



*'A space to learn  
about relationships'*

[www.Advancecharity.org.uk](http://www.Advancecharity.org.uk)



# Niki Scordi

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**@SophieKLinden**



*'A space to learn  
about relationships'*

**Dr. Summer Alston-Smith**  
**Director of Criminal Justice Services,**  
**Advance**

# *About the Research*

## **Greater London Authority's Citizen-Led Engagement Programme**

“What social factors influence early sexual relationships among young women who have been involved in the criminal justice system, and what are the health impacts of these relationships?”

# Key Findings



First sexual relationships



School Education



Peer group pressure



Saying no



Child sexual abuse



Mental health



# First sexual relationships



## 12 years old

was the average age of first sexual experience amongst the young women



## 16 years old

was the average age of their partner

**96%** of the young women had their first sexual experience (of any kind) before the age of 16

**73%** of the young women reported having consensual sex before the age of 16



Differentiation between sex and relationships



# Learning about sex & relationships

**48%** learnt about sex from friends of their age or older

**50%** thought they should have known more about contraception, birth control and safer sex

*“It is more like peer pressure, because your friends were doing it, it was like ahh okay, you got to do it. No one forced me to do it but I just felt that everyone was having sex at that age so I was like I’ll just do it.”*



## Consent and Saying no

**57%** of respondents had been pressured into having sex with a romantic and/or sexual partner

**74%** of the young women felt they should have waited longer before having sex with anyone

**73%** of young women agreed that they ought to have known more about consent and how to say no when they started having sexual experiences



# Child sexual abuse

**65%** of young women had been sexually abused (non-consensual)

**87%** of these young women were younger than 16 at the time





# Physical health impacts of early sexual relationships



Contracted sexually transmitted diseases



Abusive and harmful relationships

**74%**

of young women had been physically hurt by a romantic and/or sexual partner



# Mental health impacts of early sexual relationships



Unhealthy, controlling relationships

**96%** of the women who participated had been emotionally hurt by a romantic and/or sexual partner



Affected their perception of themselves and their future relationships

**91%** believed their past relationships have had an adverse impact of their mental health.



## A link to engagement in the criminal justice system

**48%** of women stated that their previous sexual relationships were a factor in their offending

**61%** of the young women who participated in the research entered the criminal justice system between the ages of 10-20 years old, and

**87%** by the age of 25

# Recommendations

## Advance calls for *Spaces & Services for girls*:

- ✿ Gender-responsive youth justice policy & practice
- ✿ Creating safe spaces and specialist services to learn about sex & relationships through trusted adults and peers
- ✿ Early intervention & prevention services designed by & for girls & young women, delivered by specialist advocates

# Recommendations

## Advance calls for *Community Education*:

- ✿ More in-depth sex and relationship education – exploring emotions and consent
- ✿ Access to mentors in school and/or community
- ✿ Tools and guidance on sex and relationships for families
- ✿ Training on gendered approach for professionals engaging with young women in contact with criminal justice & statutory services

# Recommendations

## Advance calls for *Further Research*:

 Impact of technology & digital influences

 Explore impact of demographics, including culture & same-sex relationships



*“A friendly mentor that you can talk to about your relationships. Not even just sex, but your relationships. There should be a space to learn about relationships”*

# Naomi's story

**Young woman with lived experience  
of the criminal justice system**

*(read by Tia,  
Young Women's Keyworker,  
Advance)*

# Our Panel

**Pippa Goodfellow**  
Standing Committee for Youth Justice

**Jessica Southgate**  
Agenda

**Nicole Walsh**  
Women and Girls Network

**Caroline Howe**  
Lloyds Foundation

**Dr Summer Alston-Smith**  
Advance



# Pippa Goodfellow

**Director  
Standing Committee for Youth  
Justice**

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# **Engendering (in)justice? Girls in conflict with the law**

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**Pippa Goodfellow**

29<sup>th</sup> September 2020

# Engendering (in)justice? Girls in conflict with the law



An alliance of over 60 non-profit organisations working to positively influence the youth justice system and in England and Wales



The Griffins Society sponsors research to bring about change in how women and girls are dealt with in the criminal justice system. Outnumbered, locked up and overlooked? The use of penal custody for girls in England & Wales (2019)



Doctoral research - Engendering (in)justice: An exploration of factors influencing recent levels of criminalisation and incarceration of girls in the youth justice system

