. They could tell me I've done a murder and I'd be none the wiser. For the first time in my life I'm clear of courts. That's a bonus for me - that's really helping me ... I've developed a friendship with my family. My sister never spoke to me before. She's more than happy to let me see [sister's child] as much as I want to. My sister just noticed a difference in me. She can see that I'm trying. (Kathy)*

Kathy's comment that she is '27 years old and there's nothing really to tell people about myself' suggests that she may have reached a turning point in her life. Levinson et al.'s (1978) research into human development depicts the life span as a series of critical transitions. Although each stage of life is linked to the biological process of ageing, the life course is largely a social construction; each stage of the life course presents characteristic problems and transitions that involve learning something new. Kathy has reached a turning point in her life - a stage of self-insight - and has re-negotiated a better relationship with her family, leaving behind a 'criminal way' of life for another,

family-approved, existence.

One woman talked about re-building her relationships after a period in prison:

*I'm not seeing anybody at the moment. I missed a lot getting a two year sentence. My main priority is building up my relationship with my daughter and with my mum ... My daughter is with my mum. Mum has full custody of her. She started school a few weeks ago. I see her twice a week ... Things are better. I've managed to get my life back into order. I've got a job, work, college. I'm nae dabbling about in drugs or anything. (Lisa)*

Another woman reported the end of the relationship with her partner but was feeling positive about the end of her prison sentence:

*I'm no longer with my man. It's still the same with my family ... It [Suzanne being imprisoned] really hurt my dad. I love my dad so much. Since being in jail I've had a better relationship with my parents. Before, I felt they were trying to control my life. Now I wish I'd listened to them a bit more ... He [ex-partner] was a total prick and all. I must be attracted to these idiots, you know. But he's not a bad man. He just wanted his life back. I had to let him go ... My little boy is still with my parents. He no longer sees his dad. We grew apart, like a stranger, it comes with the prison. Now I feel nothing, I accept it. He's with someone else now. He told me once I sensed something was wrong. My family are very supportive. I've cut myself off except for my family now. I stopped the others three months ago. I'm at the end of my sentence, so I just want my family there now ... It's better, as I'm not so stressed out. Stressed with my man arguing with me on the phone. You play games with yourself and end up taking it out on him. There's no trust, no loyalty in here. (Suzanne)*

Sykes (1969) has identified the loss of heterosexual relationships for prisoners. This loss occurs not only while the woman is in custody, but also impacts on the likelihood of a partner able and willing to resume the relationship once the woman is released from custody.

The fifth woman said her family relationships were improving:

*We're still close. I see my family regularly. Relations have improved with my mum. Now I have a niece; my brother has married. And my cousin, he recently just heard and started to visit [in prison], and my auntie. That's going well. (Ashley)*

Three women reported that their family circumstances were 'about the same' as they were during the first interview.

*I'm still with [boy-friend]. He's been in [psychiatric hospital] for six months now. His brother died and he took it really bad. He's sectioned. (Louise)*

*I was pregnant since the last time we spoke. I bought stolen stuff and I was arrested. The stress brought on a miscarriage. I've not been pregnant since, and I take no precautions. There was no charge after the arrest. I'm still fighting to get back the stuff they took away. Not everything was stolen. (Michelle)*

Two women described events in their lives over the past year and said that things were worse.

*I went into B and B after [supported accommodation], then got a council bed-sit, went back with [boy-friend] and we lived together. We swapped that for a bigger house. Then I got pregnant, we split up again, I had [baby], and we're living together again now ... I have another wee sister, through dad. He phones me often. I last saw him three weeks ago. I see mum once a week. I see my sister when I see my mum. I see my brother quite a lot - he comes up a lot. It's not so well with [boy-friend's] family - just interfering. They're trying to cause bother - to break us up. It's worse in some ways, because of his family. (Mandy)*

*I've been six months here [prison]; I got seven years...The report on her death said 'blow to the throat'. She was alive three and a half hours after I left her house. I hit this girl with a bloody great bar. And I kicked her a few times too and hit her legs with the bar ... She was not a friend, but we spoke; an acquaintance. Her friend had battered my mate the night before ... The photo showed disgusting marks on her neck. But I never touched her neck. I hit her full on the head. I spent four months on remand. There was no trial because there was not enough evidence then. Seven and a half months later,*



*they said it's you ... Murder is vicious and violent and pre-meditated. She wasn't meant to have died. I saw the photo and I thought I had no worries ... If they made my story into a film, people wouldn't believe it. It's my own fault I'm in here, but it starts to get me now and again ... I knew I'd fought with this girl and now she's dead. But I've been fighting all my life and inflicted worse damage but without anybody dying ... My daughter is still in foster care. I have hardly any contact with her. I'll keep the baby here --- who the hell wants to keep a baby in here? I'm still a B cat. as I'm appealing [against conviction and sentence]. I think it'll probably be a case of keeping her or him here. The baby's dad, I'm still in touch with him. I'm saving visits to go to [prison unit nearer home]. All my mates are on the brew. It's expensive to get here. My step-mother is OK. I've not spoken to her for years. The last time was 10 years ago, when it was face to face. Dad, he's just a fart. I've got some mates left, and my boy-friend ... As I'm further away, it's worse. (Rose)*

Table 5.5 (above) shows that for four of the women relationships had improved with support providers (other than family), for three women the situation was the same, for two it was mixed and for one woman it was worse than at the time of the first interview. Seven of the women reported some change in their main support providers as discussed during the first interview. For four women, the change meant they had enlarged their support network, two by adding to their original group.

During the first interview, Jenny had talked about her social worker and a friend. By the time of the follow-up interview, she added a partner to her support network:

*The social worker kept in touch once I was off probation. She supported me through everything. She's always been there for me. I can't find words enough to praise her. I was thinking I'd have to shop-lift again to see her again! I told her and she said I could see her anyway. I see her once a week - to know I'm OK. I've started to forget I've got appointments with her now, which is a good sign. My friend in London - there are still letters and the phone. My new friend [partner] is marvellous. I've been seven months with my new partner. It's good. She knows about my past and it doesn't matter. (Jenny)*

Jenny's statement, 'I was thinking I'd have to shop-lift to see her again!', shows how

important was the relationship between her social worker and herself.

Ashley had earlier reported her family as her main support provider in prison. By the time of the second interview, she added certain prison staff:

*The psychiatrist, yes. I have a new personal officer, who is absolutely wonderful. We have a blether. She'll come in any time. My work party officer, my boss at work, is excellent. The block I'm on, there was no support and I was really annoyed. People cutting themselves and people who are really ill. The block has been a hindrance. Day in, day out, you hear someone talking about the end of their sentence. Lifers are in there, too. The establishment have not done anything to improve it. I've wrote twice to my MP and go no reply. I see my social worker, I don't mean to sound snobby, to have intelligent conversation. I'm not a drug user, and not an alcohol user, so really my life's different ... Friends - we've sorted of drifted. I've accepted it, they've got to move on. I had a couple of friends, ex-inmates. It really doesn't annoy me. They don't encourage you to build up relationships, but I don't know how they think you can manage when you're in here for a long time. (Ashley)*

Ashley's comment that 'They don't encourage you to build up relationships' supports the findings of Dobash et al. (1986) in their work on the imprisonment of women (including women in Cornton Vale), and has been discussed in Chapter Four.

The other two women had enlarged their support network by a change in their network. Mandy had earlier cited her boy-friend as her main provider of support. In the second interview, she talked about family and friends:

*I've got a new friend. I don't see old friends - we've each moved away ... The only people I speak to now are my pal and my mum. (Mandy)*

Kathy had earlier talked about support from her husband. In the second interview, she cited instead family and friends, noting that her support providers had changed since she had stopped drinking, an activity which was responsible for all her offending behaviour:

*My family, since I've stopped drinking. We never actually fell out as such.*

*They've just never been good to me ... My sister was the biggest change so far. I've made friends through AA [Alcoholics Anonymous], I've made a lot of nice friends. I decided to go myself. I've been sober before for five weeks in a row. I needed support to continue ... I gave up with myself last August. I couldn't care if I drank myself to death. Now I'm so grateful for what I've got. I've met really nice people at AA. It's like a life-line for me, it's been good for me. I look forward to going to a meeting. Staff [at hostel] might put me to a halfway house shortly. (Kathy)*

Kathy's experience supports Eaton's (1993) 'strategies of change' thesis (discussed below, see Reoffending and desistance), in which she argues, *inter alia*, that both a decision to change and appropriate support are necessary survival strategies to avoid reoffending. Kathy has recognised that her acts were harming both herself (in terms of her health and her future) and others (poor relationships with her family); she now has very little contact with her husband, who has a drinking problem, and she has a new supportive network.

