Women and Mentoring Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of the Women and Mentoring Program funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board.

Women and Mentoring Program

The Women and Mentoring Program (WAM) was established in 2009 as a mentoring program aimed at supporting women involved with the criminal justice system in Victoria. With predominantly philanthropic funding, the program slowly evolved through its early years, through supporting women presenting at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre and Sunshine Magistrates' Courts.

In 2017 WAM was successful in receiving funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board (VLSB) to expand the program under the VLSB priority area, *Preventing Women's Contact with the Criminal Justice System,* focussed on addressing the increasing number of women being incarcerated in Victoria over the past decade.

WAM matches trained mentors with women who have had contact with criminal justice system in Victoria who are assessed by the program as being likely to benefit from mentoring support. WAM does not replace professional supports that women might need to address the issues impacting on them that led or contributed to their offending behaviour, but works alongside other support services providing non-judgemental support and engagement across a broad range of areas.

The evaluation

The evaluation aims to provide WAM with feedback on the program over the three years of the VLSB funding, and identify recommendations for improvement. The report will also be provided to the VLSB as part of WAM's acquittal for the project. Findings will add to the body of knowledge about what is known about the characteristics and lived experience of women involved with the criminal justice system in Victoria.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach including:

- Document review
- Interviews with WAM staff
- Focus group with mentors
- Interviews with women (participants)
- Analysis of case records
- Analysis of the WAM monitoring data

Data from all sources was synthesized to answer the three key evaluation questions:

1. **What can be learned from the program data on the lived experiences of women in the criminal justice system to advocate for, and influence systemic change to ensure a gender-responsive approach?**
2. **How effective is the mentoring program as an early intervention model within the criminal justice system?**

3. **How effectively does the program generate and share knowledge of women's lived experience of the criminal justice system?**

Findings

Lived experience of women

The WAM program successfully engaged a broad range of women over its three years of operation, most of whom presented with complex and intersecting issues that impact on their offending behaviour or contribute to it. Eighty- eight percent of women matched had experienced current or past family violence, 95% were diagnosed with one or more mental health issues, and a significant proportion were either homeless or in unsafe or inadequate housing.

The majority of women identified their culture as Australian although just under third came from 18 different cultural backgrounds, and just under a quarter were born in countries other than Australia. This suggests that WAM is successful in engaging women from backgrounds represented in the criminal justice system including women born overseas or from other cultural backgrounds. Only two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were successfully matched by WAM over the three years, possibly suggesting more work in engagement for these women may be required.

One of WAMs aims is to intervene early with women who have contact with the justice system, however the data suggests that three quarters of women matched had had contact with the justice system in some way prior to the offending that led to their engagement with WAM. This suggests that also WAM provides earlier intervention to prevent women's further progression into the criminal justice system.

Effectiveness

Fifty-six percent of women referred to WAM were successfully matched. While there is some evidence of women being screened out at assessment due to their complexity including unmanaged mental health issues or poorly controlled alcohol and drug use, further work needs to be undertaken to more fully understand the profile of women who are assessed as appropriate for more mentoring but not matched.

Once matched, 21% of women remained engaged with their mentor for 1-3 months and 60% between 4 and 12 months. While length of match may be an indicator of success, there is evidence that some matches closed after a short period with successful and positive outcomes, particularly if the goals were clear and relatively simple to achieve. In longer term matches, change was often more incremental and goals harder to achieve, particularly if they related to mental health or substance use.

At assessment women identify three priority goals for the mentoring relationship aligned to one of nine domains of change:

- Housing/ Accommodation
- Health and Wellbeing
- Children and Family Relationships
- Social Connections
- Drug and Alcohol Use
- Debt and Finances
- Employment and Training
- Offending and Legal Issues

- Self-esteem and Coping Skills

The three top priority goals identified by women related to social connection, housing and accommodation, and legal issues and offending. Domains that women listed as one of their top three priority areas were social connection (50%), legal issues and offending (41%), employment and training (39%), children and family relationships (39%) and housing and accommodation (37%). Goals in each of the nine domains were identified by at least some women.

It was not easy to draw firm conclusions on outcomes for women as these were not always clear from the data WAM collects. WAM could benefit from identifying quantitative measures to support evidence of progress and positive outcomes at the individual level.

Outcomes were achieved for most women across the domains of change they identified. If mentors and mentees do not engage with each other, outcomes in other domains are unlikely to be achieved. For successful matches, social engagement was an outcome, even if change in other domains was not achieved.

WAM has limited ability to impact on broader structural issues including homelessness that impact on women however some good outcomes were reported for women including advocacy, mentors attending appointments with women, and providing a sounding board for mentees' frustration with systemic issues.

For women who identified goals around drugs and alcohol and mental health, mentors appear to have played a strong support role for women in encouraging them to attend appointments, seek professional assistance if they were not engaged with it, and remaining in contact with women when they were hospitalised or in rehabilitation.

Support in navigating the criminal justice system was a frequently reported outcome in case records. This included helping the mentee prepare for court, accompanying women to court, assisting women understand what conditions or orders meant for them, and providing a visible presence that women were engaging with services.

Mentor characteristics identified as important for the success of the match and achievement of outcomes included their non-judgemental approach, their commitment to the relationship, and their ability to listen to mentees' stories of trauma and abuse. A number of mentors brought their own or a family member's lived experience to their role, with this experience seen as a strength in engagement with a mentee. A few mentors were identified as not suitable for the role due to their own personal or emotional needs or their inability to commit to the match.

The evaluation cannot confirm whether involvement in WAM impacted on reducing recidivism, but it is positive that only 13% of women matched reported reoffending during their involvement with WAM. It would be worth undertaking longer-term follow up with mentees post exit from WAM to assess longer-term outcomes.

Over the three years of the VLSB funding round, WAM has gathered and used information on women's lived experience of the criminal justice system and has shared this with government, funders, other organisations and the broader community through publications, conferences, reports and presentations. A Women's Voices consultation in 2018 provided WAM with more in-depth information about women's experience of the criminal justice system and of the WAM program, that was used for improving the program. WAM has recently established a Women's Advisory Group to provide it with ongoing input into

the further development of the WAM model and to build the capacity and confidence of women to be the story tellers of their own experiences.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the first three years of the WAM program found that the program has been successfully implemented and has had an impact in supporting criminalised women to address issues that underly their offending behaviour, in supporting women to navigate the criminal justice system and reducing recidivism in the short term. The program continues to build the knowledge on women's lived experience of the criminal justice system including the complex inter-relationship between offending, family violence, homelessness, mental health and alcohol and drug use.

Many of the outcomes for women noted in this report are qualitative and there is an opportunity to strengthen the way data is collected to provide stronger quantitative evidence to add to the positive outcomes reported.

Summary of recommendations

1. Undertake further investigation on the issues facing women born overseas to understand whether there are particular features of the mentoring model that make the program more useful for them.
2. Undertake further promotion of the WAM model with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders specific services.
3. Ensure that information is collected on the reasons that women who are assessed as appropriate for matching do not end up engaging with the program.
4. Add a field to the WAM database on the reasons for closure to understand the relationship between length of match and goal outcomes.
   - Goals achieved
   - Goals partially achieved
   - Goals not achieved
   - Mentee disengaged
5. If WAM decides to provide the program remotely, consider targeting mentors from regional areas who have knowledge of local service systems.
6. Consider adding two additional fields to the WAM database or investing in a client records management system to improve the collection of data to enable monitoring and evaluation of outcomes for WAM participants. If the current database remains the main source of data capture then include the following fields:
   - Mentoring Goal (from dropdown list) (e.g. "Social Connection")
   - Specifics of the mentoring goal - open ended field (e.g. "broaden social network")
   - Key actions taken - open ended field (e.g. "met with mentor regularly")
   - Goal Outcomes - open ended field (e.g. participant has specific actions for broadening her network, or participant joined a new social group)
   - Goal Progress - dropdown list (e.g. significant progress, some progress, little progress, no progress)
7. Consider seeking funding to undertake a follow up review of women post their exit from WAM to gather information on their re-offending over time.
8. When setting up the data fields in the volunteer management system, consider what additional data on mentors needs to be collected at assessment that might indicate that mentors may require additional support when involved in a mentoring relationship.
9. When the new case management position is filled, ensure that staffing support is available to support matches across the working week.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Women and Mentoring (WAM) program between December 2017 and October 2020. Findings are reported in relation to the program's effectiveness. Recommendations and opportunities are included where identified.

1.1 Program context

Women in the Justice System

The number of women entering Victorian prisons has increased dramatically over the past 10 years largely attributable to growth in women on remand for short periods of time who are subsequently released on bail or to a non-custodial sentence. Drivers for this increase in the remand population include changes to the Victorian Bail Act in 2018 making it more difficult for people to obtain bail, tougher policing under the new bail conditions and less options for Magistrates to use discretion when making decisions.

A recent study on women in remand[1] highlighted additional factors for further exploration in relation to the remand population including the strong correlation of women's criminalisation with family violence and homelessness. This study found that women were disadvantaged from successfully applying for bail due to poor access to housing, lack of personal relationships and support, and lack of appropriate mental health and alcohol and drug support. Rather than presenting 'risk' to the community for relatively low-level offending, women are more likely to be remanded due to their disadvantage and marginalisation.

A report published by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Women in the Victorian Prison System (2019)[2], described the characteristics of women in the prison system as of the 30 June 2017. Of the 507 women in prison at the time of the report, 26% reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability prior to entering custody, 61% reported daily drug use, 51% had not applied for bail, and 65% reported being a victim of family violence.

This study cited Corrections Victoria survey data for people in prison, and also reported the significant history of family violence, trauma and abuse, and instability in the female prison population. The study also noted an increase in the number of women who are now being listed as both perpetrators and victims of family violence.

This increase in women in prison has implications for the Criminal Justice System in Victoria. The system was developed for men and the needs and characteristics of women are not well served by the model. Studies suggest that particular attention needs to be given to approaches that focus on the role that victimisation and trauma have had on women's offending including family violence, the complexity of women's health and mental health needs and the intersectional links with alcohol and drug abuse and homelessness.

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[1] Emma Russell, Bree Carlton, Danielle Tyson, Hui Zhou, Megan Pearce, Jill Faulkner (2020) *A Constellation of Circumstances: The Drivers of Women's Increasing Rates of Remand in Victoria*, Fitzroy Legal Service and the La Trobe Centre for Health, Law and Society: Melbourne.

[2] Women in the Victoria Prison System (2019) Authorised and published by the Department of Justice and Community Safety – Corrections Victoria, 121 Exhibition St, Melbourne.

In order to address this increase in women's incarceration, in 2017 the Victorian Legal Services Board established a specific grant round, *Keeping Women Out of the Justice System*, and funded five innovative projects with the following aims:

- Reduce women's encounters with the justice system.
- Reduce the factors driving growth in the women's prison population.
- Reduce women's incarceration and recidivism rates.
- Provide models for reform.

1.2   Program Overview

Women and Mentoring Ltd (WAM) is a small not-for-profit organisation that provides an early intervention program for women who have been charged with a criminal offence, or who are at risk of offending by matching them with a supportive, trained female mentor. The program commenced in 2009 in the City of Yarra under the auspice of the Wellington Group, before breaking away from them and creating WAM under a new legal entity. The program has been co-located in the inner north with a range of other organisations over the years including the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC), the Salvation Army and Good Shepherd.

In its early years, with funding from philanthropic organisations, WAM provided services to women presenting at the at the Collingwood Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC), a specialist court of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.

