

# DISCOVER WHY WOMEN ARE COMMITTING CRIME



# TYPES

## VIC

Based only on alleged offences: the most common offence committed by women in 2016 was theft (9754 alleged offences), followed by assault and related offences (6467 alleged offences), and then drug use and possession (2380 alleged offences) (Crime Statistics Agency)

## AU

“Theft was the most prevalent principal offence for females, while the largest increases in female offender numbers were for Theft (up 12 per cent), Illicit drug offences (up 8 per cent) and Acts intended to cause injury (up 6 per cent),” said Mr Milne. (ABS) 4519.0 - Recorded Crime - Offenders, 2015-16

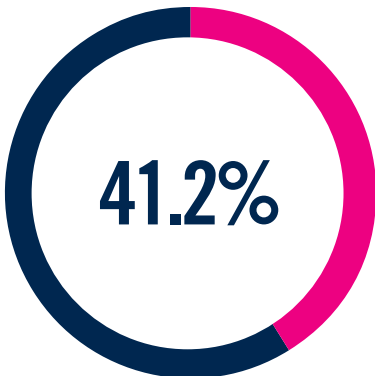
# 2,484

Number of female offenders as of 31 March 2017

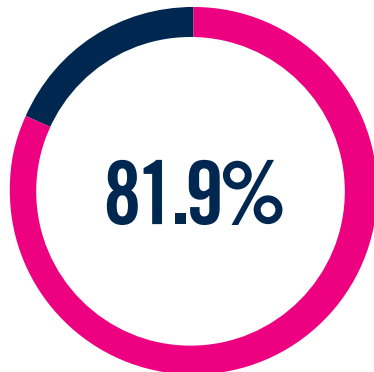


# RECENT TRENDS

- In the month ending 31 March 2017, of a total of 13,996 offenders, 2,484 were female offenders<sup>1</sup>
- In April 2015 – 31 March 2016, 33,890 incidents in Victoria involved a female alleged offender (19.7% of all offenders). This was an increase by 31.1% from the previous year<sup>2</sup>
- Between 30 June 2006 and 30 June 2016, the number of female prisoners in Victoria grew by 75% whereas the number of male prisoners grew by 66%<sup>3</sup>
- Nationally, between 2014-15 and 2015-16, there was a 5% increase in the number of female offenders (97,304 in total)<sup>4</sup>
- The recidivism rate for women is 41.2%, for men it is 44.4%<sup>5</sup>
- 32.5% of female prisoners are serving a sentence of less than one year, and 82.9% are serving a term less than 5 years<sup>6</sup>
- There has been an 81.9% increase in female first-time offenders being imprisoned over the 2008-2013 period<sup>7</sup>
- A 2014 evaluation found that recidivism rates have fallen by 9-11% since the introduction of targeted programs for women prisoners since 2005-06, which aimed to address the specific needs of women offenders and reasons for offending<sup>8</sup>



Female recidivism rate



Increase in first time offenders



# SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

## Employment and education

- 45% of female prisoners were unemployed at the time they entered prison<sup>9</sup>
- In Victoria, around 80% of women prisoners have not finished secondary school.<sup>10</sup>

## Homelessness

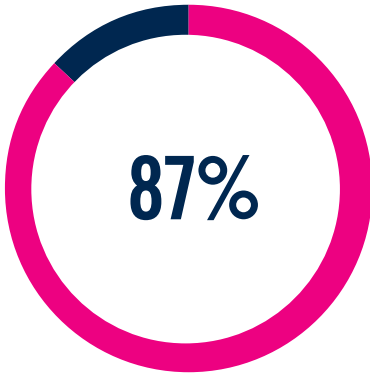
- VIC – 52% of women in prison report sleeping rough or staying in emergency accommodation in the four weeks before being imprisoned (Victorian Ombudsman Report 2015)
- Over 40% of female prisoners are homeless upon release from prison<sup>11</sup>
- Around one third of women prisoners experienced homelessness before imprisonment.<sup>12</sup> Over 50% of those women having moved accommodation at least once in the last 12 months.<sup>13</sup>

## Substance Abuse

- In NSW around 75% of women offenders at the point of arriving at prison had experienced substance abuse disorders.<sup>14</sup>
- In NSW 57% of sentenced women offenders had experienced substance abuse disorders.<sup>15</sup>

## Physical and Mental Health

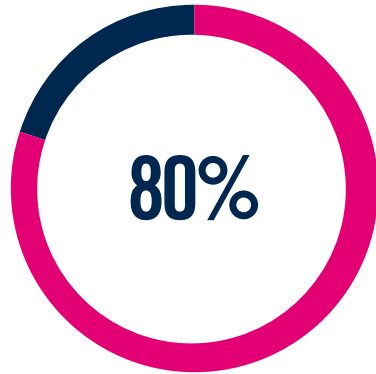
- In NSW around 90% of women offenders at the point of arriving at prison had experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months.<sup>16</sup>
- In NSW 79% of sentenced women offenders had experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months.<sup>17</sup>
- Among Australian female prisoners, 14% had experienced psychotic mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia.<sup>18</sup>
- In NSW only around 50% of women inmates had ever been assessed or treated for an emotional or mental problem by a medical practitioner.<sup>19</sup>
- 44.8% had experienced depression, 33.9% had experienced anxiety and 25.5% had experienced drug dependence.<sup>20</sup>
- Among female police detainees, 68.1% had experienced high or very high degrees of psychological distress – the degree of anxiety and depressive symptoms – in the previous month.<sup>21</sup>
- 60% of women prisoners reported experiencing mental health problems while growing up.<sup>22</sup>
- In NSW, 92% of women in prison had one or more long term health conditions.<sup>23</sup>



## Victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse

### Victims of Abuse

- The Australian Institute of Criminology found in 2004 that 87% of women prisoners were victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse. The majority of these women were victims of multiple forms of abuse.
- 49% of women prisoners experienced at least one form of child abuse.
- 59% of women prisoners had been forced or frightened into doing something sexually that they did not want to do in their lifetime. Of this group, 57% said they didn't want to tell anyone or seek help afterwards.
- It should be noted at the outset that statistics on child abuse and other forms of victimisation are problematic due to under-reporting. However, a survey of the research done in this area suggests a prevalence of between 57% and 90%. For example:
  - In NSW, a 2007 study found 59% of women had experienced sexual coercion or violence. Re-victimisation was also women with one third experiencing it 3-9 times, and 13% more than 10 times.



## Incomplete secondary education

- In Queensland, between 1/4 and 1/3 of women in community corrections reported, coerced, unwanted or forced sexual activity. Victimization was also high. Among the victims of child sexual abuse, 81% experienced sexual victimisation as an adult.
- Other work has estimated that before incarceration, 98% of women had experienced physical abuse. 89% of women had experienced sexual abuse.
- Women's House research found that 70-80% of women in prisons in Queensland were survivors of incest.

## Further Information

Department of Justice, Statistical Profile of the Victorian Prison System:  
[http://assets.justice.vic.gov.au/corrections/resources/4e7c798e-a854-4db2-93eb-d13f91555f0a/statistical\\_profile\\_prisoner\\_2010-11-final.pdf](http://assets.justice.vic.gov.au/corrections/resources/4e7c798e-a854-4db2-93eb-d13f91555f0a/statistical_profile_prisoner_2010-11-final.pdf)

We would like to thank  
Melbourne University Law Students' Society



<sup>1</sup> Corrections Victoria, Monthly prisoner and offender statistics – 2016-17 (to March 2017), Table 2.09: Number of total offenders by Justice region – end of March 2016 and 2017 <<http://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/utility/publications+manuals+and+statistics/monthly-prisoner+and+offender+statistics>>

<sup>2</sup> Crime Statistics Agency, Crime Statistics Victoria: Year ending 31 March 2016, 13

<sup>3</sup> Sentencing Advisory Council, Victoria's Prison Population 2005 to 2016 (2016), 14

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4519.0 – Recorded Crime – Offenders, 2015-16 (18 February 2017) <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4519.0>>

<sup>5</sup> Department of Justice and Regulation, email response to Victorian Ombudsman, 21 August 2015 in Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria, 2015, 16

<sup>6</sup> Corrections Victoria, Key statistics on the Victorian prison system 2009-10 to 2013-14, Table 5: Historical Trends all prisoners as at 30 June 2014, 11 in Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria, 2015, 94

<sup>7</sup> The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, Adelaide and Flinders Universities, Evaluation of the Targeted Women's Correctional Response, Final Report, commissioned by Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice, October 2014, in Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria, 2015, 94

<sup>8</sup> The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, Adelaide and Flinders Universities, Evaluation of the Targeted Women's Correctional Response, Final Report, commissioned by Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice, October 2014 in Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria, 2015, 97 <sup>9</sup> Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria, 2015, 150

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Government Department of Justice, Better Pathways: An Integrated Response to Women's Offending and Re-Offending (2005) 28.

<sup>11</sup> Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria (2015) 2.

<sup>12</sup> Victorian Government, 'Inquiry into the Impact of Drug-Related Offending on Female Prison Numbers: Government Response' (3 May 2011) <[http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/dpcp/Women\\_prisoners/Gov\\_Response\\_03052011.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/dpcp/Women_prisoners/Gov_Response_03052011.pdf)>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, Parliament of Australia, A national approach to mental health – from crisis to community (2006) 334.

<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Stathopoulos and Antonia Quadara, 'Women as Offenders, Women as Victims: The Role of Corrections in Supporting Women with Histories of Sexual Abuse' (Report, Women's Advisory Council of Corrective Services NSW, 2014) 22.

<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Wendy Loxley and Kerry Adams, 'Women, Drug Use and Crime: Findings from the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia Program' (Research Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2009) 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 32.

<sup>23</sup> 'No Exit into Homelessness: Still a Dream?: The Housing Needs of Women Leaving

<sup>24</sup> Victoria, Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria, September (2015), 95.

<sup>25</sup> Stathopoulos and Quadara, Women as Offenders, 24.

<sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> Ibid 15.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Stathopoulos et al, 'Addressing women's victimisation histories in custodial settings' (Report, Australian Institute of Family Studies, December 2012) 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>34</sup> Victorian Government Department of Justice, Better Pathways: An Integrated Response to Women's Offending and Re-Offending (2005) 21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 27.