Of the remaining three women who had experienced some change in their support providers, one woman had lost one person providing support but had gained others. Suzanne had earlier talked about support in prison from her family and her partner. During the follow-up interview, she reported help still received from her family and from certain prison staff:

*I see the social worker, the psychiatrist, my family and occasionally my personal officer. [Social worker] will see me, she's very helpful. You're supposed to make an appointment but this can take a few days and by then you're stressed out. I'm happy to go to the social worker or the shrink, but not to go to an officer, unless it's for a pass or something like that. Not for any personal help - there's no trust. The officers take it upon themselves to interfere. If you reject them, they say, 'There you go again, Suzanne, with that bloody attitude!' I take one day at a time now ... I don't ask my family for clothes and tapes. My man used to bring those in. My family have got financial problems, so I manage on what I've got ... I've lost a lot in the past month. I've lost home leave, been shipped back from open [prison block], because of my 'attitude'. I've got 20 days back here now, and I've lost all outside acts. [activities], privileges, D cat. I've got to go back through the system again. I take partly the blame for committing*

*the crime and being here. I'm very deep, dour and not wanting to talk, not sociable. I'm trying to address this, for my release. I was back for three days and I was settled again. It's a scary feeling. I didn't like it [open prison] - there was too much responsibility for me. It was like moving from the shallow to the deep end. I'm used to being told by staff do this, do that. You get used to it. I felt totally lost ... People think because you commit a crime like that [serious assault], you've got badness in you. But that wasn't me. Even my mum and dad said no, we know you. (Suzanne)*

Suzanne's comment, 'It was like moving from the shallow to the deep end. I'm used to being told by staff to do this, do that,' demonstrates her awareness of the deprivation of autonomy experienced by prisoners (Sykes 1969): the frustration of a prisoner's ability to make choices reduces her to the weak, dependent status of childhood.

The other two women had experienced a reduction in their support network. Louise had earlier discussed the support role played by the hostel staff and her boy-friend; at the second interview she stressed the help given by the hostel staff:

*I had a social worker in mental health. I didn't get on with her. Then a befriender - I packed her in. I get support from here [hostel]. I go up to [psychiatric hospital] for a jag with a member of staff from here. I only go out when I go to [psychiatric hospital], or in a car with a member of staff ... There are meetings every night with a member of staff. They've been for a wee whiley (sic). We chat, about how I'm getting on, it's just myself. I used to lie in bed and do nothing, speak to no-one. They've helped. (Louise)*

Rose had earlier mentioned her daughter as providing support. During the second interview, she said that she received support from no-one:

*My daughter is still in foster care. I have hardly any contact with her ... A previous boy-friend, a violent bastard, ended up stabbing me above the eye ... He got a jail sentence, for something else, so I dumped him then ... I've put on a face through all this (prosecution and sentence). A lot of people think I don't need it [support]. I'm fed up with it now and I'm going to ask for it. I need to speak to someone. Who to, I don't know. I was even racking my brains this morning, thinking about it. A social worker is a*

*social worker. I need somebody who is - I don't know - out of it ... I used to write letters every day, moaning about things. I don't write nearly as much now. I think it's all building up inside ... I did have a friend in here, but she basically just dumped me.*  
(Rose)

Three of the ten women reported no change in their support providers. The family were still the main provider of support for two women:

*With my family, it's about the same. I've no social worker - I don't get one and I don't want one.* (Michelle)

*About the same. If I'd ask they'll give it me. I don't really ask because they've got their needs as well. You can't just think of yourself ... I don't need to ask, I've got no problems just now. I'm just getting on with my life day by day.* (Lisa)

and her partner for one woman:

*My husband ... I suppose everybody would like more [support], wouldn't they?*  
(Danielle)

The situation concerning family relationships and main support providers showed a mixed response as to whether the situation was better or worse since the first interview, but three women reported improved personal relationships with family, friends and significant others. For the three women in prison, the fact of being in prison had, not surprisingly, affected their relationships; for one woman, there was an improvement, for another the overall situation was about the same and the third woman (the only one of the ten women to do so) talked of much worse relationships by the time of the second interview.

#### Reoffending and desistance

Eight (80%) of the ten women reported that they had not re-offended since the initial interview (see Table 5.6). One woman (Kathy) had committed an offence shortly after the first interview and had been convicted. Two women had committed offences shortly

before the first interview but their cases had not come to court by this time, therefore these offences have not been discussed in Chapter Four. By the time of the second interview, the charge against the first of these two women (Michelle), of buying stolen goods, had been dropped. The second woman (Rose), who during the first interview had been on remand charged with murder, had by the time of the second interview been found guilty of culpable homicide. This conviction is not discussed here as she had not re-offended since the initial interview. Rose had committed an offence, drug taking, since the first interview, for which no charge was brought.

Table 5.6 Reoffending

WOMEN	LAST CONVICTION	RE-OFFENDED?
Ashley	Murder	No
Danielle	Shop-lifting	No
Jenny	Fire-raising	No
Kathy	Breach of the peace	Yes – Breach of the peace
Lisa	Drugs	No
Louise	Nuisance telephone call	No
Mandy	Fraud	No
Michelle	Shop-lifting	No
Rose	Assault	Yes – Drugs (NC*)
Suzanne	Serious assault	No

\* NC No charge was brought

Four of the eight women said that they had been tempted to re-offend during the period between the first and subsequent interview:

*Maybe to steal from shops. Not fraud [last offence]. I did it - shop-lifting - sometimes, just now and again. I didn't get caught. Hairspray, mousse, make-up. I did it because I knew I wouldn't get caught.*

- What stopped you? (LT)

*Just scared of getting caught and being sent to prison. I think I've learnt, ken [you know], what I was doing was wrong. I've got too much to lose - [baby], [boy-friend], my family, my mum. (Mandy)*

Mandy has identified a number of issues here. Firstly, the fear of being caught and sent to prison shows her awareness of the threat to her self-esteem and to her life goals. Secondly, she has, like Kathy (discussed earlier), reached a level of understanding about her behaviour and the possible consequences for the future. Thirdly, considerations of family responsibilities and ties of affection demonstrate the importance to Mandy of her family.

Jenny gave another reason for desistance:

*I was tempted to steal, shoplifting - it's easy, things are just there. It was Christmas time and I wanted to buy things. But I knew I had to live an honest lifestyle. My conscience had always bothered me.*

- What stopped you? (LT)

*Conscience. I could have got away with it, no sweat. (Jenny)*

Jenny acknowledges that she has always found it physically easy to offend, but more difficult emotionally to do so. That her conscience, which 'had always bothered' her, now acts as a deterrent to further offending, suggests that the new supportive and loving relationship in her life (discussed earlier), or maturity, (or both), has brought about this change.

*Sometimes. Phone calls, to the police; a bomb or something, probably.*

- What stopped you? (LT)

*Ken [I knew] I had the support here [hostel]. If I'd been in a flat I'd probably have done it. I know if I really wanted to, I could go to one of the staff [here]. (Louise)*

Louise's need for support, and her history of psychiatric illness, has been discussed in Chapter Four. Carlen (1983), Dobash et al. (1986) and Loucks (1998) have commented on the imprisonment of women with psychiatric problems. With the appropriate support, Louise does not feel the need to offend – in her case, to make 'nuisance' telephone calls.

Ashley too had been tempted to offend, but resisted:

*Yes, of a violent nature! Attack somebody! Slap a couple of people actually. But because I'm not really a violent person I've been able to stand back.*

- What stopped you? (LT)

*I just sat back and thought, do you want to go down that path? I have to deal with it in an adult way. I would have got away with it ... I think it's because you're learning. In my younger days, I probably just would have jumped in there. (Ashley)*

Ashley was interviewed in prison, which may have influenced her decision not to re-offend. Nevertheless, her statement that she 'would have got away with (an assault)' emphasises the sense of growing up, of maturity, expressed elsewhere in her comments.