The Mentoring program (2017-2020)
In 2017 WAM was one of five organisations successful in obtaining grants from the Victorian Legal Service Board (VLSB) to expand the mentoring program into the Melbourne, Heidelberg and Broadmeadows Magistrates' Courts to address a VLSB priority area- *Preventing Women's Contact with the Criminal Justice System.* The funding was initially for three years (2017-2020) but a further 12 months of funding was granted in mid- 2020 enabling the program to continue into 2021.

WAM was successful in obtaining separate trust funding to expand the program to women living in the catchment of Frankston Magistrates Court in 2018.

The mentoring program trains and supports volunteer mentors and matches them with women who have come to the attention of the criminal justice system. The program is open to adult women who present at the NJC, Melbourne, Heidelberg, Broadmeadows and Sunshine Magistrates' Courts. Women are referred by a range of services and court staff who identify women that could benefit from additional support while awaiting their hearing, while on bail for offences, or who have contact with the criminal justice system in some way.

The VLSB funding enabled WAM to strengthen the program including refining its program logic and developing domains of change to more clearly demonstrate the range of changes the program is able to make.

1.3   Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide WAM with an independent evaluation of the first three years of the expanded mentoring program, including providing an acquittal to VLSB.

1.4   COVID-19 Pandemic

The introduction and spread of the pandemic (COVID-19) in Australia in 2020 significantly impacted on WAM's service delivery, with staff and volunteers moving to working from home, and face to face mentoring on hold due to restrictions.

Following the immediate crisis, WAM was successfully able to continue the program with mentors providing support to women via phone, text or video and digital platforms. New mentors were assessed and trained remotely and new matches continued through 2020. In late 2020, face to face meetings between mentors and mentees recommenced.

2   WOMEN AND MENTORING PROGRAM

2.1   Staffing

WAM is a small organisation and currently governed by a Board of Management. It employs five part time staff including the Executive Officer, Operations Manager, Intake & Assessment Coordinator, Mentor Coordinator and Frankston Coordinator (responsible for both intake and mentor support).

2.2   Program Model

Referrals are received by the WAM Intake & Assessment coordinator who undertakes an initial phone intake of each woman to assess their readiness to benefit from mentoring support to assist them with social and community connection, to find the support they need to address the underlying issues related to their offending, and to help them navigate and understand the criminal justice system.

If assessed as able to benefit from mentoring support, the Intake & Assessment coordinator undertakes a full assessment of each woman to understand the issues impacting on her behaviour that led to criminal activity. Prior to COVID-19 assessment meetings were conducted face to face unless there were safety concerns that warranted these being done by phone or tele-conference. From March 2020, all assessments were done remotely in line with social distancing requirements imposed by the Chief Health Officer.

Assessment

The assessment process is structured and includes gathering information from women including current and desired support, current and previous offending history, family dynamics, family violence, mental health, alcohol and drug use, employment and education status, interests and hobbies. This information is written up under the following themes:

- Brief Description of the participant (age/culture/ location/ motivation/ family/ interests and strengths)
- Her ideal mentor
- Contact with the justice system
- Stressors and health information
- Professional supports
- Barriers to engagement

The Intake & Assessment coordinator then makes a rating of the participant's understanding of legal matters and presenting issues, and their ability to manage them, and identifies three priority areas for mentoring support based on the nine domains of change below:

- Housing/ Accommodation
- Health and Wellbeing
- Children and Family Relationships
- Social Connections
- Drug and Alcohol Use
- Debt and Finances

- Employment and Training
- Offending and Legal Issues
- Self-esteem and Coping Skills

All assessments are reviewed by the WAM Executive Officer prior to being accepted. Matches are generally established for a set period of time from a minimum of 3 months. Following acceptance, the case is referred to the Mentor Coordinator for matching.

Matching

During assessment women are asked to identify characteristics of a mentor that they would like to be matched with. This varies significantly with some women identifying the need for a mentor of a specific age, similar interests to them, particular knowledge and skills (parenting, mental health). Others identify characteristics that they do not want in a mentor including religious beliefs and some women do not specify any preferences.

The Mentor Coordinator then identifies potential mentors based on these requirements. Suitable mentors are identified and screened against a range of criteria including:

- Availability for weekly commitment
- Ability to meet the mentee close to where they live
- Any issues or areas where the mentor lacks confidence in relation to the mentee's goals or presenting issues
- Plans that may interrupt the mentoring relationship

Mentors and mentees are introduced at a face-to-face meeting that includes the Intake Coordinator. Formal goals are not established until the match is reviewed after one month, and the relationship has been established.

Monitoring the Match

Mentors and mentees determine the type and frequency of contact. Prior to COVID-19, meetings could be face to face in community settings, or by phone or text. In line with social distancing requirements, from March 2020, mentors and mentees met via online video platforms, phone or text. Ideally contact between the mentor and mentee is weekly, however this varies significantly based on the mentee's needs and wellbeing.

Once the match is established the Mentor Coordinator[3] is responsible for supporting the mentor and mentee through informal support as required and formal reviews of the match at 6 and 12 months. Mentors record brief notes of their contact with mentees and these are provided to the Mentor Coordinator on a regular basis and included in the woman's file.

Exiting the Program

The program aims to formally close each match when goals for mentees are met.

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[3] The Frankston Coordinator undertakes both intake and mentor coordination roles

2.3 Mentors

Mentors are volunteers and come from a range of backgrounds and ages including retirees and students. While not essential criteria for becoming a mentor, the Volunteer position description notes that mentors from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are encouraged to apply due to the overrepresentation of these women in the criminal justice system. To apply, people who identify as a woman need to have:

- The ability to demonstrate effective active listening skills
- The ability to exercise self-awareness
- An alignment with WAM values
- Availability during the day either to receive phone calls or meet face to face
- The ability to exhibit a non-judgemental attitude to alternate [4]life choices/ life styles
- A warm and practical approach
- The capacity to commit to the program for at least 12 months
- The capacity to be assertive and set firm boundaries

Key functions of the mentoring role are the ability to build rapport, provide practical assistance and assist women to connect to communities they live in or come from. Specific types of support include:

- Supporting women to keep appointments at court.
- Helping women work towards setting and achieving their goals.
- Attending professional appointments with women
- Connecting women with local activities and resources
- Liaising with services including Centrelink and the Office of Housing
- Supporting women experiencing family violence to find their voice
- Spending quality time with women to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Women interested in mentoring are invited to attend an information session and then, if still interested, apply in writing to become a mentor. Potential mentors then attend a two-day training program (or the equivalent over shorter sessions) that cover the following topics:

Module 1   Introduction to WAM and theoretical frameworks and principles that guide our work

Module 2   The role of the mentor

Module 3   What has brought women here (Pathways to the Criminal Justice System?)

Module 4   Interpreting the Justice System

Module 5   Reporting and Record Keeping

Module 6   Goal settings and Domains

Module 7   Maintaining the Mentoring Relationship

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[4] M1 WAM Mentor Position Description v2.0 Updated 06/08/2018

Having completed training, mentors are then supported through monthly group supervision run by the Mentor Coordinator.

All mentors are required to undertake a police check and need to have a volunteer Working with Children Check, along with providing two character references. Women applying to be mentors that have a criminal record are screened on a case-by-case basis prior to determining their suitability.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation aimed to address the three key evaluation questions:

1. **What can be learned from the program data on the lived experiences of women in the criminal justice system to advocate for, and influence systemic change to ensure a gender-responsive approach?**
2. **How effective is the mentoring program as an early intervention model within the criminal justice system?**
3. **How effectively does the program generate and share knowledge of women's lived experiences of the criminal justice system?**

A range of areas for exploration were identified for each of the evaluation questions.

3.2 Data Collection

Data has been collected using mixed methods, including interviews with WAM staff and clients, focus groups with mentors, analysis of the WAM database and review of internal and external documentation.

Interviews with WAM staff
Zoom interviews with 5 WAM staff

Focus Group with Mentors
Zoom focus group with 16 mentors

Observation of Mentor Peer Supervision and Professional Development session
May 2020

Interviews with clients
Interviews with 4 women

Analysis of Case Records
An in-depth review of 15 client case files that included all or some of the following documents:

- Referral
- Assessment summary
- Mentor screen
- Domains of change
- Goal setting
- Case notes
- Mentor notes

Analysis of WAM database and monitoring data
Analysis of data collected by WAM staff on the mentoring program from December 2017 to the end of October 2020 including:

- All referrals
- All assessments
- Matches
- Participant demographics and experiences at the time of assessment
- Relationships and outcomes
- Offending and re-offending history

4 PROFILE OF WOMEN (AT ASSESSMENT)

This chapter explores two areas in the evaluation framework under the key question:

What can be learned from the program data on the lived experiences of women in the criminal justice system to advocate for, and influence systemic change to ensure a gender-responsive approach?

- What are the characteristics of women in the WAM program and how are these linked to their offending?
- What has been learnt that is of wider applicability and interest?

4.1 Referrals Assessments and Matches

Since the program commenced in late 2017, 218 referrals have been received for the program and 114 assessments conducted between December 2017 and October 2020 (approximately 34 months). Of the 114 assessments, 56% resulted in a match with a mentor. Seventy matches are listed in the database but this includes five participants who were matched with more than one mentor. Demographic data for 65 individual women is presented below.

4.2 Characteristics of women at assessment

WAM collects information from women at assessment across a range of domains including age, country of birth, cultural identity, living arrangements, housing status, family violence status, mental health issues, social isolation and current and past offending. Figures on all demographic data analysed are attached in Appendix 1.

The age of women matched is presented in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 AGE OF WOMEN
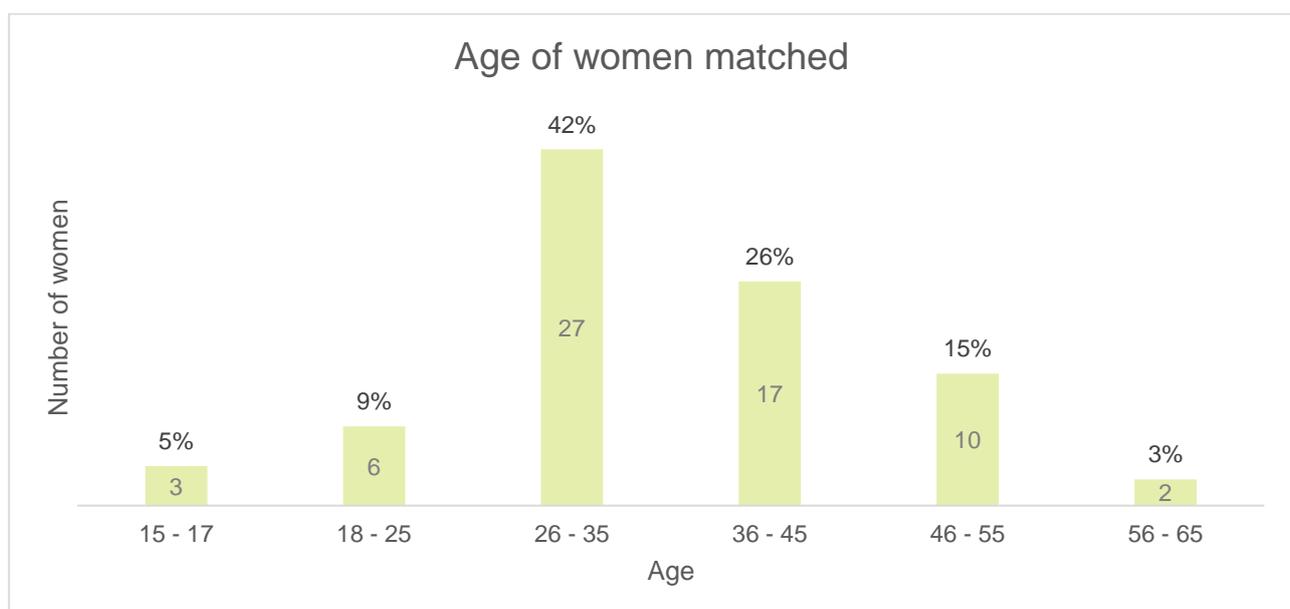
Over 40% of women matched were aged 26-35 and 26% aged between 36 and 45 which is similar to Crime Statistic Agency data on the age of women on unsentenced receptions in Victorian prisons in 2018[5] that reported 43.9% of women were aged between 25-34 and 27.3% aged between 35-44.