*Email: [pippa.goodfellow@scyj.org.uk](mailto:pippa.goodfellow@scyj.org.uk)*

# What is known about girls in conflict with the law?

- **Aetiology of their offending and distinct vulnerabilities** evidence need to consider a gendered perspective
- Girls are **overlooked** by research, policy and practice - paucity of published data
- Girls' needs are **marginalised** within a youth justice system primarily designed to deal with offending by boys
- Less likely to find their way into the courts, but when they do, they receive **differential treatment** to their male counterparts
- Girls in custody have frequently experienced **abuse, exploitation and a lack of care** from those responsible for their wellbeing

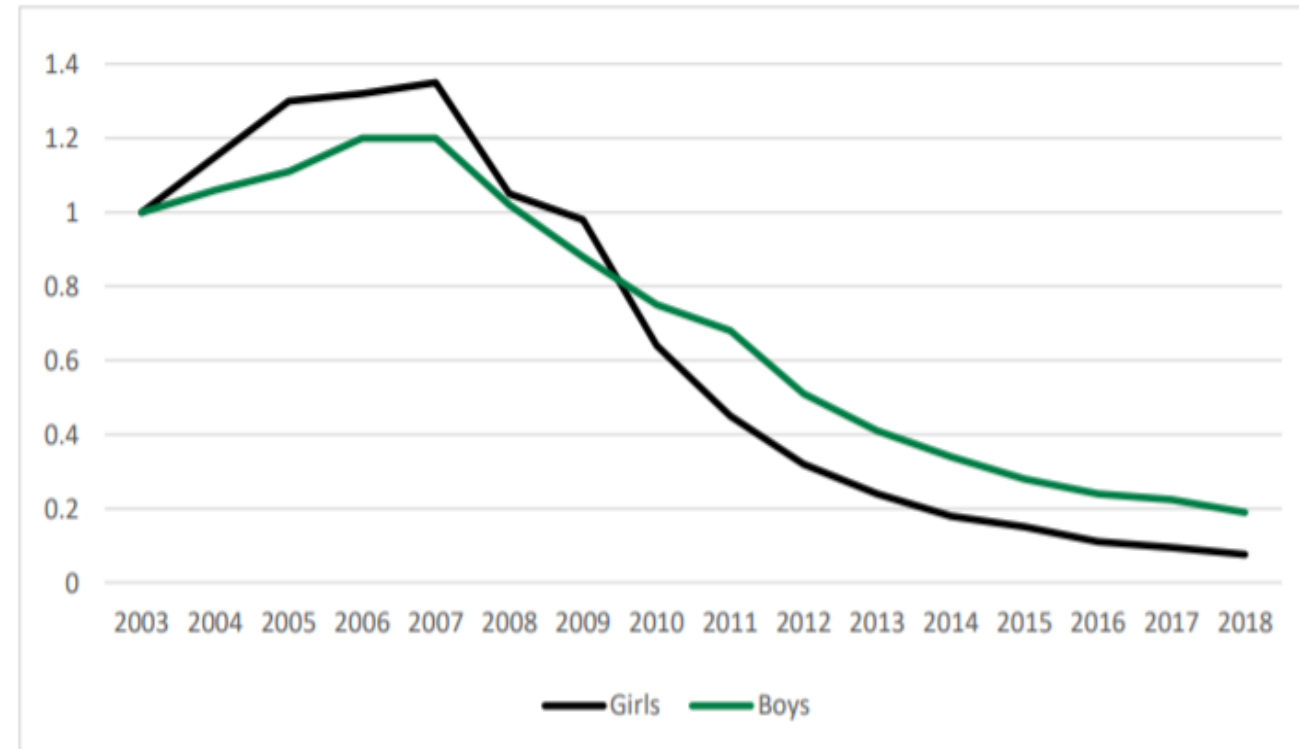
# Relational context of offending

- Family breakdown is common amongst girls in the youth justice system - distressing familial experiences of **rejection, neglect, bereavement and loss**
- Female offending associated with response to problems of **emotional well-being** and **issues concerning relationships with parents, partners and friends**
- Many girls in the youth justice system have encountered **trauma, periods in the care system, school exclusion, drug or alcohol dependency and mental health problems**
- Many vulnerable girls have been drawn into associated offending behaviour in the context of **exploitation, often through coercion and control**