Four women said they had not been tempted to re-offend, two of them stressing their concern with the future:

*I offended and endangered someone's life and now I'm being punished for it. I didn't think about it at the time, but when it was done I realised. The police doctor was totally amazed at how much alcohol there was in me. And this was a week after ... If somebody attacked me, I'd walk away. It has happened. They've come back and apologised. I just laugh in myself at them and walk away. At the end of the day, what would it solve? (Suzanne)*

*No, not really. I don't see the point. You just get caught and you're in and out of jail and all that crap. You just go round and round. I want to lead a normal life. I spent a year of my life in jail. I don't particularly want to go back in there again. (Lisa)*

*I've not been tempted. (Danielle)*

The fourth woman had re-offended shortly before the first interview but had subsequently not been charged with this offence:

*I had an idea that some stuff was stolen ... For money. Just money being short; being offered something at a fraction of the price.*

- Have you been tempted to re-offend since? (LT)

*No. (Michelle)*



Of the remaining two women, one had since been found guilty of a crime for which she had been on remand during the first interview. She had also committed an offence since the first interview, although not one she regarded as a real offence, and one for which no charge was brought:

*I did take speed when I came out [of prison where first interviewed]. I suppose that's an offence.*

- Have you been tempted to re-offend since? (LT)

*There've been times when people really bugged me and I felt like belting them.*

- What stopped you? (LT)

*Just because I had to keep out of trouble ... It was bloody scary to be on a murder charge. (Rose)*

The second woman had both offended and been convicted shortly after the first interview:

*What I've done I don't know. I got 14 days in jail - breach of the peace, breach of bail, I slapped a police officer in the face. All district court stuff. And one theft. I stole from a shop, a jar of mussels. I don't even like mussels. I was drunk at the time.*

- Have you been tempted to re-offend since? (LT)

*No. I haven't been drinking. I don't commit anything in sobriety. (Kathy)*

Various studies have shown that alcohol abuse is linked to offending (see Chapter Two). The present research also found this to be a relevant factor in criminal behaviour (see Chapter Four). Kathy stated during both first and second interviews that her offending was as a result of heavy alcohol consumption. She is now addressing this problem (see earlier).

In sum, of the ten women re-interviewed, all but two reported no further offending since the first interview. Various reasons were given for desistance, with concern over the outcome being cited by two women, conscience by two women, both concern over the outcome and conscience by one woman, and having sufficient support was given as the reason for desistance by one woman. The remaining two women simply stated that they were 'not tempted.'

Although only one woman specifically stated the importance to her of support when asked about desistance, when talking about current relationships earlier in the interview nine of the ten women stressed positive relationships with family members and/or other support providers (that is, partners, children, parents, siblings, other relatives, friends, social workers, certain prison staff and hostel staff) (see Relationships and Table 5.5). The tenth woman was interviewed in prison and she reported that the relationships in her life were much worse than during the period of the first interview. It can be reasonably argued, then, that supportive relationships are important to the women and may well be a contributory factor in desistance.

Three women reported that they had not re-offended because they had been concerned over the outcome. These comments, too, can be seen as reflecting on relationships. Both Lisa and Mandy stated they were afraid of being caught and sent to prison; Lisa said, 'I want to lead a normal life,' and Mandy stated, 'I've got too much to lose', going on to cite various family members. The third woman, Suzanne, asked 'what would it [reoffending] solve?' She had earlier talked about her love for her father and the distress caused to him on her imprisonment.

Finally, three women talked about conscience: learning what they had done was wrong (Mandy), knowing they should live an honest life (Jenny) and learning to deal with situations in an adult way (Ashley).

Eaton (1993) identifies three 'strategies of change', which had helped the women in her study to avoid reoffending after imprisonment. Although not all the women in the present study were or had been in prison, Eaton's thesis on survival strategies is relevant and the findings reported in this chapter in general support her work. The first strategy identified by Eaton, redirection, may begin with a decision to change, to redirect one's life, but appropriate support is also required. In the present study, of the 10 women taking part in the follow-up interviews, six women talked about a positive decision not to re-offend (with reasons ranging from 'conscience' to 'I don't see the point ... You just go round and round'). Five of these women had no further convictions since the first interview, while the sixth woman was convicted shortly after the first interview but was adamant that she would not offend again. Seven women (Mandy, Jenny, Ashley,

Suzanne, Lisa, Kathy and Rose) all talked about the need to change the way they lived their lives, and most had already made changes, such as joining the support group Alcoholics Anonymous (Kathy) and moving away from relationships with offending friends (Mandy).

Eaton's second strategy of change, recognition, is most commonly experienced through work; being valued at work and accepted by society also provides new relationships. In the present study, only one woman had paid employment, as a bar-maid (Lisa), and she saw this as part of 'getting my life back into order.' Two women (Jenny and Kathy), who had not been working at the time of the first interview, were doing voluntary work during the period of the second interview. They both talked about the importance to them of their work, of it being 'a life-line', and of the friends made as a result. They had become part of a new, non-offending network, gaining self-confidence and a feeling of being valued. Two of these three employed women (one in paid work and the other in voluntary work) had not re-offended since the first interview, while the third woman had re-offended shortly after the first interview. All three women talked about having made a decision not to offend again. Of the three women in prison, two (Ashley and Suzanne) reported they were learning a trade, which they enjoyed, and they hoped to continue with this work on release from prison.

The third strategy of change identified by Eaton is reciprocal relationships: these involve having an empowering relationship within a network and between equals. In the present study, half of the women (Jenny, Kathy, Lisa, Ashley and Mandy) said they were re-establishing family relationships, and this was a priority for most of the five women. Jenny and Kathy were the most positive about the changes in their lives: they had stronger relationships with significant others (partner for Jenny and sister for Kathy), they were doing voluntary work in which they took pride and pleasure, and each talked specifically about the steps they had taken not to re-offend (in particular, not to drink alcohol again).

Eaton concludes by stressing the importance of a basis of secure accommodation. All but two of the women in the present study were either living in, or on release from prison would go to, stable accommodation. One of these two women was in prison and had no obvious accommodation to go to on release. (Rose also stated that she had no

support network.) The second woman, Louise, was living in a hostel, and she talked about the possible move of her by the authorities to other, less supportive, accommodation. Louise stressed that she knew she would re-offend if her accommodation did not provide her with the feeling of security she needed.

### The future

Three women felt optimistic about their future, five expressed concerns and two saw no change.

The three women (30%) who saw their future as a positive one, cited partner, work, family, friends and child:

*As they say, 'the sky's the limit'. I can't drink or use drugs as I don't know what the outcome would be. I could wake up and find I'd set the world on fire. It's really not a problem, the obsession to drink has gone. I still go to AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]. Before I went all the time, now I go to four or five meetings a week. I feel good about the future. If I can get the [counselling] course and finish it, that would be good. I'm getting on with the girls in class. Before, I had an agenda, no control over my feelings. I was always thinking she does or doesn't fancy me. With my new partner, now I can get on with the course. (Jenny)*

*It seems a lot better now. I feel a lot more confident. I enjoy what I do and having my friends and family around me. (Kathy)*

*It's better, a lot clearer. I did lose my flat, but I'm seeing my daughter and I've got a normal job. (Lisa)*

These three women who saw their future as a positive one talked about their partner, work, family, friends and child. Unlike the women in Carlen's (1988) study, who claimed to have turned their backs on family life, the women in the present study saw their future closely tied to their family. Work was also important, not only to help with the family finances but also to provide the women with a measure of independence and

with it a sense of self-esteem.

Five further women (50%) spoke about their concerns for the future. These concerns were for accommodation and support, partner relationship and work, and, not surprisingly, for the three women in prison, life outside on their release. In addition, one of the imprisoned women had to make a decision about her baby.

*I'm hoping to get into a house. A house with 24 hours cover, like here [hostel], but more independent, still in [city], with two others, disabled too. I know them well. One is here but the other's here no longer. I'm a bit scared to move from here. I ken [know] staff, ken residents. I get cooked meals! I'd have to learn! They'll learn us. They're waiting for the new budget in April and I'm hoping to hear after that. The council has money for the house, but not for the caring side, I think. I've been six years here. But I would bide here if I got away with it! I don't like change. (Louise)*

*I've got [baby]. I couldn't tell you with me and [boy-friend]. It's alright now, but next week ---. Things blow up out of proportion. It's been that long that I've had no work. I want to work, but I don't know what. (Mandy)*

*I fool myself a lot, I think. I play little games with myself. When I get out - I don't know. It depends on the circumstances. If I get out pretty soon over this appeal, I'd go back to my house. Just to prove a point, I think. Some people don't think that's a good idea. But there've been no threats, only rumours behind my back. I'll keep the baby, if I don't crack up before that time. (Rose)*

*My life was a total mess. You need to have a path. I did the art course because of pressure from my family. But it was a hobby for me. Now I have cooking - I love it. I was accepted for college, an HNC, it started on 26th of this month. I've gone back to square one; it's been taken off me as part of my open privileges ... I'm scared about leaving here [prison]. I've let this place turn into a security blanket. I'm a prisoner - it's drummed into you, you're not a part of society - you start to believe it. I look at the price of bread, do you know that? I can't remember what it was before I came in. You get a memory block ... I want to go to college, do catering. It's sad that at the end of the day it's taken jail to find what I'm about. I'm as happy as Larry with food. (Suzanne)*

*It'll be easier to get a job as I have something behind me [prison work experience]. It's not worrying me about starting afresh. I'm looking forward to that in a sense. My worry is that I might become institutionalised. I may be in for ten years. That's just my personal opinion. (Ashley)*

These five women who spoke of their concerns for the future talked about accommodation, support, partner relationship, work, child and, not surprisingly, for the three women in prison, life outside on their release. Again, both the family and employment featured strongly here, but there were other practical matters of concern for the women, notably accommodation and coping with life after release from prison. Eaton (1993) has identified the importance of accommodation and of both supportive and reciprocal relationships in helping women to stop reoffending, and the findings in the present study support her thesis.