The majority of women identified their cultural background as Australian (63%) with two identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The remaining 34% listed 18 different cultural identities. The majority of women (72%) were born in Australia with 23% born in 13 different countries. Data on country of birth was not available for 5% of women. While direct comparisons cannot be made, WAM is working with a higher proportion of women born overseas than those in the unsentenced reception population in 2018 that identified 13% of women in the prison system were born overseas.

It is possible that the WAM program is more engaging for women born overseas due to its strong focus on social connection and its broad intervention focus. Women born overseas are likely to be isolated due to limited English, lack of family and social supports and compromised working and housing conditions. It would be worth undertaking further investigation to understand if there are elements of the mentoring program that make it particularly welcoming for women born overseas.

1. Recommendation

Undertake further investigation on the issues facing women born overseas to understand whether there are particular features of the mentoring model that make the program more useful for them.

Only two women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were supported by WAM. Given higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the prison population or in contact with the criminal justice system, this number seems low. It may be that Aboriginal women are provided with support via Aboriginal specific services or it may indicate that WAM needs to undertake specific promotion of the WAM model with Aboriginal services.

2. Recommendation

Undertake further promotion of the WAM model with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders specific services.

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[5] Walker, S., Sutherland, P., and Millsteed, M. (2019). *Characteristics and offending of women in prison in Victoria, 2012-2018.* Melbourne: Crime Statistics Agency

Figure 2 presents the housing status of women at the time of assessment.

FIGURE 2 HOUSING AT THE TIME OF ASSESSMENT

Housing type
(65 women)

Housing type	Number of women	Percent
Private rental	19	29%
Family-owned house	14	22%
Office of Housing	13	20%
Homeless	7	11%
Transitional	5	8%
Rooming house	3	5%
Supported Accommodation	1	2%
Own house	1	2%
Motel	1	2%
Cabin Caravan Park	1	2%

Number of women
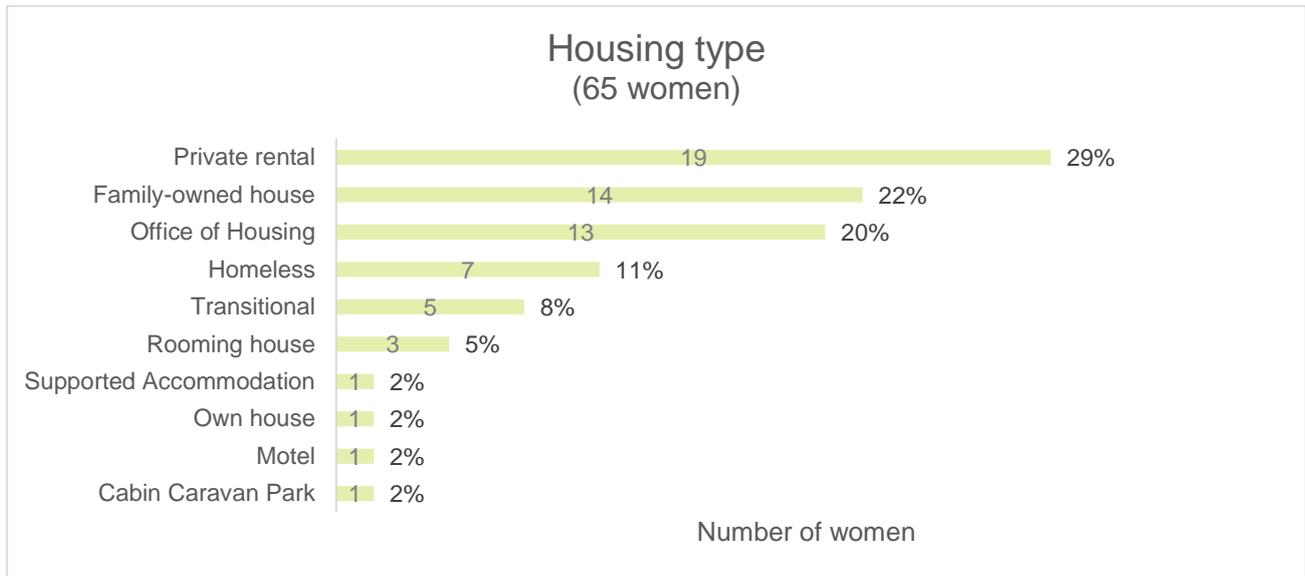
Just under a third of women were living in private rental, 11% were homeless and one owned their own home. The remaining women were living with family (22%), in Office of Housing accommodation (20%), and in a range of other types of accommodation indicative of housing instability. Homelessness is highly linked to criminalised behaviour in women and is an increasing problem more broadly in Victoria. Systemic housing issues create barriers for women and housing instability can prevent women addressing other issues in their lives.

Figure 3 presents the data on women's experience of family violence.

FIGURE 3 WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF FAMIY VIOLENCE

Family Violence - current and previous
(information available for 59 women)

Category	Number of women	Percent
No	7	12%
Yes - current	2	3%
Yes - current and previous	16	27%
Yes - previous	34	58%
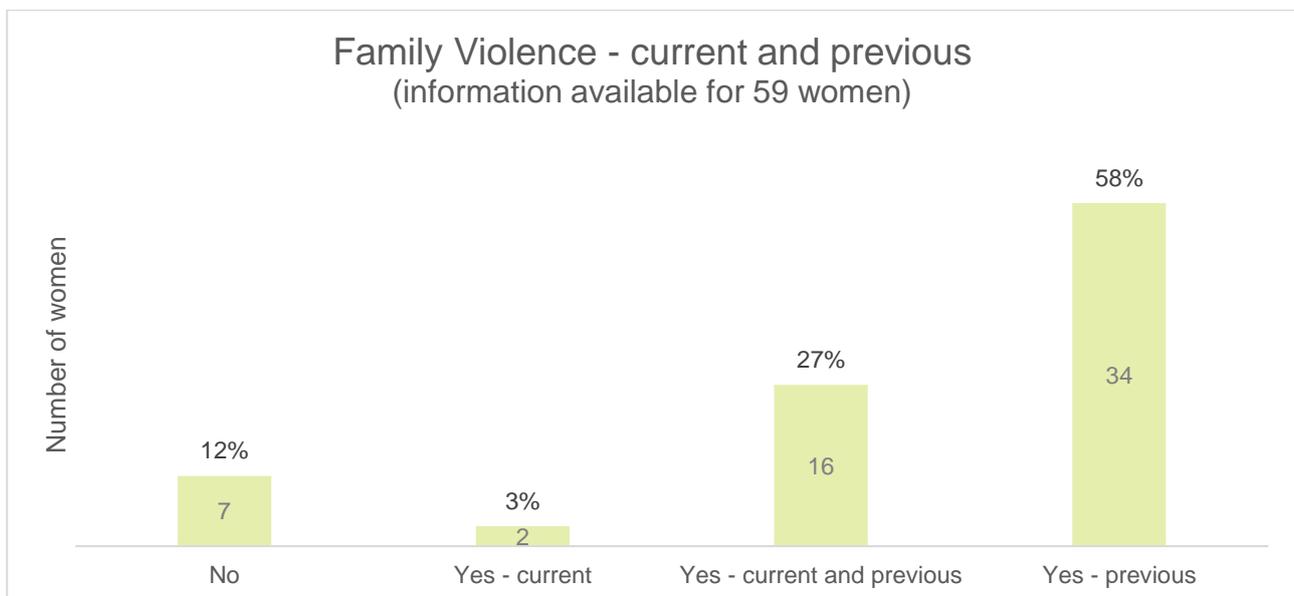
Eighty-eight percent of women had experienced either current, current and previous, or previous family violence. Data from the Crime Statistics Agency reported that 43% of women in the unsentenced population reported being the victim of family violence in 2018. WAM is working with more than double

this number of women, highlighting the prevalence of family violence for criminalised women. While no data was available on numbers, WAM staff noted the increasing rates of women involved with WAM being listed as both a victim and perpetrator of family violence.

The majority of women matched lived alone (31%) with 17% living with housemates, 16% living with their children only and 13% living with family. Only 8% lived with a partner or with a partner and children. It is interesting to note that women who were assessed but not matched were slightly less likely to be living alone than those who were matched. Sixty-nine percent of women had dependent or adult children.

Figure 4 presents the information on the mental health diagnoses that women reported at assessment. A number of women had more than one mental health diagnoses at assessment.

FIGURE 4 WOMEN'S PRESENTING MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES

All women matched that we have data on except for three had at least one mental illness diagnosis at the time of assessment, and many women had multiple diagnoses including severe mental illnesses like s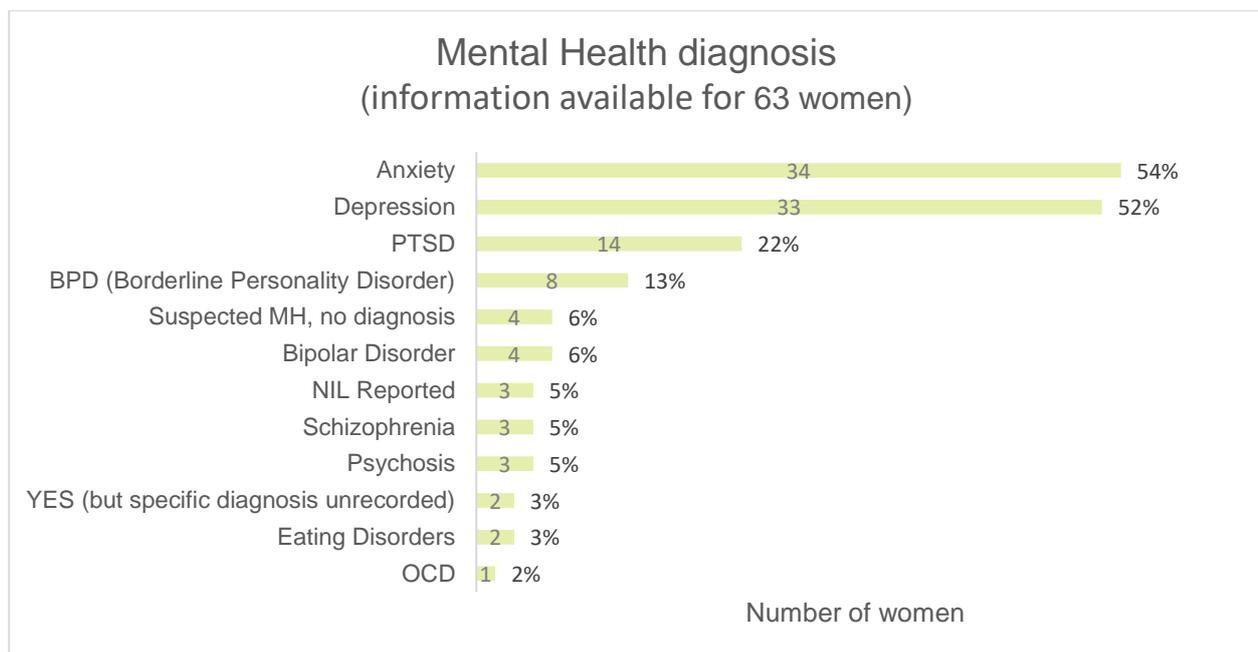chizophrenia, psychosis, borderline personality disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder in addition to anxiety and depression. Thirteen percent of women had three mental health diagnoses and 51% had two diagnosed mental illness. For those with a mental illness 68% reported either a moderate or significant impact on their daily lives, with 29% reporting minimal impact or well managed with or without medication.