# Recent trends in the criminalisation of girls

**Changes in detected indictable offending to 2018 relative to a 2003 baseline by gender**  
(1.5 represents a rise of 50%; 0.5 a fall of 50%)

Derived from Bateman, 2017 and Ministry of Justice, 2019b



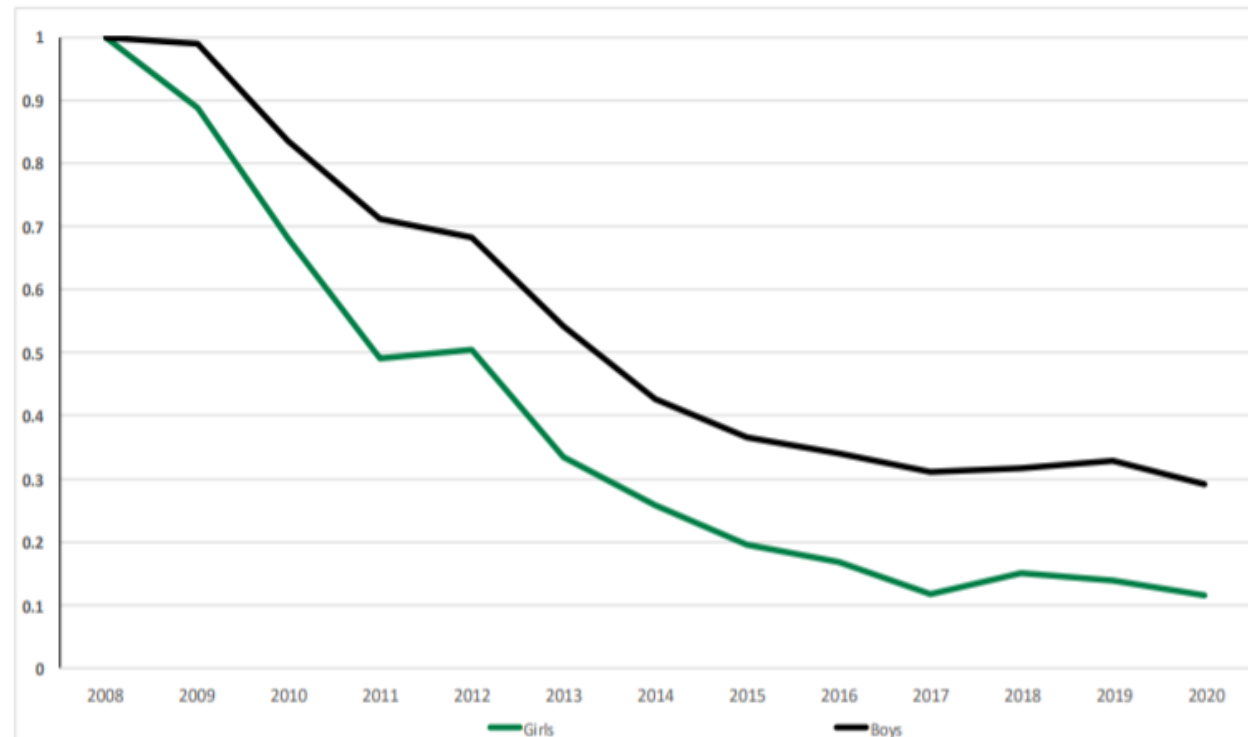
From 'The State of Youth Justice 2020' by Bateman:

<https://thenayj.org.uk/cmsAdmin/uploads/state-of-youth-justice-2020-final-sep20.pdf>

# Recent trends in the use of penal custody for girls

**Changes in the population of the secure estate relative to a 2008 baseline by gender: March each year (0.5 represents a fall of 50%)**

Derived from Ministry of Justice, 2020a and Youth Custody Service, 2020



From 'The State of Youth Justice 2020' by Bateman:

<https://thenayj.org.uk/cmsAdmin/uploads/state-of-youth-justice-2020-final-sep20.pdf>

# Systemic discrimination in responding to girls' offending?

- **Neglected area of policy** - small numbers providing the justification for this oversight
- Gender-neutral policy and practice have gender-sensitive outcomes – **this is discriminatory**
- Extensive changes to the youth and criminal justice systems have been recommended in a number of reviews, but **have not specifically addressed gender-specific needs or considered the implications for girls**
- Proposed changes that are envisioned as gender-neutral may have unintended, gendered impacts for girls and inadvertently bring about counterproductive consequences