Finally, two women (20%) saw no change in their future:

*The same. Your kids growing up is always a worry. Since last time [we spoke], I've started writing poems. Now I want a fancy computer. I will just have to win the lottery or something. Or I daresay if someone comes up with one cheap ---! (Michelle)*

Again, children and money were mentioned here. As has been seen above, their children were an important focus in the women's lives, whether expressed as part of the woman's hopes for, or worries about, the future. Each mother accepted responsibility for her children, and those mothers whose children had been taken into local authority care still mourned the loss of their children. Financial problems were also discussed by many of the women; clearly, lack of money was a real concern for them, confirming Carlen's (1988) work on women, crime and poverty.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The first part of this chapter discussed earlier work on recidivism. Reconviction rates, despite providing only an oblique measure, remain the best proximal measure of reoffending (Lloyd et al. 1994). Official statistics show that the reconviction rate is lower for women than it is for men, and that women with reconvictions feature less in the serious crime categories than do men with reconvictions.

A variety of variables have been identified by earlier researchers as having predictive value in relation to recidivism (see for example Farrington and Morris 1983, Cooke and Michie 1997). These studies found the categories most closely associated with reconviction included age at first conviction, number of convictions, drug abuse, stability of relationships and unemployment. Farrington and Morris (1983) conclude that the major reason why men are more likely to be reconvicted than women is because they are more likely to have been previously convicted. That women's reoffending and reconviction rates are considerably lower than the rates for men may be explained by the social control of women (Heidensohn 1985).

Rehabilitation programmes which recognise and address the different needs of offenders are essential (Loucks 1998), including modification of patterns of thinking and behaving. In addition, relationships, and in particular romantic relationships which provide a degree of economic support, appear to lessen female reoffending (Jurik 1983). Finally, for women released from custody, the four 'structural blocks' to positive change identified by Eaton (1993) need to be addressed, if women are to be able to desist from offending.

The second part of this chapter examined the follow-up interviews carried out as part of the present research. Whilst it is recognised that no firm conclusions can be drawn from follow-up case studies of only ten women, the factors outlined above demonstrate the importance of these factors to the women.

Employment prospects continued to be poor for the majority (see Table 5.3), although the financial situation of most of the women was reported to be satisfactory. Almost all of the women talked about physical and/or mental health problems, with more women speaking of mental health problems (see Table 5.4). Concerning family relationships

and main support providers, the answers were mixed as to whether the situation was better or worse since the first interview (see Table 5.5), but three women reported improved relationships while one woman talked of much worse relationships by the time of the second interview.

Of the ten women re-interviewed, all but two reported no further offending since the first interview. Various reasons were given for desistance, but concern over the outcome - what would it achieve?, fear of going to prison, and so on - was commonly expressed. None of the 10 women could be described as 'criminal careerwomen' - that is, offending regularly for financial gain - but rather were occasional offenders.

As mentioned above, all but one of the ten women received support from friends and/or family. Of the four women who had been tempted to re-offend, three stressed the importance of their relationships; one of these three specifically stated that the support she received had prevented any reoffending. Of the four women who reported that they had not been tempted to re-offend, two had discussed their families in relation to their futures and the third, a mother of five children, had spoken of the attraction of cheap (stolen) goods. Of the two women who had re-offended since the first interview, one (Kathy) talked about the importance of support which had helped her not to re-offend in recent months. The second reoffending woman (Rose) reported receiving no support at all.

Finally, when talking about their future, relationships, work, accommodation and money were cited by the women as either giving cause for concern or providing hope, or indeed both.

Whilst it cannot be stated on the basis of the above that emotional and/or practical (including financial) support will prevent reoffending, it does appear to be an important element in the lives of these women. It can therefore be argued that social factors such as close relationships and good support are associated with lower rates of recidivism. In addition, both employment and health seem to be relevant factors; even those women whose job prospects and/or health appeared to have improved since the first interview, they still, largely, had poor job prospects and less than good health (see Table 5.7). As Eaton (1993) argues, an offender may make a decision to change her offending way of



life, but such a decision is not in itself sufficient to bring about change. Other factors – such as good support and other relationships, good health and employment - are also necessary if such a change is to take place.

Table 5.7 Possible reasons for reoffending

WOMEN	WORK	HEALTH	RELATIONSHIPS	RE-OFFENDED?
Ashley	=	+	+	No
Danielle	=	-	+	No
Jenny	+	+	+	No
Kathy	+	+	+	Yes*
Lisa	+	+	+/-	No
Louise	=	-	+/-	No
Mandy	=	=	+/-	No
Michelle	=	=	=	No
Rose	=	-	-	Yes (NC**)
Suzanne	=	+	+/-	No

Key: + Better, - Worse, = Same, +/- Mixed.

\*This offence was committed shortly after the first interview took place; Kathy reports improved conditions in her life since then.

\*\*NC No charge was brought.

The above findings also provide some support for Hirschi's (1969) control theory (see Chapter One), which argues that poor social bonding results in offending behaviour; therefore, conversely, new relationships can amount to positive triggers for desistance. It is likely that a combination of both positive and negative triggers can help to account for a lack of reoffending behaviour. When the women in the present study were asked why they had not re-offended, responsibility for their family, fear of getting caught and of going to prison and insight into their possible future lives were all given as reasons. Factors such as fear of prison can be seen as negative triggers, while factors such as responsibility for the family are positive triggers. It can be seen, then, that there is no single reason for desistance; but it can be argued that the relatively low level of female (re-)offending may also be related to the responsibility that women generally have for their children and other family members.

Throughout this research, the importance of giving a voice to these marginal women has

been stressed. It is argued that we are likely to learn more from what the women themselves say than from general theories of crime, which (as Chapter One has shown) are largely based on men's experiences. However, we can explore these theories to see whether women's offending supports or goes against them. The final chapter examines the relevance to the present research of the theories set out in Chapters One and Two, presents further analysis of the findings of the empirical study detailed in Chapters Four and Five, makes suggestions for future research and discusses proposals for change in policy and practice in the field of female criminality.

## PART THREE - CONCLUSIONS

### CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

Part One of this thesis considered traditional and modern theories of female criminality. Chapter One examined the largely biological theories of female criminality. The fundamental criticism of biological explanations is that they confuse nature and nurture. Despite this criticism, it was shown that the work of these 'classical' theorists, although severely and justifiably criticised, influenced later writers. As a result, female offending research has remained isolated from advances made in other areas of criminological research. Recent years have seen a growth in the writing on female offenders, and the rise of feminist criminology has made an important contribution to the discipline in emphasising the centrality of gender.

However, as has been seen in Chapter Two, still relatively little research has been carried out on female criminality *per se* and some of it remains biologically-based. Modern studies suggest that offending is multi-causal. The role of such variables in female criminality has been slow to appear; they are, however, of importance. Female offending research needs to be brought more thoroughly into the broader world of criminology. The present research represents an attempt to do this.

The theories discussed in Chapter One put forward propositions based almost entirely on male offending behaviour. It has been argued that theoretical criminology has been constructed by men, about men, and therefore it cannot adequately account for female offending. However, Williams (1997) suggests that careful use of these theories may be useful in explaining female criminality. The five theories examined in Chapter One - namely, structural, sub-cultural, labelling, differential association and control theories - are explored further in this chapter.

An analysis of the five themes

Structural theory argues that individuals are taught to desire certain things such as material success, but the legitimate means of achieving this – education and then employment – are either not available or have only a limited relevance for the majority of people. People are therefore frustrated into committing crimes to obtain the goals. Merton (1938) did not attempt to apply this theory to females. However, females also suffer from economic marginalisation and yet they are essentially law-abiding. One way of overcoming this problem has been to see the goals of women as different from those of men. Women's goals may be not financial but relational – that is, to form a close relationship with (usually) a man.

This study found that relationships with men were important to the women. Although half of the women interviewed were single, five of these had children which indicates a relationship with a man, however brief. One woman had been married but was now divorced. The remaining 12 women (46.2%) were either cohabiting or married. If the importance of a relational goal lies in the status of having a man, then these 12 women, at least, could be considered to have attained their goal. If emotional support is relevant, then the majority of the women who claimed their partner provided a supportive relationship have also succeeded in their goal. If the relationship was a means of achieving financial goals, however, then for the majority of the women this goal had not been achieved. It is likely that all three aspirations play a part in relational goals.

