



# Female Imprisonment and “Trauma-Informed” Prisons

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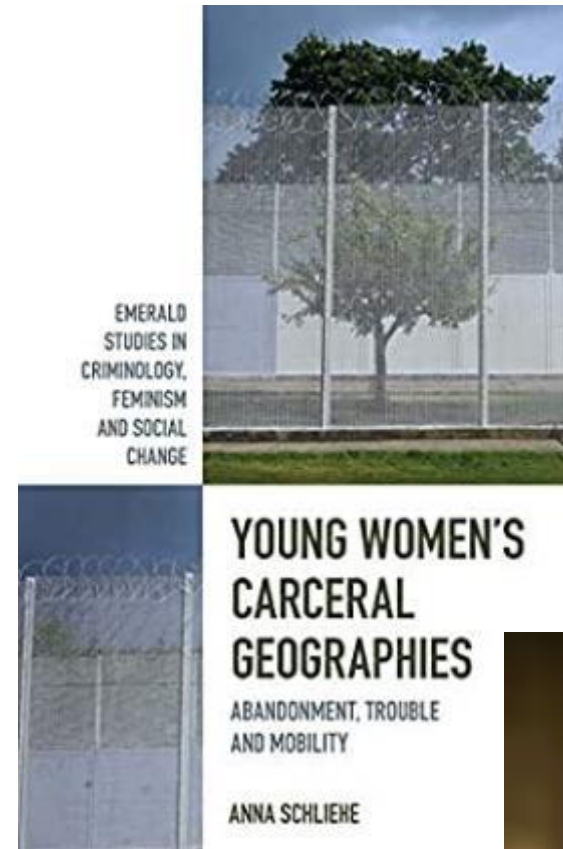
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# Introductions

- Completed doctoral research project in 2016 with a focus on young women's experiences of secure care, prison and closed psychiatric units in Scotland
- Joined the Prisons Research Centre in Cambridge for the EU funded 'COMPEN' project managed by Ben Crewe
- Worked on themes around carcerality and women's imprisonment in different contexts from Scotland, England and Norway to now look at Germany in the current research project 'WISCA'
- Joined the Crime and Carcerality Research Group in September 2021 as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow



# Women's Imprisonment, Social Control and the Carceral State (WISCA)

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship 2021-2026

- The fact that women are far fewer in number can pose a variety of challenges for prison administrations, often resulting in less favourable treatment as compared to imprisoned men
- Female prisoners are interesting, however, because many reform agendas are trialled on this relatively small and seemingly more manageable group
- WISCA responds to the Council of Europe's call (2018) for research and gender-sensitive monitoring which is attuned to the problems women face in prison and how they make sense of their contact with the criminal justice system beyond incarceration





# Overview of the presentation

- A very brief exploration of women's imprisonment
- What are unique harms for imprisoned women?
- What is trauma and what is Trauma-Informed-Practice?
- The initiative 'Becoming Trauma-Informed'
- Can prisons be 'trauma-informed'?
- Measuring TIP
- Excerpts from the field in England and Wales
- Measuring trauma in prison environments elsewhere
- Conclusive remarks





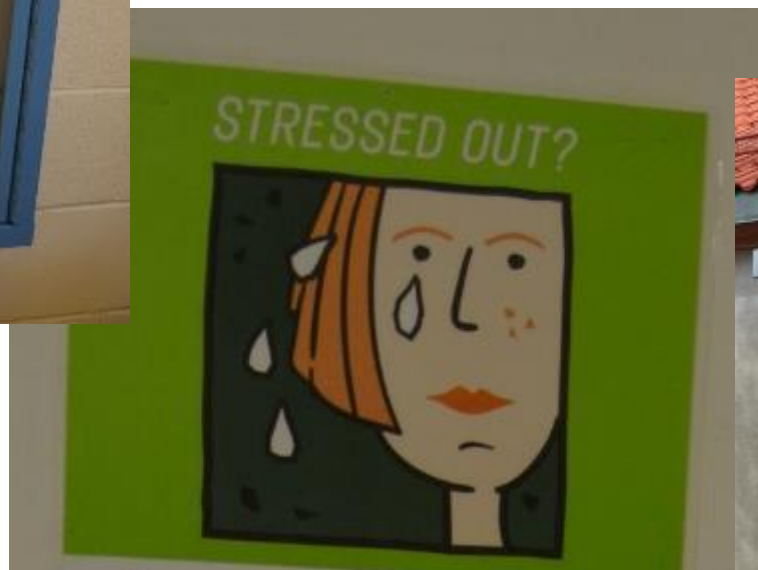


Exploring  
women's  
imprisonment



Exploring  
unique harms







# What is trauma?

“Tension between trauma practices that conceptualise trauma as within individual body-minds and trauma practices that understand experiences of trauma as relational or emergent from particular social environments and legal procedures that individuals encounter”

Ehrkamp et al 2019: 118



# Trauma-informed Practice (TIP)

Key principles of trauma-informed care are:

- Clients need to feel connected, valued, informed, and hopeful of recovery;
- The connection between childhood trauma and adult psychopathology is known and understood by all staff; and
- Staff work in mindful and empowering ways with individuals, family and friends, and other social services agencies, to promote and protect the autonomy of that individual.