This data suggests a strong correlation between mental health and women's criminalised behaviour.

Forty-two percent of women reported alcohol and drug use at the time of assessment with 12% using alcohol, 10% using Cannabis and 17% using Ice. It is worth noting that women who were assessed but not matched had higher rates of drug and alcohol use (61%) that those who were matched. Women whose alcohol and drug use is uncontrolled at the time of assessment are screened out at assessment as not ready to engage in a mentoring relationship.

Sixty-nine percent of women reported a disability, an acquired brain injury or a physical illness at the time of assessment.

Sixty-nine percent of women reported being socially isolated with only 7% reporting positive social supports. Twelve percent identified supportive family and 12 % had professional supports.

Women involved with WAM reported a range of current and historical criminal charges and other court matters including fines as presented in figures 5 and 6. Nil criminal relates to women who are at risk of offending or with reported (significant debt).

FIGURE 5 CRIMINAL CHARGES
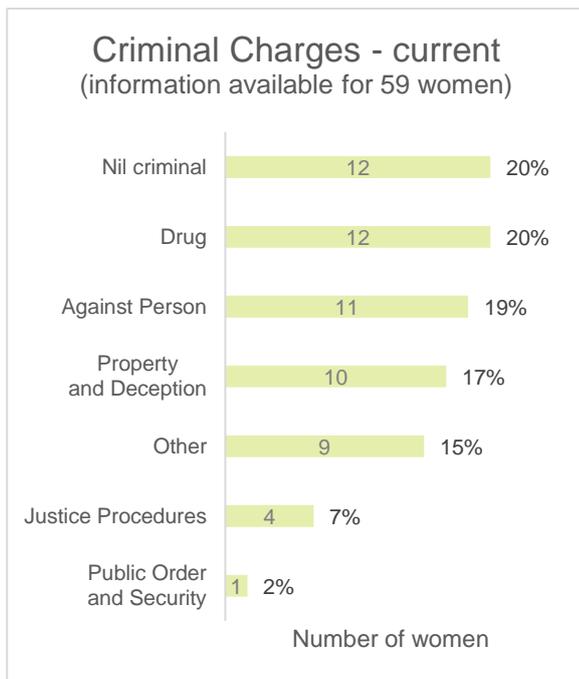
FIGURE 6 HISTORICAL OFFENCES

Criminal Charges - current
(information available for 59 women)

	Number of women	
Nil criminal	12	20%
Drug	12	20%
Against Person	11	19%
Property and Deception	10	17%
Other	9	15%
Justice Procedures	4	7%
Public Order and Security	1	2%

Offences - historical
(information available for 53 women)

	Number of women	
Nil criminal	13	25%
Other	11	21%
Drug	9	17%
Property and Deception	9	17%
Against Person	6	11%
Public Order and Security	3	6%
Justice Procedures	2	4%

Of those women successfully matched for whom we have data, 6 disclosed re-offending during involvement with WAM and 1 received a custodial sentence.

Ninety-two percent of women identified they were financially stressed at the time of assessment with 50% reporting low income and 29% reporting difficulty paying fines.

4.3   Summary

The demographic assessment data confirms that WAM supports a broad range who present with multiple complex and intersecting issues that have impacted on or have resulted from their criminalised behaviour. Of particular note is the high rates of mental health, family violence, housing stress and social isolation that women experience in addition to income stress. A significant proportion of women supported by WAM have had previous contact with the criminal justice system in addition to the matters that led to their referral into the program, suggestive of longer-term disadvantage that may have led to, or be as a result of, their offending behaviour.

Further exploration of the significantly high rates of family violence and mental health issues in women involved with WAM would be worth investigating to understand whether there are factors in the mentoring model that have particular applicability to women presenting with these issues.

5 EFFECTIVENESS (EARLY INTERVENTION)

This chapter explores four areas in the evaluation framework under the key question:

How effective is the mentoring program as an early intervention model within the criminal justice system?

- How effective is the mentoring program in supporting criminalised women to address issues that underly their offending?
- How effective is the mentoring program in supporting women to navigate the criminal justice system?
- How effective is the mentoring relationship in reducing recidivism?
- What are the characteristics of mentoring that have been most helpful?

As a volunteer program WAM is not designed to replace professional supports that women need to access in order to address the broad range of issues that underly their offending behaviour. The mentoring relationship aims to support women to attend professional appointments, negotiate with service providers, link women in to support services that they have not yet accessed, and provide social connection to those who are isolated. Where possible women are matched with a mentor who has a good knowledge of the local community that women come from, and have an awareness of the local service system.

While WAM mentors may have professional training and expertise in areas relevant to the mentee's presenting issues, this is not the main intent of the mentoring relationship. The role is relationship-based, not time limited, nor focussed on addressing a one-off need. Professional supports remain in place and mentors walk alongside women throughout the legal process and following it to assist women achieve their goals.

5.1 Effectiveness in engaging women

Of those women assessed by WAM for their suitability for engagement in a mentoring relationship, 56% result in a match with a mentor. WAM staff suggest that not all referrals are appropriate, particularly if women are very unstable and require more significant professional intervention that WAM cannot provide. Some referrers refer women because other services are closing without having a clear understanding of what the mentoring program can offer women.

Of women referred who go onto assessment, some are screened out during this phase, particularly if their needs are assessed as too complex including high alcohol and drug use or unmanaged mental health. While this explains why some women assessed do not end up being matched, it does explain why other women assessed as appropriate are not ultimately matched. The data collected does not systematically record information on why women assessed as appropriate for mentoring do not end up engaging with the program. Collecting this information would provide an opportunity to understand the characteristics of this group of women.

> **3. Recommendation**
>
> *Ensure that information is collected on the reasons that women who are assessed as appropriate for matching do not end up engaging with the program.*

Figure 7 shows the length of the mentoring relationship that are now closed.

FIGURE 7 LENGTH OF CLOSED RELATIONSHIPS
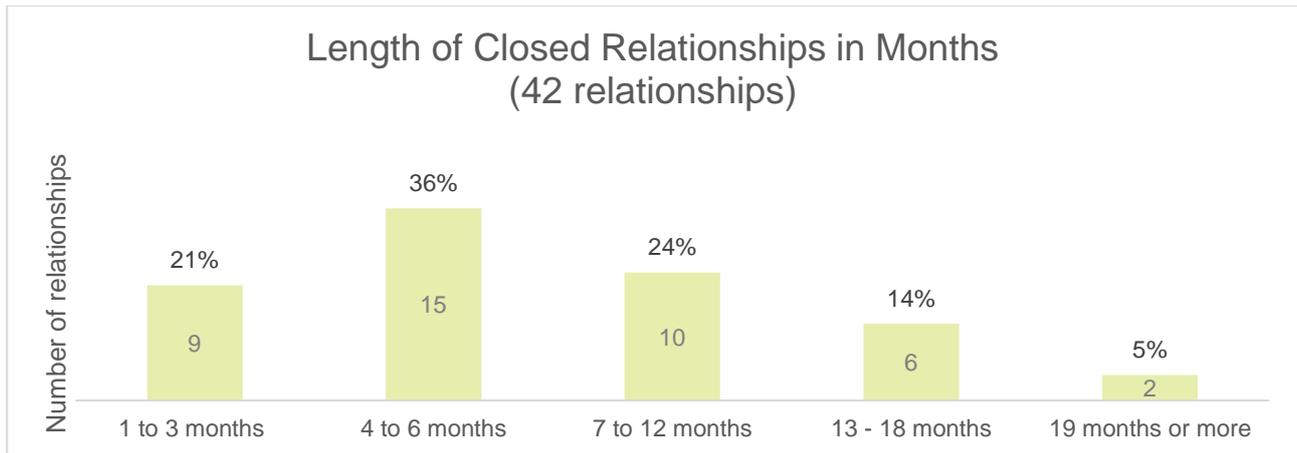
The majority of closed matches (60%) lasted between 4-12 months with 19% lasting longer than 12 months. One relationship lasted 20 months.

Data on reasons for closure was not easy to ascertain from the data available. While it could be assumed that the longer the match lasts is an indicator of its success, there are other factors that could impact on this. Case note analysis suggests that some matches close after a short period of time where goals and outcomes were met as well as examples where the match closed early due to lack of engagement by women.

Examples of positive closure in under 6 months included situations where the mentee's goal was clear and easily achievable (eg being supported to attend court) and cases where the mentee's goal could be achieved through the provision of resources or funding including paying for a woman to attend a safe driving course to improve her skills to prevent fines related to driving.

For mentees, whose goals related to more complex personal issues or systemic issues like housing and employment, change appears to be more incremental and takes longer to achieve. Examples of positive outcomes leading to closure over the longer term included women finding work, becoming involved in community activities and no longer feeling socially isolated, and women successfully obtaining stable housing.

Women with existing mental health issues and problems with drugs and alcohol took longer to achieve outcomes and the pattern of engagement with mentors varied depending on their health presentation. The analysis of case notes confirmed some positive outcomes over the longer term in terms of stabilisation and management of mental health and drug and alcohol issues.

In order to understand whether there is relationship between the length of matches and outcomes it would be worth adding a field to the database to collect data more systematically on reasons for closure including goals achieved.

> *4. Recommendation*
>
> *Add a field to the WAM database on the reasons for closure to understand the relationship between length of closure and goal outcomes. Drop down fields could include:*
>
> *Goals achieved*
>
> *Goals partially achieved*
>
> *Goals not achieved*
>
> *Mentee disengaged*

Table 2 presents the length of matches for current open cases.

FIGURE 8 LENTH OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

Length of Open Relationships in Months
(28 relationships)

	1 to 3 months	4 to 6 months	7 to 12 months	13 - 18 months	19 months or more	No start date listed
Percentage	7%	25%	39%	11%	14%	4%
Number of relationships	2	7	11	3	4	1
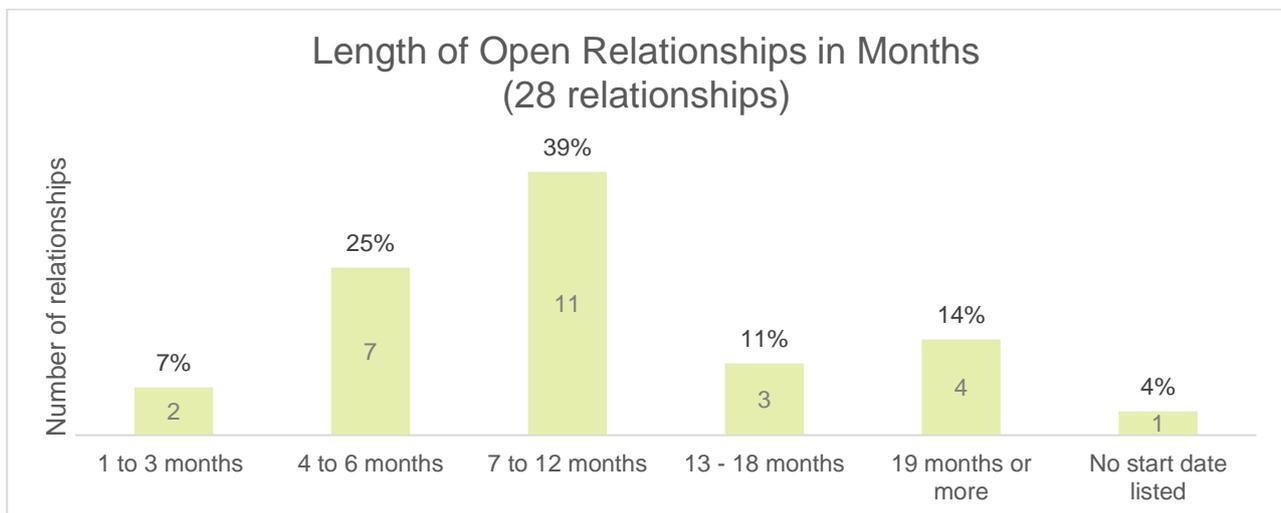
Of the relationships which are still open, 25% have been going for over 1 year, with the longest relationship currently at 32 months (over 2.5 years). The pattern of open relationships suggests a similar pattern to closed relationships. Twenty- five percent of current matches had been going for over 12 months. WAM staff reported that a number of closed matches are continuing to meet independently of WAM, suggesting strong engagement and success of the match.