Returning to the economic goals originally propounded by this theory, it has been shown that women (like men) are subject to financial pressures, and that some women are the only, major or joint bread-winner. As women often have low paid and insecure employment, or are unemployed, they have huge pressures on them. When talking about their offending, many of the women in this study stated that they had committed their crimes because of financial problems: they wanted to increase their material wealth, but not for its own sake, rather to survive or at least to make life a little more comfortable for themselves and, on occasion, for their immediate families. Ambition for these women was not about a fast car or holidays abroad, but for happy times with their families and friends and aspirations towards a modest job.

Structural theory may help towards an understanding of female criminality, if Merton's original ideas on economic aspiration are developed to embrace a wider understanding of what is meant by goals, in particular if we include social goals. However, to view the goal of women as purely a desire for a partner is too narrow. Clearly, women often fall under similar financial strains to those suffered by men and desire some measure of wealth, too. Nevertheless, as there remains a large difference in the criminality between the two sexes, despite similarities in economic and social goals, we must now consider the other theories.

The sub-cultural theory which appears to be most relevant to this research, and therefore is examined in this thesis, is Cohen's (1955) theory. He argued that working-class boys internalise middle-class values of success but feel hostile towards them. They join with others in a similar situation, the delinquent sub-culture stressing working-class values which include toughness, excitement and immediate gratification.

Cohen did not attempt to analyse female offending, although he stated that this was related to their feminine role in that it was either sexually promiscuous or directed at finding a stable relationship with a man. This sex-role perspective is based on biological theories (femaleness gives rise to femininity) and learned theories (people are socialised into gender roles from birth), and portrays women as passive, dependent and conventional. Only one woman in the present study had convictions for sex offences (prostitution), and she did not claim membership of any type of gang, much less a sub-culture.

There was no evidence that any of the women had offended whilst trying to win the affection of men. One woman talked about stealing make-up, which could be seen as an attempt to make her more attractive to the opposite sex. However, satisfactory relationships with the opposite sex were important to the women in this study, as has been noted above. In addition, a few of the women stated that they had been pressured into offending by a male friend. Indeed, some women were clearly afraid of possible violence by the male if they had refused his demand.

As scientific criteria, masculinity and femininity are elusive and subjective concepts and

therefore sex-role perspectives arguably have little validity (Williams 1997). The traditional view of the sexes will be returned to below. Although none of the females in the present study could be described as belonging to a gang or sub-culture, some of the women had offended whilst in the company of female friends. It would appear that their criminality was socially constructed – deriving in part from the values, traditions and practices of others in a similar position. It can be noted, then, that relationships with the opposite sex - and with the same sex – are relevant to offending behaviour.

Labelling theory is the third of the theories to be considered here. It is concerned with the societal reaction to behaviour, with labelling the individual and with the labelled individual's self-concept. Labelling theory appears to offer a useful explanation of female criminality rates (and the lack thereof). With the exception of the sexual bias of defining an activity such as prostitution as criminal behaviour, women are not generally associated with criminal status and therefore are less likely to be labelled. In addition, females are socialised to be particularly sensitive to the opinions of others – thus women might avoid criminal behaviour because of the potential social reaction. A criticism of this analysis is that it is plausible that the reason very few women are labelled as criminals is because very few women are involved in crime. If this is so, then the third aspect of this theory – the individual's self-concept - is of particular relevance to an explanation of the low rates of female offending.

Although all the women in this research had offended, and therefore been labelled as such, four (15.4%) of the women did not see themselves as offenders. Two of these four women – who had convictions for, respectively, prostitution and possession of drugs - did not consider their law-breaking to be 'real' crime. A third woman acknowledged that her convictions for breaches of the peace related to real offences but that they were only minor ones. Yet another woman, with convictions for nuisance phone calls, stressed that she needed psychiatric help and should not be dealt with by a criminal court. The remaining women in the study accepted that they had broken the law. Some of these women had no previous convictions and, given the particular circumstances of their respective crimes, it is arguable that they would not offend again. In addition, to have broken the law and been labelled as a criminal appeared to have had an sobering impact on these women. One

woman was distressed by the thought that she was seen as having 'badness' in her as a result of her offending behaviour, and she stressed that her action was not typical of her. For other women in the study, in particular those who had a number of previous convictions, offending, though not frequent, was simply a way of life and labelling did not appear to be a concern. Labelling theory appears to be useful in explaining women's relative lack of criminality, insofar as it 'encourages' women to avoid criminal behaviour because of the potential social reaction, but it is not sufficient on its own to allow an understanding of female crime.

The theory of differential association posits that criminality is the result of normal, learned behaviour. Sutherland (1939) was investigating male delinquent behaviour, although he argued that the different socialisation of women accounts for their low crime rate. He further claimed that girls did not take part in gang activities and that they remained relatively free from peer group pressure leading to illegal behaviour. However, both Campbell (1981) and Carlen (1988) have reported that women do join gangs involved in criminal activities. Although no gang membership was claimed by the women in the present study, this research points to the importance both of association with offenders and of peer groups in female offending. The majority of the women interviewed had either past or present partners, friends or family members who had offended, and some of the women had committed offences with partners or friends. A number of the women also stated that peer pressure or peer group activity was relevant to their offending, as has been outlined above. In claiming differential learning for women, Sutherland allows females the learning of sex roles but not of criminal behaviour. Clearly, women can learn both types of behaviour.

Campbell (1981) found in her study that the girls in the gang were very conventional in their outlook and their aims – they wished to establish a stable relationship with a man, have a family and live a happy life. Carlen (1983) found similar desires on the part of the women in her study of female imprisonment, although she came to the opposite conclusion in her study of women and poverty (Carlen 1988). However, the desire for a happy family life was also found in the present study: the majority of the women discussed the importance to them of family relationships and their future wishes were also concerned

with their families.

Females tend to be more closely supervised by their families, and research (for example by Graham and Bowling 1995) has shown that the family remains a more important reference group for females than it does for males. Differential association reinforces the notion that males and females are treated unequally in our society and that they have very different experiences based on these differing sets of expectations. The theory that criminal behaviour is learned helps to explain the lower crime rate of females, but it also helps to explain crime committed by females insofar as females may have offending friends and relatives from whom to learn such behaviour. An application of the original theory of differential association, as applied to men, might therefore be useful in explaining female criminality.

The last theory to be considered here is control theory. Theorists in this school argue that delinquent behaviour is natural, whereas conformist behaviour has to be learned, first through childhood socialisation and later through prohibitions and punishment inflicted by social institutions. Therefore what needs to be explained is conformity. Hirschi (1969) studied men and portrayed conformity as positive, making a rational decision to remain law-abiding. As discussed above, the difference between male and female criminality is generally explained by the fact that females are subject to much closer control in both the family and society than are men. Thus, when control theory is used to explain female conformity, the element of conformity is depicted as passive and negative (Williams 1997). That women are more conforming because of the way others control them, does not explain why women allow themselves to be controlled in this way (Heidensohn 1985). This question is examined below.

Although the women in the present study had offended, and therefore to an extent had gone against conformist behaviour, none of them could be described as career criminals. Further, the women had learned some conformist behaviour through early socialisation in the family, at school and so on.

It appears that control theory offers the best account of female non-offending. However, Carlen (1988) argues that the theory explains female offending. She concludes that the



women in her study had lost, or never fully gained, a commitment to family life and thus the temptation of criminality was not so well controlled as for other women. In the present study, although half the women had spent time in local authority care (for Carlen (1988), a strong indicator of a later lack of commitment to a conventional family life), many of the women had a psychological commitment to a family and a conventional life. This commitment could be despite the women having been in care or because of it.

#### Usefulness of the five themes

Female conformity and femininity have been referred to frequently in the above analyses. The negative view of femininity as compliant and passive is a stereotype which can no longer be credibly employed (Williams 1997). Gilligan (1982) adopts a feminist perspective, accepting a traditional view of the sexes, but rather than investing males (and masculinity) with all the positive traits, she credits women with a positive, though different, set of values. She sees the male approach as an 'ethic of rights', in which individuality is to be valued, and the female approach as an 'ethic of responsibility', which values consideration of others before oneself.

This leads to the question of whether these personality variables are inherently connected with male and female, or whether they are merely constructed that way by society. According to Williams (1997), very few behaviours are natural or instinctive; most must be learned. Learned behaviour depends upon knowledge, skills and responses that have been developed as a result of experience or of the need to adjust to the environment (ibid.).

There is no doubt that to view the criminality of women as related only to the desire for a partner, as Cohen's sub-cultural theory claims, is too narrow. Nor is there strong evidence for labelling theorists' argument that labelling a person as an offender affects their perception of themselves in a negative way. Perhaps the most plausible explanation for crimes committed by women is their economic marginalisation, a traditional application of structural theory. However, this is only of limited use, as women are generally economically worse off and yet they offend in far fewer numbers.