# Systemic discrimination in responding to girls' offending?

*“A gender-neutral youth justice system based on the risk of offending has the potential to discriminate against girls, particularly when welfare needs are confused with risk. There is a lack of understanding about the different needs of girls who end up in the criminal justice system, little evidence of what works for girls and few programmes designed specifically for girls.”* APPG on Women in the Penal System (2012)

- **Girls suffer a ‘double injustice’** when those who have been let down by welfare and education services are met with a punitive systemic response (Myers, 2013; Sharpe, 2016)
- **Underlines importance of a gender-specific approach**, that takes into account the **importance of relationships**

# Jessica Southgate

## Interim CEO

## Agenda

**@Agenda\_alliance**

<https://weareagenda.org/young-womens-justice-project/>



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# Young Women's Justice Project

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**Jess Southgate**, Interim Chief Executive, Agenda

# About Agenda

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Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk, campaigns to

- transform systems and services;
- raise awareness across sectors;
- promote public and political understanding of the lives of girls and women facing multiple disadvantage.

# About the Young Women's Justice Project

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- Providing a national platform to make the case for the needs of young adult women (17-25) in contact with the criminal justice system, including girls transitioning into adult services as they turn 18
- Empower young adult women to safely share their experiences and use their voices to make change
- Exploring and building a credible evidence base in relation to key themes and issues in the lives of young adult women, with a focus on:
  - Transitions between youth and adult services and resulting cliff-edges in support
  - Relationship between experiences of violence and abuse and contact with the criminal justice system
  - Experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young women and care-affected young adult women, in recognition of the levels of disproportionality and poor outcomes for these groups
- Influencing government policy and strategies to take account of young adult women and enable more effective practice

# Young adult women in the criminal justice system

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- A minority on account of both age and gender.
- Complex, overlapping needs which are mutually reinforcing.
- Contact with the criminal justice system underpinned by histories of violence, abuse and exploitation, poor mental health, poverty and social exclusion.
- Systematically overlooked in policy and practice.
- Report feeling alienated from both adult women's services and youth services, feeling they are **"not for them"**.
- Describe being **"just left to their own devices"** when transitioning to adulthood – going from **"having loads of support"** to **"struggling alone"**.

# Young adult women, relationships and abuse

- Young adult women have gender- and age-specific support needs which are distinct from those of young men and adult women.
- Young adult women's experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation are too often overlooked.
- Responses to young adult women's experiences of sexual violence and mental ill-health can be punitive and re-traumatising.
- Significant gaps in the evidence-base remain, limiting the development of gender-sensitive responses to young adult women in the CJS.
- Young adult women value opportunities to learn about relationships with their peers in spaces where they feel safe and would like to see specialist provision developed and maximised –

*“There should be more clubs for girls.. There should be more youth centres for us women to open [up] and talk about our personal stuff...”*



# Nicole Walsh

**Young Women's Service Manager  
Women and Girls Network**

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# Caroline Howe

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# Dr Summer Alston-Smith

**Director of Criminal Justice Services  
Advance**

<https://www.advancecharity.org.uk/>

# Advance: Our services

- Our approach is holistic - centred on the survivor's needs & empowering them on their journey towards recovery from the trauma of their experiences.
- Both Criminal Justice *and* Domestic Abuse specialist services
- Young Women's keyworker (CJS)
- Children and Young Women's IDVA (DA)
- Children and Young women's Worker (DA)

# Advance: Our perspective

- YW&Gs experience familial abuse and coercive intimate relationships with a lack of information and resources
- Evidence, policy and services gap
- Low volumes create 'invisible' cohort

# Advance: Our aims

- Investment in early prevention & intervention
- A Coordinated Community Response approach
- Design solutions 'from the lens of the girl, not the system'
- Co-design & co-production with service users

# Our Panel

Q & A



# Nicole Jacobs

## Domestic Abuse Commissioner

@nicolejacobsST



# *Thank You*

**Our speakers and panellists  
Greater London Authority  
Advance Peer Mentors & Staff  
Research Participants**

[www.advancecharity.org.uk/what-we-do/learning-centre/research/](http://www.advancecharity.org.uk/what-we-do/learning-centre/research/)