(Muskett 2014: 52)





# The initiative 'Becoming Trauma-Informed'

- Introduced into prisons in England and Wales (and elsewhere) from 2015 based on the work of American clinical psychologist, Dr Stephanie Covington
- Supported financially by a charitable organization, *One Small Thing*, led by prison philanthropist, Lady Edwina Grosvenor
- Trauma-informed training interventions promote awareness of the significance of trauma in an individual's everyday life in order to support recovery





# Can prisons be trauma-informed?



# Measuring TIP

TI-Items	Item Mean Scores	
	Prison 1 (n=116)	Prison 2 (n=70)
Time is taken to understand my personal history in this prison.	2.39	2.54
Care is taken to be sensitive to my past experiences in this prison	2.39	2.64
I am helped to develop coping strategies that I can use in daily life	2.77	2.77
I feel emotionally safe in this prison.	2.78	2.75
Staff in this prison try to understand the reasons for my behaviour.	2.59	2.45
Staff in this prison take a personal interest in my emotional wellbeing.	2.60	2.48
Staff in this prison act with compassion.	2.75	2.59
I do not feel judged by staff in this prison.	2.83	2.71
Staff in this prison believe I can grow and change.	3.11	2.99
Staff are able to connect with me emotionally in this prison.	2.56	2.53
This prison is sensitive and responsive.	2.68	2.61
Staff see and treat me as a whole person.	2.87	2.56
This prison approaches problems in creative ways.	2.62	2.41
This prison is helping me to improve my physical and mental health.	2.60	2.67
Staff are working with me, not against me in this prison.	2.91	2.70
Staff in this prison are patient.	2.68	2.64
Staff in this prison are willing to be flexible.	2.75	2.54
I am being helped to understand my past in this prison.	2.57	2.74
I feel confident and 'in control' in this environment.	2.76	2.69
This prison allows me to express difficult feelings.	2.63	2.41
This prison helps me recognise my strengths.	3.01	2.74
In this prison I feel truly seen and heard.	2.43	2.32
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.69</b>	<b>2.63</b>



# Excerpts from the field

‘Trauma-orientation is bullshit – they do not look into the deeper reasons for your behaviour.’

**Prisoner**

‘They don’t know your story here. They all knew my story in [another prison].’

**Prisoner**

‘It’s [this prison] caused me trauma’

**Prisoner**

‘They take the lid off the can of worms and leave you in prison, with officers that are not mental health trained.’

**Prisoner**





‘Just because they’re women doesn’t make them nice and sweet – they’re just as dangerous as men, sometimes even more so ... can’t trust ‘em’’

Staff member (quote from fieldwork notes)

‘Some staff love to catch the women in the wrong and punish them. It’s like what they live for.’

Staff member

‘Staff go out of their way to *not* see prisoners as people.’

Staff member







‘We teach them how to build a bike [in a cycle workshop], but we don’t help them deal with their underlying issues. There is nothing therapeutic here.’

**Staff member**

‘The general environment in here is not trauma informed at all. Trauma is not recognised. There’s absolutely zero help with self-harm.’

**Staff member**

‘People get lost in the system here, and the chaos and misery that it creates is dehumanizing’

**Staff member**

We listen to some horrendous things, and it’s not recognised, the toll that takes on you.

**Staff member**



‘I avoid officers like the plague (...) they antagonise you and abuse their authority (...) some are preying on vulnerable women’ **Prisoner (interview)**

‘When you’re not a good prisoner, officers target you. When you are on their radar, you’re fucked’ **Prisoner (interview)**

‘This jail in general doesn't have many officers who understand emotional needs of trauma certain women have been through. 20-30% are homophobic and I feel targeted by at least 3 officers.’ **Prisoner (comment survey)**



## Conclusive remarks



- Women's prisons represent a challenge to models of penal order, authority and legitimacy precisely because power flows through the complex, charged and ambiguous relational dynamics that were described
- The fact that women were so critical of the prison, despite it being ostensibly decent and relaxed, tells us a good deal about the particular difficulties of accomplishing justice
- A focus on trauma seems integral here, as it has, in part, manifested itself in dramatically rising numbers of violent incidents and self-inflicted deaths in custody and the prisons inspectorates in all four jurisdictions in the UK and the ROI



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Thanks  
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