It appears therefore that a combination of structural theory and differential association

theory helps to explain female offending. Further, although the women in the present study had offended, many also saw themselves in the traditional roles of wives and mothers. Therefore, the relational goals of the revised structural theory and a traditional application of control theory, using Gilligan's (1982) feminist perspective, in addition to the two theories indicated above, permit a broad and inclusive explanation.

This thesis, then, building upon the above insights, argues that economic marginalisation (and related matters such as unemployment) and the influence of relationships (including factors such as being in care) are highly relevant to female offending. The presence of non-offending, supportive networks and loving relationships with partners, other family members and friends provide the impetus for desistance from offending. The view taken in this research is that theories tend to put the offender in the background; therefore the above (male-oriented) theories have been explored whilst at the same time being sympathetic to women's own views of their behaviour.

## **SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

The aim of the research was to assess our current understanding of the nature and causes of female offending. The study was an exploratory one, looking at what women offenders themselves say about their offending behaviour. There are three areas in female offending research which must be understood and which this study aims to clarify. These are the relevance of social, psychological and physiological factors.

Certain factors, such as biology, have been overstated in female offending research; other factors, for example sexual abuse and partner abuse, have been understated. This research stresses that female offenders can often be identified by the extent of the background deprivation they report and that the most vulnerable women can often be found in the worst situations, such as having limited employment prospects. Poverty was the reason given by the largest number of women for their offending behaviour, with depression and alcohol/drug abuse also commonly cited. Chapter Four also identified ten material circumstances which, although not necessarily given as a reason during the interview,

decreasing order of prevalence), poor family relationships, lack of support, poverty, psychiatric problems, drink/drug abuse, peer group pressure, having been in care, being the victim of sexual abuse, being the victim of partner abuse and a lack of educational qualifications.

Since this thesis was first completed, the joint report of the Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorates for Scotland (1998) has confirmed my findings. This study found that women offenders are generally living in poverty, they are poorly educated and their employment prospects are bleak. In this respect they are no different to many males. However, a high proportion of women offenders suffer from an additional history of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The authors of the report conclude that there are strong associations between abuse as a child, drug misuse and abusive relationships as an adult; these factors are also associated with self-harm. Whilst they may not cause offending, and criminological knowledge is insufficient at present to indicate what does, women in abusive relationships, lacking any real employment prospects and with a drug misusing peer group are poorly equipped for living a crime-free life.

Women, then, may offend due to a number of factors. Although one woman in my research reported only one of the above-named factors, another woman reported experience of all ten. However, the largest number of women, six, stated that six of the various factors were relevant to their lives.

Although all the factors cited above appear relevant to a crossing of the line between lawful and offending behaviour, most of the women were attempting to live their lives as normally as possible and had committed their offences in order to do precisely that. Their perspective was that they had stolen to provide for themselves or their families, and they had committed assault to protect themselves or their families. The minority of women who did not appear to have been acting in the interests of their own or their family's preservation were simply responding to situations in the only way they knew how. All the women showed a measure of resourcefulness, albeit sometimes misguided.

For women, it appears that relationships are particularly important in the offending process; the threshold at which offending occurs may be lowered by the past (or present) experience

of relational problems. Despite, or perhaps as a result of, these relational problems, the women's future hopes and plans were frequently linked to family and friends. Many saw their future as a positive one as a result. One of the women's few coping skills may rest on actual or hoped-for supportive relationships with family and friends.

The women also talked about work, or education, as an issue concerning their future. Employment clearly provides financial support and education should lead to improved employment prospects; however, as with relationships, they also provide a sense of self-worth.

The follow-up interviews with the women showed that employment was again important to the women. This part of the research goes on to argue that close relationships and good support are particularly associated with low rates of recidivism. Relationships were commonly either cited directly or expressed indirectly as the reason for desistance. Again, the women's main future plans and concerns centred around family and friends. The women not only wished to provide emotional and practical support for their loved ones, they also felt a sense of self-worth through their relationships.

#### Discussion of the empirical study

Some 20 years ago Miller called for 'a new psychology of women' that would recognise the different starting point for women's development and the fact that 'women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others' (1976, p.83). She stresses that women's sense of self becomes organised around being able to make and maintain affiliations and relationships; and that the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self.

Gilligan notes how the years of adolescence mark the different dynamics of separation and attachment in gender identity formation, with males valuing separation as it defines and empowers the self, and women recognising the importance of 'the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community' (1982, p.156). Asked to describe themselves, all the women in her study identified themselves in the context of

relationships and judged themselves by a standard of responsibility and care, whereas the men in her study, situated similarly to the women in occupational and marital position, responded using 'adjectives of separation', such as 'intelligent' or 'arrogant' (ibid., p.161).

For women, then, the fusion of identity and intimacy is crucial. Any account which measures women's development against a male standard will be limited (Gilligan 1982). This view of female behaviour has been largely ignored in the past in criminology, but the need for such an understanding remains strong today.

Research on female criminality and on male criminality should inform each other, while recognising important differences. The types of crimes committed, and the histories, perceptions and motivations of offenders need to be understood within the particular environment in which they take place.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

This study has not looked for a global explanation of women's crime, nor has it claimed to search for a special theory of female crimes. A search for either of these two would be theoretically unsound, because (respectively) it would have to be presumed that social constructions of both sex and gender are unvarying between and within societies and because criminal activities would have to be distributed to males and females on the basis of an activity's supposed 'masculine' or 'feminine' characteristics (Carlen 1985). Further, as Cousins (1980) has pointed out, any explanation of a 'female criminality' must, by the nature of the project, be as reductionist as the much-maligned biological ones. Additionally, there can be no such thing as the 'typical' criminal woman - either in theory or in practice (Carlen 1985). However, research such as this on individual female offenders can give an insight into the reasons behind offending by women in Scotland.

Identifying experiences does not provide a solution to female offending, any more than punishment addresses the problem of recidivism. At present, at worst, women who offend are sent to prison, with limited opportunities for rehabilitation due to the commonly short

duration of their sentences. The practical implications of this have been indicated in Chapters Four and Five, with inmates being separated from their family and friends, losing any job they may have had and jeopardising their accommodation. Such outcomes are counter-productive. It is not difficult to be aware that matters such as economic problems, psychiatric depression and a lack of support make up a pathway to offending. It is a matter for policy-makers, and for the public, to decide whether greater use of community penalties might point the way to a better future.

In the light of the research presented in the previous chapters, certain conclusions can be drawn. Three areas will be examined under the heads of public policy, criminal justice and social justice.

Firstly, supportive public policies are needed in order to reduce the likelihood of offending. These can cushion vulnerable individuals and families, and may result in not only less first time offending but also reduced recidivism. Carlen (1992a) categorises the need for such policies into areas which include the family, education, employment and residential care. Amongst the changes she calls for are, respectively, adequate state financial support for all household units, the opportunity to complete one's education at a time appropriate to that person, all job-training schemes to be linked to the creation of worthwhile jobs and young people in care to be provided with greater stability of residence. The first three of these areas relate to one of the major problems that this work has shown needs to be addressed, the issue of finances – namely, poor educational qualifications and limited employment prospects. The fourth area has been addressed in the recent child-centred legislation in Britain (Children Act 1989; Children (Scotland) Act 1995), which sees children being 'looked after' rather than 'in care' and which puts the emphasis on children remaining in their own homes wherever possible. This may go some way towards alleviating present and future problems experienced by children who are in need of care, as also discussed in this thesis, although rhetoric and reality do not always co-exist and, indeed, it may not be possible or desirable for a child to remain in his or her own home.

There should also be greater community provision for young people and families involved in child-rearing. Findings from the present research suggest that efforts to prevent young

people from starting to offend, and encouraging and helping those who are trying to stop, should focus on strengthening families (by parent training and support groups), strengthening schools (by strategies to prevent truancy and improving family-school relationships), protecting young people from the influence of delinquents in their peer group and activities (such as alcohol and drug abuse) and preparing young people for fully independent and responsible adulthood. All of these measures apply to males as well as females (Graham and Bowling 1995), although arguably encouraging boys to put others before themselves (Gilligan's (1982) ethic of responsibility) could be of particular benefit.