WAM receives referrals from a number of courts and other legal or criminal justice organisations as well as from community services including mental health and alcohol and drug services. On occasion self-referrals are made by women including those who have had past experience of the program.

FIGURE 9 MATCHES FROM EACH COURT

Number of successful matches from each court

Court	Matches
Sunshine Magistrates Court	19
Frankston Magistrates Court	17
Melbourne Magistrates Court	11
Heidelberg Magistrates Court	11
Other	6
NJC	2
Broadmeadows Magistrates Court	2
West	1
Melbourne Drug Court	1
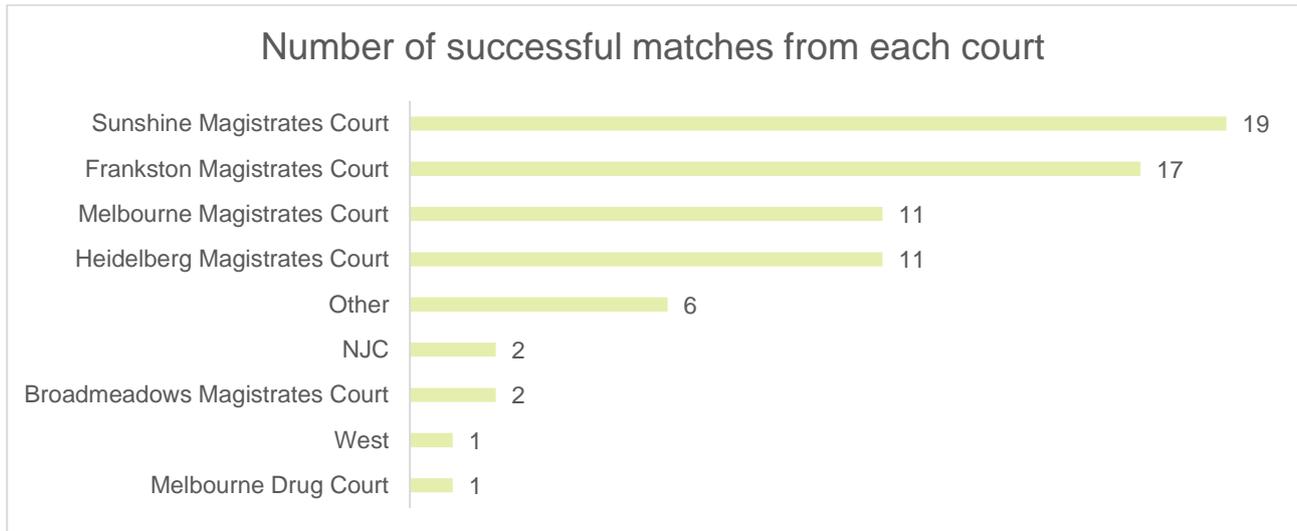
Referrals that resulted in successful matches came predominantly from women who present at the Sunshine, Frankston, Melbourne, Heidelberg and Broadmeadows courts. According to WAM staff, the number of referrals from each jurisdiction varies depending on WAM's relationships with key personnel at each court. Ongoing work is undertaken by WAM staff to maintain and establish new relationships with potential referrers to ensure the program remains known.

While not listed in the data available, WAM identified a significant increase in referrals from Fines Victoria and Melbourne Drug Court as a direct result of successful matches with women referred from these areas.

In 2020, as a result of COVID-19, WAM changed its engagement model between mentors and women from face-to-face to remote contact. While this change in service delivery presented a barrier for some matches, there was evidence that the program was able to adapt and achieve good outcomes using remote communication. A number of mentees and mentors remained engaged or were matched and met remotely during this time.

The experience of running the program remotely provides an opportunity for WAM to expand its service delivery to more women involved with the justice system across Victoria, including those areas with limited support services. As the WAM model relies on mentors having knowledge of the local communities that women live in, this would require a broader targeting of mentors from rural locations who have good knowledge of regional services in the areas they come from.

> **5.   Recommendation**
>
> *If WAM decides to provide the program remotely, consider targeting mentors from regional areas who have knowledge of local service systems.*

5.2   Effectiveness in addressing underlying issues

Over the years, WAM has developed a more formalised approach to demonstrating its impact through identification of nine domains of change that women referred choose to work on with the support of the mentor. Three goals are agreed on at the goal setting meeting that link to the priority domains.

Based on the information from the WAM database, figure 10 shows the domains most frequently listed first based on initial assessment and goal setting.

FIGURE 10 PRIORITY GOALS FOR MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Mentoring Goal - First Priority

Goal	Number	Percentage
Social connection	20	29%
Housing/Accom	13	19%
Legal Issues / Offending	12	17%
Health & Wellbeing	8	11%
Children / Family r'ships	6	9%
Self Esteem/Coping skills	3	4%
Employment/Training	3	4%
Drug/Alcohol use	3	4%
Debt/ Finances	2	3%

Number of relationships

Social connection (29%), housing and accommodation (19%), and legal issues/ offending (17%) are the three goals most frequently listed first by women at assessment, with all domains identified by some women as a priority area for them.

Figure 11 presents the data on the number of matches that had each of the nine domains of change listed as one of the three priority goals of the mentoring relationship.

FIGURE 11 NUMBER OF MATCHES WITH EACH GOAL

Mentoring Goals - number of relationships with each goal

Goal	Number	Percentage
Social connection	35	50%
Legal Issues / Offending	29	41%
Employment/Training	27	39%
Children / Family r'ships	27	39%
Housing/Accom	26	37%
Drug/Alcohol use	17	24%
Health & Wellbeing	17	24%
Self Esteem/Coping skills	13	19%
Debt/ Finances	13	19%

Number of relationships
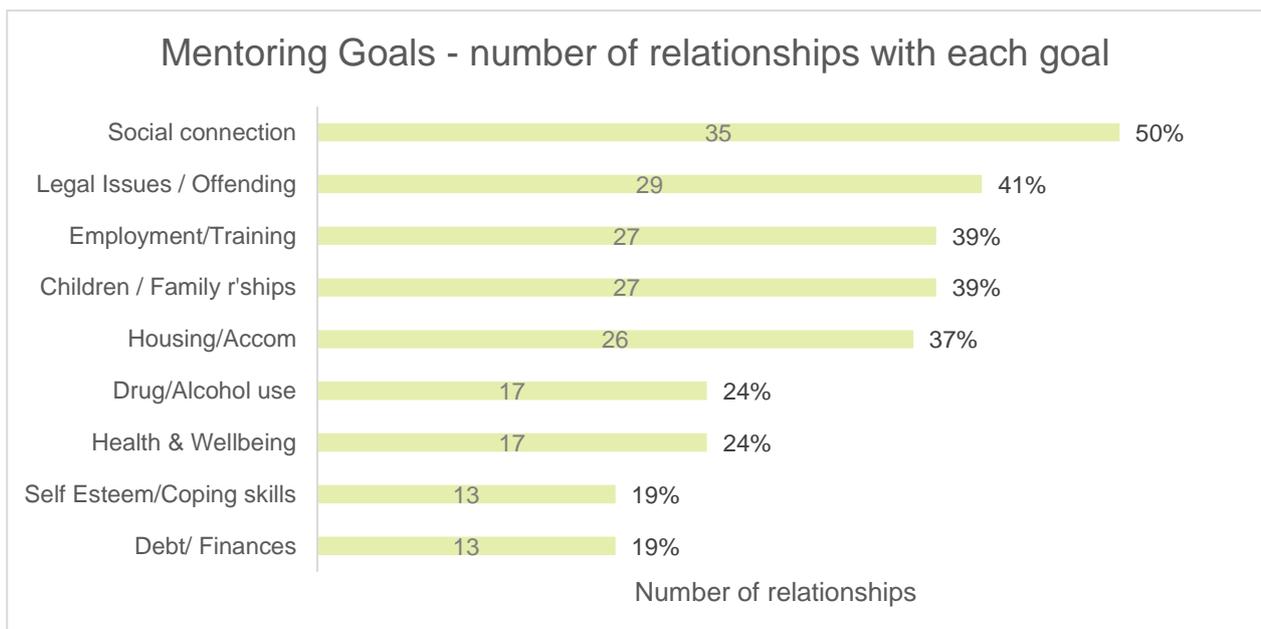
Half of the women successfully matched identified social connection as one of their three priority goals followed by legal issues and offending (41%), employment and training (39%), children and family

relationships (39%), and housing and accommodation (37%). All domains were listed by women as one of their three priority areas with debt and finances, and self-esteem and coping skills listed least often by women. These results are in line with the profile of women reported in chapter 4.

As previously reported, while domains and goals are routinely captured, it is not easy to identify clear outcomes from the data available as information is reported in different ways by staff. The goal outcomes field at times contains more specific information about the goal, or information about what was done, rather than what was achieved.

While acknowledging the administrative burden on staff, it is worth considering whether two additional fields could be added to the database that would enable a clearer measure of progress toward goals, to add to the qualitative data currently captured.

> *6.   Recommendation*
>
> *Consider adding two additional fields to the WAM database, or investing in a client records management system, to improve the collection of data to enable monitoring and evaluation of outcomes for WAM participants. If the current database remains the main source of data capture then include the following fields:*
>
> *1. Mentoring Goal (from dropdown list) (e.g. "Social Connection")*
>
> *2. Specifics of the mentoring goal - open ended field (e.g. "broaden social network")*
>
> *3. Key actions taken - open ended field (e.g. "met with mentor regularly")*
>
> *4. Goal Outcomes - open ended field (e.g. participant has specific actions for broadening her network, or participant joined a new social group)*
>
> *5. Goal Progress - dropdown list (e.g. significant progress, some progress, little progress, no progress)*

While a broad range of outcomes were achieved for women, it was not always clear whether outcomes were a result of the mentoring relationship or not. Qualitative outcomes were reported where it was clear that the mentor had taken specific action in relation to the outcome, while in other cases it was not clear whether the positive outcome related to the mentoring relationship or other factors. Sometime goals were reported without an outcome or discussion of an issue was listed as an outcome.

For some mentees, just identifying a goal or discussing an issue impacting on them might be a positive outcome, however it is difficult to draw any firm conclusion from the data. For a number of matches, regular meetings with mentor was identified as an outcome and given the high proportion of mentees who listed social connection as one of their priorities it would appear that this is one of the successful elements of the mentoring relationship.