Secondly, criminal justice involves both prison and community provisions. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales has called for 'a coherent regime approach, supported by appropriate programmes' in response to the low self-esteem commonly found among women in prison (1997, p.129). The report stresses the poor employment history, substance abuse, childhood and adult abuse, poor family relationships, poor educational attainment, poor social support and external loss of control which are all linked to low levels of self-esteem. While not wishing to devalue the importance of specific programmes aimed at tackling offender behaviour, the report by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons argues that no individual programme can attempt to deal with all these issues. The recent report into HMPI Cornton Vale in Scotland also documents the damaged lives of female prisoners, but argues for 'prison regimes and programmes [which] must recognise and address the different needs of men and women' (Loucks 1998, p.168). However, the report does not consider a coherent regime approach. Further, although Holloway prison in London offers a number of programmes including assertiveness training, anger management and cognitive skills (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 1997), and there are a number of therapeutic intervention programmes for women offenders (especially in North America, for example Correctional Services of Canada 1995), such therapeutic intervention is not as comprehensive as recommended by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Finally, Sear and Player (1986), amongst many others, suggest that women should not be imprisoned for non-payment of fines, that only exceptionally should they be remanded in prison before trial and that alternatives to prison should be found for the mentally ill.

Carlen (1990) discusses the need for accommodation schemes for female ex-offenders, run

on democratic lines and with 'come-back' facilities in times of crisis, and for all-women probation-run or ex-prisoner-run support groups, which recognise that the material and psychological conditions conducive of women's offending are often different to those conducive of men's. There is also a need for greater use of measures to divert offenders from custody, such as reparation and mediation schemes. The joint Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorates for Scotland (1998) review *Women Offenders – A Safer Way*, published since this thesis was originally completed, concludes that to date criminal justice services have given insufficient attention to the needs of women offenders in the provision of services in Scotland. The authors argue for better use of community disposals and resources, including supported accommodation, deferred sentences and provision for proper child care arrangements. (The Wedderburn report on *Justice for Women: the Need for Reform*, also published since the thesis was first submitted, also calls for a reduction in the use of imprisonment for women offenders in England and Wales; Wedderburn 2000)

All the women in the current study recognised the need for emotional and/or practical support. The majority of those women who had social workers appreciated the help they received from them. Greater time and resources allowed to criminal justice staff, and a continued commitment to an understanding of and therefore a reduction in female offending, are all essential. Social workers can be very effective agents of change as they are in frequent contact when women offenders are on community disposals, although programmes must be used as intended (Hedderman and Sugg 1997). A criminal justice programme which focuses on internal changes – highlighting both social bonds and the individual's future – may be particularly effective.

In the search for constructive solutions, we can learn from studies of male criminality - for example, that counselling work with violent men reduces violence against women (Dobash and Dobash 1980). Cognitive or group therapy can be an effective method of dealing with offending. Of value would be survivor groups for women who have been abused (as well as work with men who do the abusing), parenting classes for both sexes with respect to the next generation of children and 'coping skills' courses which address financial concerns and provide both practical and psychological support. Procedures which stress discussion and support should supplement a system which is largely punitive (a fine is the penalty most



commonly imposed by Scottish courts) and does not prevent recidivism.

The third area to be examined is social justice. A sentence given by a court cannot, on its own, constitute a satisfactory response to women who offend. There must be some understanding of the offender and her behaviour. As Box notes, 'Many of us, in similar circumstances, might choose the same course of action' (1987, p.29). Offenders need a sense of self-worth. The policy and practical issues identified here should go some way towards material and emotional inequalities being recognised and taken seriously.

As indicated in Chapter Five, criminal justice practice with female offenders is to sentence them either more leniently or more severely than comparable males, the decision being influenced largely by the woman's domestic arrangements. Whilst not denying the relevance of such a factor in providing an indication of the likelihood of re-offending, there may be other important factors in the woman's history, as argued above, and a revised approach is required.

It should be noted that some changes which have been called for in the modern Scottish criminal justice system have been carried out, such as small units attached to (male) prisons for female offenders and a reduction in the numbers of people being sent to prison. Nevertheless, there is scope for more improvement, as discussed in this chapter.

Different groups of women will respond to different types of support. To ascribe a single motivation to female offending is misleading, unhelpful and possibly dangerous. Criminal justice workers are in many cases committed to the alleviation of the distress of individual offenders; all criminal justice staff should continue to be encouraged to appreciate the complexity of such behaviour and its possible causes and motivations, which are multiple. A central aim of criminal justice is to prevent re-offending. Social policy and economic regeneration are likely to have more impact on crime rates than penal policy, but policy choices to date have been in favour of punitive approaches rather than social investment.

All the schemes discussed here are possible and may be effective. More systematic research is needed on female offenders, as indicated above, before advances can be made.

Last, but not least, it is acknowledged that change must also come from within. Women offenders must have the desire to change that offending part of their life. However, the practical issues identified here will go a long way towards supporting the women in their wish and ability to change.

## LIMITATIONS

Research on criminal behaviour is hampered by obstacles in accurately determining the size and characteristics of the female population that commits crimes. There are a number of reasons for these problems.

First, the offence may not be reported to the police and/or the offender may not be caught; and so the characteristics of these undetected women cannot be stated. Second, women offenders may be more likely to be cautioned rather than prosecuted, compared to male offenders. Official statistics are not kept on the incidence of this in Scotland and research is contradictory as to whether or not 'innate chivalry' by the criminal justice agencies exists. Third, class and race differences in conviction exist in the criminal justice system, although such differences apply to both men and women. However, it should be noted that in Scotland ethnic minorities make up a very small percentage of the prison population: of the 185 females in custody in 1997, 184 were white (Scottish Office 1998).

Finally, there is a lack of material specifically on Scotland. A number of so-called 'National Reports' are in fact concerned with only England and Wales, for example the Audit Commission's 1996 report on *Misspent Youth*. As a result, mainly English (and North American) materials are cited. Reference has been made to Scottish materials where possible; however, there are disappointingly few writings, studies and official figures on Scotland which could be used in this thesis.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

The research fieldwork was restricted to women in Scotland who had at least one conviction for a crime or offence, and the research aim was to assess our current understanding of the nature and causes of female offending.

This work has not made a comparative study of male and female offenders, nor of females who offend with those who do not offend. It has not attempted to analyse groups of women offenders according to the particular offences they committed, nor has it analysed the inter-relationships between the multiple variables identified in this study.

Future research, then, is required on differences between males and females in their perceptions and experiences of both abusive and supportive relationships, on the importance of the stated variables on women who commit particular types of offences and on the significance of these variables on women who have not offended, who have stopped offending and who have gone on to make a career out of offending. A quantitative analysis of the inter-relationships between the multiple variables identified in this study would be of particular interest.

Female offending is an important area of criminality; there is still relatively little research on it, and there is a need for more information, derived from both qualitative and quantitative studies.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This work has brought together the research literature already existing on female offenders, explored the validity of the explanations, and shown how gaining information directly from women offenders contributes to our understanding of female criminality.

Attempting to account for women's experiences and perspectives contributes to a more complete understanding of the world. Only when researchers study women as they have studied men will their theories become correspondingly more fertile. To help correct

omissions and distortions of the past, this work has put women at the centre of the research. Throughout the research, the importance of giving a voice to these marginal women has been stressed. As such, this research has been concerned with the influences on women who offend and it aims to contribute to a better understanding of female offending behaviour.

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# APPENDIX 1

## SCHEDULE FOR INITIAL INTERVIEW

### PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

To study the patterns that appear to lead up to criminality.

### TECHNIQUE USED:

Face-to-face interview, lasting approximately one hour, using semi-structured questionnaire.

Identify 'self

Thanks for participating

Explain research

Outline questionnaire (No. of sections, how made up)

Stress confidentiality

### WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

Real name (Chosen name)

Date:

# RESEARCH INTO FEMALE CRIMINALITY IN SCOTLAND

**CASE STUDY No.**

## **SECTION A - ABOUT YOU**

(12 main questions)

### **1. AGE**

How old are you?

What is your date of birth?

### **2. MARITAL STATUS**

Are you single (never married)/married/separated/divorced/  
widowed/cohabiting?

### **3. CHILDREN**

Do you have any children?

If yes, how many?

How old are they?

Do they all live with you?

### **4. SIBLINGS**

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

If yes, how many?

Are they older or younger than you?

## 5. EDUCATION

How old were you when you left school (or full-time education)?

Do you have any educational qualifications?

If yes, what are they?

## 6. EMPLOYMENT

Are you working at present?

What is/was your job?

(Title of job.

Description of work).

How many jobs have you had in the past year?

Did you like your last job?

Why did you leave that job?

## 7. ADDRESS

How long have you lived in (name of town/city)?

(Were you born in Scotland?)

Why did you move from your last address?

## 8 CARE

Have you ever been in care?

If yes:

- how old were you when you went into care?

- and how old were you when you came out of care?

## 9. ACCOMMODATION

What type of accommodation are you living in at present?

(Council/owner-occupied/private rented/bed-sit/hostel/etc)

Who do you normally live with?

(Alone/with parents/with partner/ with brothers or sisters/with another relative/with a friend/etc)

Are you satisfied with your accommodation?

(People living there/landlord or landlady/privacy/size of accommodation/cost of rent/'house' rules/etc)

Were you satisfied with your accommodation before your (last) offence?

## 10. FINANCES

Before you committed your (last) offence, did you have any money problems?

If yes, what were they?

What do you think caused these problems?

(Unemployment/debt/gambling/low pay/partner/not good enough with money/etc)

## 11. HEALTH

Over the last 12 months how has your health been?

(Good/fairly good/not good)

If 'not good', can you say what is the nature of your illness and how it affects you?

## 12. PERSONAL

You do not have to answer these three questions if you don't want to:

a) Have you ever suffered from an eating disorder?

(eg. binge eating, then making yourself sick?)

b) Have you ever deliberately hurt yourself?

(eg. cut yourself/bruised yourself?)

c) Have you ever been sexually abused?

## SECTION B - ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

(3 main questions)

13. Would you say that you have a stable family/other close relationship?

(Partner/parents/brothers or sisters/other relative)

14. How much help have they been when you've had difficulties/worries?

(How did they help?)

15. You need only answer this if you wish to:  
What is your sexuality?

**SECTION C - ABOUT YOUR OFFENCE**

(9 main questions)

16. What was the (last) offence you were convicted of?

What sentence were you given?

17. Do you have any previous convictions?

Date (if remembered)

Offence

Sentence

18. How did you first come into contact with the police?

How did you come to be doing those type of things?  
(Friends, boy-friend/etc)

19. For those who have had previous sentences:

Each time you've been sentenced/released from prison, what are the particular problems (if any) that you have experienced?  
(Family, housing, personal)

20. Have you asked anyone for help?  
(Family member, social worker, other organisation)

21. In court, were you represented by a lawyer?

(If not, why not?)

22. Do you think that your (last) sentence was a fair one?

Why do you say that?

23. How (if at all) has your sentence affected:

a) you?

b) your relationships with others?

c) other aspects of your life?

24. I'm interested to know: why did you do it? (ie. commit your (last) offence)

#### **SECTION D - ABOUT YOUR FUTURE**

(2 main questions)

25. How do you see your future?  
(Job/accommodation/family/other problems)

26. Do you have any hopes about what you might do in the future?

**IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK ME ABOUT THIS RESEARCH?**

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **SCHEDULE FOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW**

Thank you for agreeing to see me again

Reminder what research is about

What we spoke about last time

What basically interested in this time

Again, confidential

#### **NAME**

Real name (chosen name)

#### **DATE**

#### **CASE STUDY No.**

#### **1. WORK**

Are you working at present?

(Paid employment, full-time, part-time, in the home, outside the home)

Do you enjoy your work?

**2. ACCOMMODATION**

Where do you live most of the time?

What type of place is that?

(Run by council, own place, pay rent to landlord, other?)

**3. PARTNER/CHILDREN**

Is it just you who lives there?

(Or with a partner, children, other?)

**4. FAMILY**

Have your family circumstances changed since we last talked?

(Have you ended a relationship/started a new relationship/had a child/other?)

What kind of changes have happened?

Is the situation better/worse/about the same as before?

**5. FINANCES**

Have you got money problems (still)?

What kind of problems are they?

(Paying rent, buying food once rent been paid, other?)

**6. HEALTH**

How is your health?

Last time you said you were using drugs/had a drink problem/were feeling depressed/sometimes cut yourself/had an eating problem/your partner sometimes slapped you about.

Is this still the case?

Is it more/less/about the same as last time?

**7. SUPPORT**

Have you had any support since we last spoke?

(Social work/family/friends/other).

a. If yes:



Did you ask for this help?

How did you 'ask' for it?  
(Direct request, or indirect?)

How did you feel about asking for it?

If you did not ask for it, how did you feel about taking it?

Was it of any help to you?

Last time we spoke, you had/hadn't had some support. How does the support you've had now compare to your earlier situation?

b. If no:

Was any help offered?

If it was, why did you turn it down?

Did you ask for any help?

How did you ask for it?  
(Direct request, or indirect?)

If you didn't ask for help, why didn't you?

If you did, what happened?

Last time we spoke, you had/hadn't had some support. How do you feel about having had no support since then?

**8. RE-OFFENDING**

Have you re-offended since we last spoke?  
(Committed an offence, whether been to court or not)

a. If yes:

Can you tell me what it was you did?

When did this happen?

Why did you do it?

If not the same as the previous offence(s):  
What made you commit a different type of offence?

b. If no:

Were you tempted to on any occasion?

What was the offence you were tempted to commit?

What stopped you doing it?

#### **9. THE FUTURE**

How does the future look to you now?  
(The same as before or different?)

If different, in what ways different?

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK ME ABOUT THIS RESEARCH?

## APPENDIX 3

### THE 26 WOMEN AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES PRE-CONDITIONAL TO THEIR OFFENDING

NAME	AGE	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Mandy	18	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jenny	34	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Jane	24	N	Y	N	?*	?*	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Samantha	22	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Louise	32	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Natasha	18	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mary	37	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Robyn	18	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Judy	21	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kelly	29	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Margaret	23	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Kathy	24	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Sharon A	25	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Michelle	28	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Danielle	53	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
Heather	35	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Rose	28	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Fiona	20	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
Nicolle	19	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Lisa	21	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Cara	26	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Gloria	43	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Sharon B	24	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Alexandra	37	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Ashley	27	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Suzanne	23	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y

A Family problems, past or present

B Lack of support at time of offending

C No educational qualifications

D Local authority care

E Sexual abuse

F Spouse/partner abuse

G Peer group influence

H Financial problems at time of offending

I Psychiatric problems, past or present (includes self-abuse)

J Drink/drug abuse

Note: The women are listed in the order in which they were first interviewed. Their ages listed are as at the first interview.

\* These two questions were not asked of Jane because they were added from the fourth interview onwards (see Chapter Four). Unlike Mandy and Jenny, Jane did not take part in the follow-up interviews and therefore the topics could not be discussed later with her. They are entered as 'No' in Chapter Five.

## APPENDIX 4

### THE 26 WOMEN AND THEIR CONVICTIONS

NAME	LAST CONVICTION	SENTENCE	PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS
Mandy	Fraud	Admonition	Fraud
Jenny	Fire-raising	Probation (1 year)	Fire-raising (numerous)
Jane	Prostitution	Admonition	Prostitution (numerous)
			House-breaking
			Fraud
Samantha	Fraud	Deferred	None
Louise	Nuisance phone call	Probation (6 months)	Nuisance phone calls (numerous)
Natasha	Breach of the peace	Fine	Assaults
			House-breaking
			Shop-lifting
			Breaches of bail
			Breach of the peace
Mary	Serious assault	Probation (3 months)	Breach of the peace (numerous)
			Shop-lifting
Robyn	Assault	Probation (1 year)	Assault
			Car theft
			Fraud
			Theft
			Breach of the peace
			Breach of bail
			(all numerous)
Judy	Fraud	Deferred	Shop-lifting
			Drug offences
			Serious assault
Kelly	Fraud	Prison (3 months)	None
Margaret	Hoax phone call	Fine (prison for non-payment)	Shop-lifting
			Fraud
Kathy	Breach of the peace	Deferred	Breach of the peace (numerous)
Sharon A	Serious assault	Probation (1 year)	None

**THE 26 WOMEN AND THEIR CONVICTIONS (continued)**

NAME	LAST CONVICTION	SENTENCE	PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS
Michelle	Shop-lifting	CSO* (40 hours)	Shop-lifting
			Non-possession of a TV licence (numerous)
Danielle	Shop-lifting	CSO* (40 hours)	Embezzlement
			Non-possession of a TV licence
Heather	Fraud	Deferred	Breach of the peace
			Drunk and disorderly
			(all numerous)
			Shop-lifting
			Possession of drugs
Rose	Assault	Probation (1 year)	Shop-lifting
	Breach of the peace		Breach of the peace
	Assaulting a police officer		Trespassing
			Fraud
Fiona	Breach of the peace	Prison (7 months)	Vandalism
	Resisting arrest		Breach of the peace
	Assaulting a police officer		Resisting arrest
			Assaulting a police officer
			(all numerous)
Nicolle	Fraud	Prison (3 months)	None
Lisa	Drugs offence	Deferred	Shop-lifting (numerous)
			Assault
			Drugs offence
Cara	Theft	Fine	Breach of the peace (numerous)
			Driving offence
			Drugs offence
Gloria	Embezzlement	Prison (1 year)	None
Sharon B	Assault and robbery	Prison (2 years)	Breach of the peace
			Perverting the course of justice
			House-breaking
			Vandalism
			(all numerous)
Alexandra	Fraud	Prison (2 years)	None
Ashley	Murder	Prison (life)	None
Suzanne	Serious assault	Prison (8 years)	None

\* CSO Community Service Order

Note: The women are listed in the order in which they were first interviewed.