A range of qualitative outcomes are reported for each of the domains that came from the analysis of notes in the WAM database, mentor logs and through information provided by clients, mentors and staff. As mentioned above caution should be taken in drawing clear links between outcomes and the mentoring relationship as other factors outside of the mentoring relationship will have influenced these.

Social Connection

Social connection is listed as a goal in 50% of matches consistent with assessment information where social isolation was listed as a priority area for 69% of women.

WAM's service model and success is dependent on a positive social relationship being formed between the mentor and mentee. If this is not an outcome, then it is unlikely that change will occur in other areas.

Examples were provided where social connections had occurred during the mentoring relationship including catching up with the mentor for a chat, through to attending exercise classes together and building trust in people through the mentoring relationship. Other examples cited included the mentor giving the woman a reason to get out of bed in the morning, gaining confidence to attend community BBQs, joining social groups, playing basketball, meeting new mums and one took up horse riding lessons. For some women just having a person in their life to that they could connect to was extremely important.

> *I felt really re-assured to know that she was there and we talked about lots of things we had in common like gardening (Mentee interview)*

> *Not judgemental and speak to her about anything. Very helpful. Calming and understanding-motivational and helpful (Mentee interview)*

> *It was really good to have someone that wasn't clinical, to take me out and about and someone supportive. I've come a long way (Case notes)*

Legal Issues and offending

WAM engages women due to their contact with the legal system and 41% of women listed support in this area as a priority goal to work on. While mentors do not have detailed knowledge of the criminal justice system, case notes and interviews with mentors and women confirm the importance of having a supportive person with them to navigate the justice system, be present with them in court, provide another ear to matters being discussed and to support women undertake directions made following court.

> *We have an important role within the Judicial System- having someone independent has been really useful to interpret the court jargon into plain language- this gives the woman more prestige in the Court. The name WAM is respected within the court (Mentor)*

Other examples of mentors assisting women with legal matters including assisting them resolve a Work Cover claim, supporting women to make a police statement and take out an intervention order in relation to family violence, having a driver's license re-instated and supporting women with Child Protection matters.

> *Mentee had the support and assistance of her mentor to accompany her and complete a day of mediation regarding family trust matters. The outcome was good for mentee. Mentee has discussions with her mentor about her legal reps, and mentor encourages mentee to respond to correspondence and keep up to date so they know what is going on for her (Case notes)*

Case note analysis confirmed that having a WAM mentor accompany a woman to court was recognised by Magistrates as a positive indication of women's engagement in services to address their underlying issues.

> *Magistrate recognised mentee's hard work with rehab and detox, noted how well she looked compared to the last time she was in court- mentioned WAM and the support provided and her engagement with her mentor (Case notes)*

> *At Court, mentee received no conviction, a good behaviour bond and needs to complete a road trauma driving course.*

Mentee completed her parole in September 2020. Mentor wrote a letter to corrections advocating for her mentee (Case notes)

Mentee is a victim of crime. Made a police statement with mentor's aid; police initiated an IVO (Case notes)

Housing and Homelessness

Not all women supported by WAM are homeless, however it is a significant issue for those who are. Even for those women living in relatively stable accommodation, including homes owned by family, OOH accommodation and private rental, there was evidence in case note analysis that this accommodation is indicative of housing stress.

Those living with family were often sleeping in living spaces, felt unwelcomed in the home and identified that living arrangements were straining interpersonal relationships. Some women in OOH accommodation found this unsuitable and at times unsafe and a number of women in private rental were struggling with its affordability or were sharing houses with people they did not want to live with.

Specialist homelessness services are in place to support women in their housing journey but waiting lists are long due to the lack of suitable accommodation options more broadly. Despite mentors' inability to have much impact on systemic and individual homelessness, interviews and focus groups with staff, mentors and women suggests that for a number of women, mentors provide significant support in writing applications for housing, attending appointments and ensuring that they are safe and supported in their unstable/ unsuitable accommodation.

Mentee and I went together to every interview with housing, we talked first about how to approach, she really managed not to 'lose it' or abuse, (which I think was influenced by my being there too, she was a bit self-conscious about exposing herself) and she was fast tracked through the system, much to her own astonishment. This was great for her sense of being listened to, which is something she doesn't ordinarily expect (Mentor focus group attendee)

Other positive examples of housing outcomes reported included women being supported to:

- Attend specialist housing services appointments and apply for emergency accommodation
- Relocate to more suitable housing
- Find private rental
- Make a complaint about unsuitable housing
- Stabilise within existing accommodation
- Check on and vary existing housing applications

Children and Family Relationships

Fifty five percent of women successfully matched with WAM were parents of adult or dependent children and for some their criminal behaviour or its underlying causes had a significant impact on their relationships with them. This included dependent children being placed out of their care by child protection, family court interventions, and estrangement from adult children. A third of women matched identified improved relationships with their children and family as one of their priority goals. In addition to relationships with dependent or adult children this also included women estranged from their parents, siblings and other family members. Case notes indicate that mentors assisted women with a range of strategies to support their relationships with children and families including:

- Discussing routines and behaviour management ideas for caring for children
- Working together to address child protection requirements in relation to resuming care of children
- Practical supports including resources
- Assistance in writing letters to siblings
- Encouraging women to keep diaries on incidents of stalking by ex-partners who are perpetrators of family violence.
- Supporting women navigate the family court in relation to family violence
- Providing women with tips on how to have positive conversations with family members.

A number of women had successfully had children returned to their care during their involvement with WAM and continued to be supported by their mentor. There was also an example where a woman had a child returned to their care that was removed again following resumption of alcohol use. This mentee remained engaged with her mentor who was again working toward reunification.

Drug and Alcohol

Forty- two percent reported drug and alcohol use at assessment, although only 24% listed this as one of their mentoring goals. This may be due to them either being mandated to or already engaged with an alcohol and drug service to address this need and therefore not identifying it as a goal of the mentoring relationship.

While women significantly impacted by alcohol and drug use are generally screened out through assessment, a number of women matched were supported with drug and alcohol issues including:

- Women being encouraged and supported to continue to engage with alcohol and drug practitioners
- Women remaining sober for significant lengths of time
- Women completing detox programs and rehabilitation
- Women reporting feeling positive about changes made in their alcohol and drug use
- Reports of reduced usage of drugs and alcohol for those for whom abstinence was not the goal
- Mentors supporting women to engage with AA online during the pandemic

Increasing and problematic drug and alcohol use was often listed as a reason for women taking breaks in the mentoring relationship or dropping out of it due to hospitalisations, rehabilitation, or return to previous unhealthy lifestyles.

> *Mentee was attending weekly appointments with AOD, however ceased contact, returned to heavy use (Case notes)*

Health and Mental Health

Mental Health is a significant issue for most women in the WAM program with almost all listing at least one mental health diagnosis and many having multiple diagnoses. While WAM has limited ability to impact on clinical issues, there was evidence that mentors supported women to attend appointments, remain connected to health professionals, motivated women to seek attention for medical and mental health, and remain in contact if women are hospitalised.

Specific outcomes noted included:

- Developing coping skills to deal with anxiety including poetry and gardening

- Going to gym and exercise classes with her mentor
- Going for walks at the beach or in nature with her mentor
- Being supported to get mental health plans from General Practitioners

One mentee was sentenced to time in a forensic psychiatric facility and while all contact was remote the mentor identified small outcomes from the relationship.

> *We are taking baby steps in communication- practising making conversation and socialising. Mentee is gaining confidence to participate and ask questions (Mentor focus group attendee)*

Another mentor noted positive outcomes as stability in mental health.

> *Mentee is managing to keep addictions and mental health in a place where they are manageable*

Employment and Training

A third of women identified goals in relation to employment and training and this aligns with the high numbers of women reporting being in financial stress at the time of assessment and wanting to positively improve their financial situation. While the data cannot confirm that offending was directly related to lack of income, theft, in particular, is often a result of financial stress. WAM staff noted an increase in the number of women referred to WAM for public transport and traffic fines that maybe due to poverty rather than deliberate criminal activity.

For those women who identified goals related to employment and training a number of positive outcomes have been reported. These include:

- Undertaking TAFE courses
- Obtaining casual work
- Being supported to attend Fitted for Work to obtain clothing suitable for work
- Attending meetings with Job Providers with mentors
- Mentors assisting women negotiate with and complete Centrelink paperwork
- Reworking mentees' Curriculum Vitaes
- Increased shifts and hours of work
- Obtaining casual work

One mentee on maternity leave commented on the confidence she had gained in employment during her involvement with WAM:

> *I know when I am ready to return to work or study after maternity leave that I can do many things (Case notes)*

Debt and Finances

While goals around debt and finances were not commonly listed as a priority goal by women at assessment, for those that had this as one of their goals a number of positive outcomes were reported including:

- Successfully applying for the disability support pension
- Completing or planning to complete a financial literacy course
- Establishing payment plans to repay debt related to fines

- Successful applications to waive fines due to these being accrued in relation to family violence matters
- Being supported to access the Queen's Fund to obtain funding to pay costs related to vehicle impounding
- Working off fines through engagement with mentors

Self- esteem and coping skills

Self-esteem and coping skills were not commonly listed by women as a priority goal or a goal of the mentoring relationship. It is possible that coping and self-esteem are addressed through the interrelationships with other higher priority goals for women that have clearer or more concrete outcomes.

Outcomes reported under self-esteem and coping included feeling positive about meeting the requirements of orders, moving away from the criminal justice system, and achieving goals in relation to education and employment, volunteering, and successfully having children return to their care.

She has rebuilt her confidence, is liking herself and stopped blaming herself

She has built up confidence and self- worth

She now feels worthy of having a volunteer

Other Outcomes

Case note analysis confirmed a range of other outcomes including referral on to other services for professional assistance with mental health, alcohol and drug use, financial counselling and community services mentees had not known about. In one case, WAM staff organised a secondary consultation for a mentee with significant mental health issues who was then successfully linked in with a mental health outreach worker and a case manager from the local health service. This support had reduced the number of hospitalisations the woman needed.

5.3   Effectiveness is supporting women navigate the criminal justice system

Mentors come from a range of backgrounds including some who have previously or are currently working in the criminal justice system and bring this knowledge to the mentoring relationship. In addition all mentors attend training that includes a module on the criminal justice system that includes:

- A snapshot of the Criminal Justice System in Victoria
- The arrest process
- Legal language use and meaning
- The court process
- Types of sentences, orders and diversions that the magistrate can impose
- Preparing mentees for the day in court
- Support services available for women through the courts

Mentors attend monthly peer supervision that also includes relevant information about the criminal justice system , guest speakers on priority topics, and information updates. In 2020 this included updated training on preparing mentees for online hearings when the Magistrates' court changed its process as a result of social distancing restrictions.

While 41% of women identified legal issues as a mentoring goal, it is likely that numbers of women supported in this area is higher. Mentor notes and records suggest that most mentors provide support to mentees on court matters and meeting requirements of orders even if it is not a priority goal of the relationship. This can be as simple as providing an opportunity for women to talk about their anxiety about court, through to attending court with women, and more specific support and advocacy.

5.4   Reducing recidivism

During their involvement with WAM, 13% of participants disclosed re-offending and one woman received a custodial sentence. For those women still engaged with WAM, and particularly for those who have maintained a mentoring relationship for over 12 months, this may suggest that WAM has an impact on women's offending, with 87% of women not re-offending while connected to WAM.

While this is a very positive outcome it is unclear what happened for individual women post their exit from WAM, and the inter-relationship between other supports and interventions that occurred concurrently with WAM, to claim that this is an outcome of the mentoring relationship alone.

While acknowledging that WAM does not have the resources for longitudinal evaluation, it would be worth seeking funding to do some longer term follow up with women to gather data on re- offending rates over the longer term.

> ### 7.   Recommendation
>
> *Consider seeking funding to undertake a follow up review of women post their exit from WAM to gather information on their re-offending over time.*

5.5   Mentor characteristics

Between November 2017 and October 2020, WAM trained 76 mentors and 58 (76%) have been matched with a mentee. A number of mentors had more than one match in that period. Twenty three percent of mentors are now closed or inactive and 10% were never matched. The average age of mentors is 42 with the youngest 20 years old and the oldest 73 years old. Sixty percent of mentors are employed, 22% are students, and 9% are retirees.

Mentors had a broad range of experiences that had drawn them to WAM, including their own or a family member's lived experience of family violence, mental health, alcohol and drug issues and involvement in the criminal justice system. Most of the mentors who were students were studying courses relevant to WAM's work including law, criminology, social work, psychology and community services. Mentors who are retired had worked in health, law and other community services.

Those mentors who were employed were working in a broad range of sectors and workplaces with a number working in the legal and justice system, family violence organisations, and health services.

WAM Staff

WAM staff identified the important characteristics required for a successful mentoring relationship. This included mentors having a non-judgemental approach to the complex and confronting lives that women in the criminal justice system have, and the capacity to listen to difficult stories of significant trauma and abuse. Staff reported that women are often shamed by their experiences and look for someone who they

can trust, who knows what they are doing and has the ability to hear anything and not become distressed by it. Mentor availability is also important, as is reliability and commitment, as women often feel let down by others in their lives and society more broadly.

Staff report that some mentees have clear views when asked what characteristic they would like in a mentor and others leave this to WAM. Characteristics identified by mentees as important include:

- Having practical knowledge of the courts or local service system and living in a similar location to the mentee
- Sharing similar interests/ common ground including gardening, fashion
- Having a good sense of humour
- Having an easy going, unstressed personality
- Good advocacy skills
- Being patient and having good listening skills

Age of mentors is also important to other mentees. Some are clear that they would prefer being matched with someone of a similar age to them who can share stage of life experiences, while others prefer mentors who are older and bring experience to the relationship.

Staff reported that while mentors are screened and trained prior to matching, not all mentors end up being suitable for the role. This was confirmed by the WAM Executive Officer who identified that further work needs to be done in screening of mentors, reporting that some were not able to commit to the program in terms of their availability and others are not emotionally able to develop a relationship with the mentee. This may be due to their lived experience being triggered by their mentees presenting issues.

The organisation is currently investigating purchasing a volunteer management system that will enable the central capture of all required information for mentors and this could include collecting more specific information on mentor characteristics including those with lived experience.

8. Recommendation

When setting up the data fields in the volunteer management system consider what additional data on mentors needs to be collected at assessment that might indicate that mentors may require additional support when involved in a mentoring relationship.

Staff notes indicate that staff provide ongoing support to mentors and mentees throughout the course of the match. At times this is quite significant if mentors are distressed or the match is not going well. Given the limited funding for WAM, all staff are part time and not available for two days of the working week creating a void in their ability to be responsive to mentors and mentees who may meet up across the working week and need support following contact.

The WAM Executive Officer identified this as an issue and is currently exploring the option of appointing an additional case management position that could provide more support to the program and to complex matches.

9. Recommendation

> *When the new case management position is filled ensure that staffing support is available to support matches across the working week.*

Mentees

Mentees interviewed mentioned a number of factors that were important to them in a mentor they were matched with.

> *Mentor is a very good listener, very helpful and always gets back to me. She is very patient with me when I'm depressed and don't get back to her*
>
> *Nothing they could do better. In 10 years I've never had so much help before*
>
> *Mentor is really confidential- I do trust her in that way*
>
> *Having someone in my corner who has no judgment. She didn't give up on me. She has helped me through so many things and with so much of my life*

One woman commented on her mentor's calming and motivational impact on her, and highlighted the importance of the mentor remembering things they spoke about including her children's names and important dates. Her mentor sends her little texts from time to time in addition to zoom meetings that "surprise" and motivate her. This woman's family have noted the changes in her and are less concerned for her wellbeing knowing she has a mentor in her team.

Two mentees highlighted the volunteer nature of the program:

> *It's a volunteer program- nothing they could do better*
>
> *More of it [the program] for women- they are exceptional women and do it in their own time*

Mentors

Mentors identified a range of ways in which they have supported their mentees and what the mentoring relationship has been able to achieve and the areas where they felt unable to assist or make an impact. Achievements included giving participants moral support and being there for them in a different way to professional support. They are a sounding board for some women who don't have a friend, sister or mother to talk to about women's health issues including pregnancy, parenting and menopause.

Mentors noted that their availability was important to mentees and that this was different to professional and other supports who are time poor and often too busy to return calls or see mentees. While they don't have all the knowledge of the justice system, they are able to support and advocate for their mentees with other professionals and note that being from WAM is important in them being listened to and heard on behalf of their mentee.

> *Interpret court "jargon" into plain language- - using the name WAM gives the woman more prestige in the Court- we are respected*

One mentor, who had recently completed training but was not yet matched, had had contact with the criminal justice system in her own life and recalled her own experience of isolation in going through this on her own. Listening to the stories of other mentors' relationships with women during peer supervision really resonated with her and confirmed that this was what she wanted to do.

Having support would have been monumental and I want to give back

Characteristics that mentors noted that were helpful included:

- Being able to listen actively
- Not feeling pressured to solve all of a woman's problems
- Using curious questioning
- Not being judgemental
- Being human and genuine
- Using your sense of humour
- Being grounded and self-aware
- Being conscious of your own biases

Mentors expressed some frustrations in relation to the mentoring role including in not being able to impact on structural issues in the housing and homelessness and mental health systems. Some mentors felt that WAM "over promised" and had no power or authority to influence system issues in these areas that were priorities for their mentee. Other mentors seemed clearer that WAM doesn't promise to deal with structural issues but provides a "buffer" and "ear to bend" when mentees express anger and frustration in dealing with system issues.

We can help negotiate and be a separate person without a fixed agenda- we can support them to get to a better place- this can be invaluable

5.6   Summary

Overall WAM appears to be an effective mentoring program for women involved with the criminal justice system in Victoria. It operates as both an early intervention program for women having their first encounter with the justice system, but importantly also works with women who have a previous contact with the system and may act as an earlier intervention program to prevent women moving further into the criminal justice system.

The mentoring relationship works alongside professional supports that women have in their lives. The program's focus is broad and can work and be effective with women across a broad range of issues that underly their offending behaviour. If strong social connections between mentors and mentees are developed, this lays the groundwork for supporting women across a range of domains.

Outcomes in relation to mentees goals are at times clear and easily actionable, while for others, steps toward goals are incremental and take time to progress. Outcomes were reported for each of the domains of change that WAM has identified and are reflective of what is known about the characteristics of women in the justice system in Victoria.

Match length varies depending on both mentees' needs and outcomes. While some matches end early due to lack of engagement by mentee, others achieve positive short-term outcomes leading to closure. There is increasing evidence that WAM is engaging with women for longer periods of time and that relationships between mentors and mentees are continuing post the program suggesting ongoing positive outcomes from the match.

WAM successfully assists women navigate the criminal justice system through providing support through the court process and supporting mentees to meet conditions of orders. While no data is available on

whether women go on to re-offend following closure from WAM, it is positive that only 13% of women report re-offending while linked to the program.

Mentor characteristics considered important include having a non-judgemental approach and the ability to hear difficult stories of women's life experience.

Data presented in this chapter is qualitative and there is an opportunity to supplement this with some simple quantitative measures to confirm outcomes reported in this report.

6 EFFECTIVENESS (SHARING KNOWLEDGE)

6.1 Generated knowledge of women's lived experience of the Criminal Justice System

WAM continues to generate knowledge of women's lived experience of the criminal justice system. In addition to supporting 65 women through mentoring, the program undertook a Women's Voices consultation in 2018. These consultations enabled a deeper investigation of the issues facing women and explored in more depth what women need in order to improve the circumstances leading to their criminalisation.

The Women's Voices Consultation process had five objectives:

- To seek the expertise of women who have experienced mentoring to actively reflect upon mentoring as an early intervention model within the justice system.
- To consider how this could be enhanced to achieve improved justice responses and outcomes for women.
- To define the characteristics of mentoring that have been most helpful and to reflect on how these qualities may influence other justice services (for example-listening skills, understanding of the issues affecting women in the criminal justice system).
- To advocate for mentoring as a service that provides women with a humane, pro-social, community service model, that is flexible and responsive to the user's needs.
- To use the women's lived experience to advocate to the broader service system and influence change.

The consultation identified five characteristics reported by participants in helping them address the issues that led to their criminalised behaviour. These included the importance of social connection, emotional growth and regulation, self and peer advocacy, mentor quality and provision of financial relief.

In late 2020 WAM established a Women's Advisory Group that is now meeting weekly. The goal of this group is to involve women in the co-design of the mentoring program as it continues to evolve and improve. There is an expressed aim to build women's confidence to enable them to self-advocate and speak for themselves at conferences, events and through the media.

The Women's Advisory Group will provide WAM with valuable information on how to improve the mentoring program for women as well as continuing to add to the body of knowledge about what is known about women's direct experience of the criminal justice system and factors that influence their offending behaviour.

6.2 Sharing knowledge of women's lived experience of the Criminal Justice System

WAM plays an important role in sharing knowledge of women's experience of the criminal justice system through the experiences of mentees, mentors and staff working in the program as well as through the Women's Voices consultations and Women's Advisory Group. WAM shares this information through

presentations at conferences, Law Week events as well as the Executive Officer's involvement in a range of specific groups including Keeping Women out of the Justice System and Smart Justice for Women.

In addition to this WAM develops case studies on women's experience that are published in the WAM newsletter and annual reports. Case studies are also shared with funders and government to provide more detailed information on how the mentoring program impacts on women, as well as to further promote awareness and understanding of the characteristics of women involved in the criminal justice system and their specific needs. Ongoing promotion includes talking to community groups including Rotary and U3A.

The WAM Executive officer stated:

The more you do- the more you get heard.

7 CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the first three years of the WAM program found that the program has been successfully implemented and has had an impact in supporting criminalised women to address issues that underly their offending behaviour, in supporting women to navigate the criminal justice system and reducing recidivism in the short term. The program continues to build the knowledge on women's lived experience of the criminal justice system, including the complex inter-relationship between offending, family violence, homelessness, mental health and alcohol and drug use.

Many of the outcomes for women noted in this report are qualitative and there is an opportunity to strengthen the way data is collected to provide quantitative evidence to add to the positive outcomes reported.

8 REFERENCES

Russell, E., Carlton, B., Tyson, D., Zhou, H., Pearce, M., and Faulkner, J. (2020) *A Constellation of Circumstances: The Drivers of Women's Increasing Rates of Remand in Victoria*, Fitzroy Legal Service and the La Trobe Centre for Health, Law and Society: Melbourne.

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January 2019

9 APPENDIX 1 (DEMOGRAPHIC DATA)

FIGURE 1 AGE OF WOMEN

Age of women matched

Age	Number of women	Percentage
15 - 17	3	5%
18 - 25	6	9%
26 - 35	27	42%
36 - 45	17	26%
46 - 55	10	15%
56 - 65	2	3%

FIGURE 2 HOUSING TYPE

Housing type
(65 women)

Housing type	Number of women	Percentage
Private rental	19	29%
Family-owned house	14	22%
Office of Housing	13	20%
Homeless	7	11%
Transitional	5	8%
Rooming house	3	5%
Supported Accommodation	1	2%
Own house	1	2%
Motel	1	2%
Cabin Caravan Park	1	2%
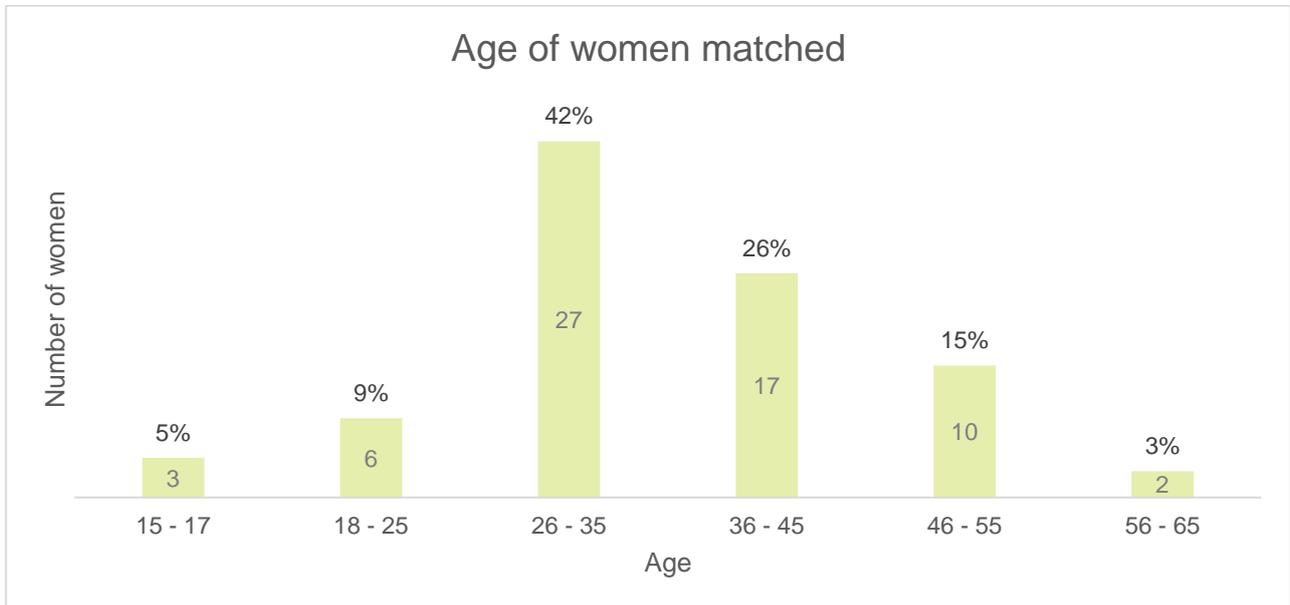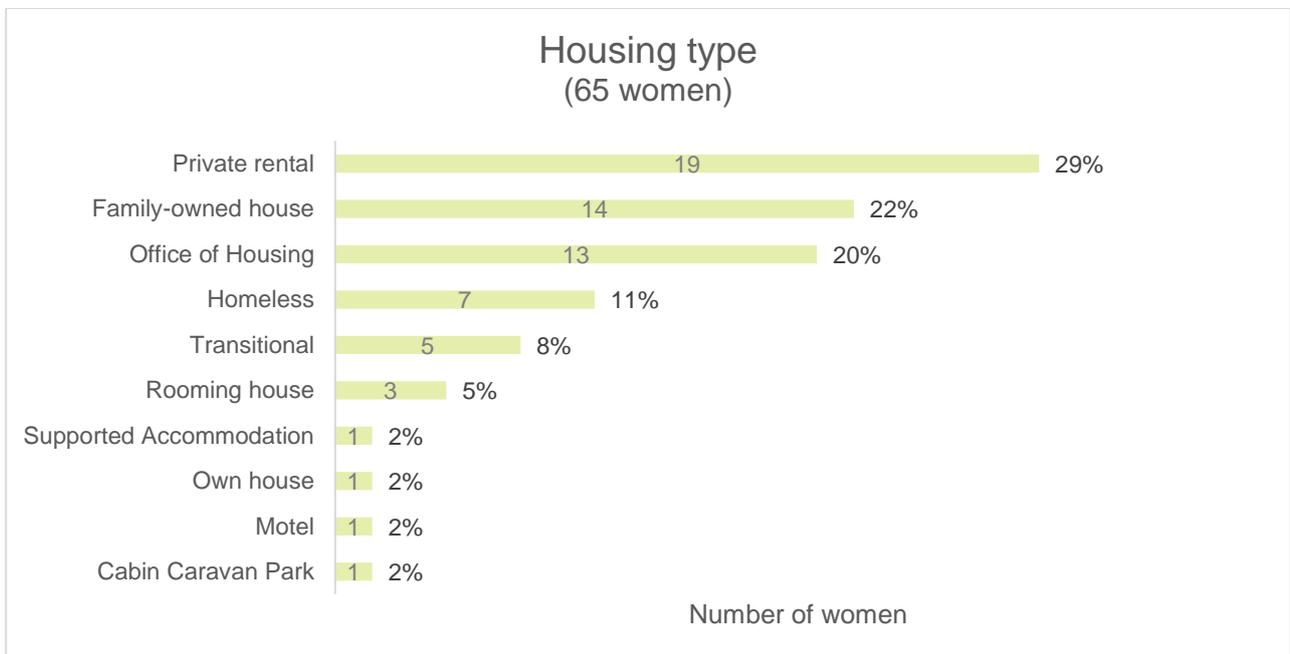
FIGURE 3 REPORTED FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family Violence - current and previous
(information available for 59 women)
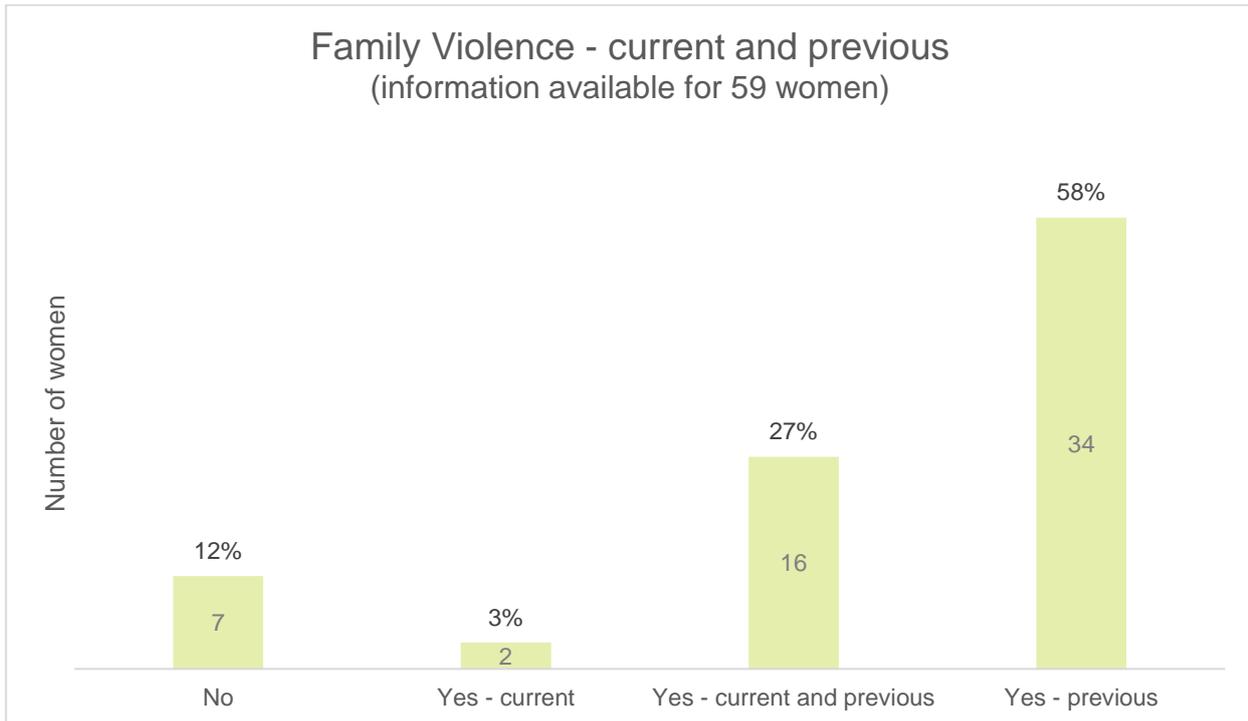
FIGURE 4 NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Number of children
(information available for 64 women)
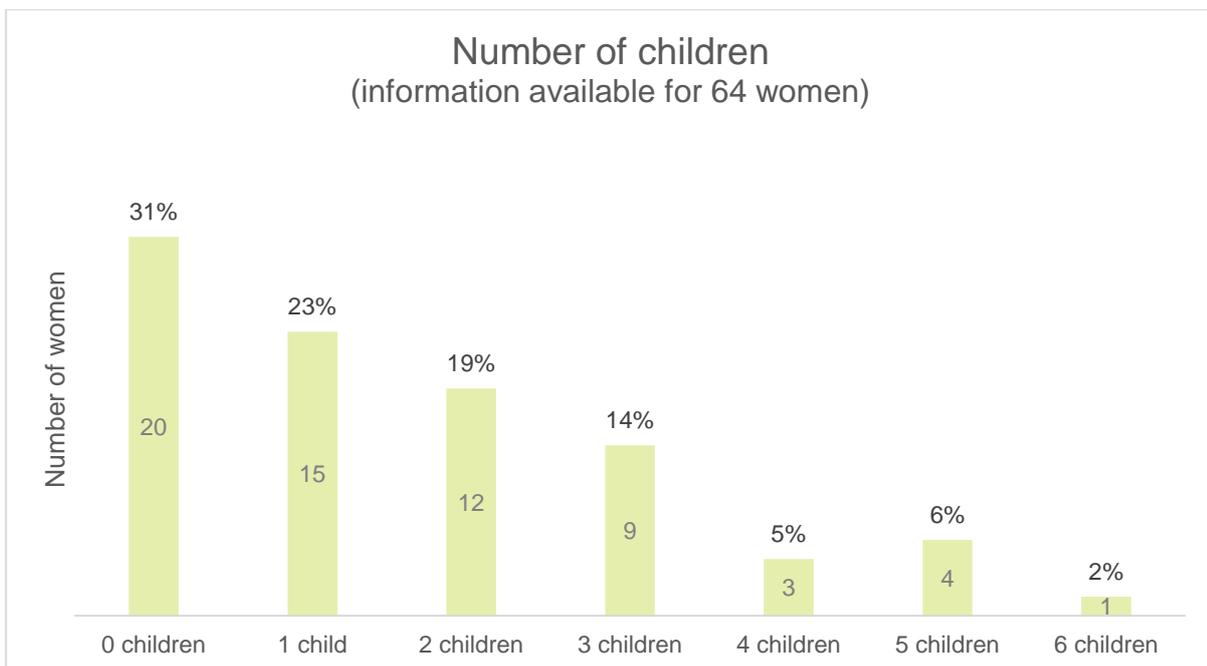
FIGURE 5 REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES BY TYPE

Mental Health diagnosis
(information available for 63 women)

Diagnosis	Number	Percent
Anxiety	34	54%
Depression	33	52%
PTSD	14	22%
Bipolar Disorder	10	16%
Suspected MH, no diagnosis	4	6%
NIL Reported	3	5%
Schizophrenia	3	5%
Psychosis	3	5%
YES (but specific diagnosis unrecorded)	2	3%
Eating Disorders	2	3%
OCD	1	2%
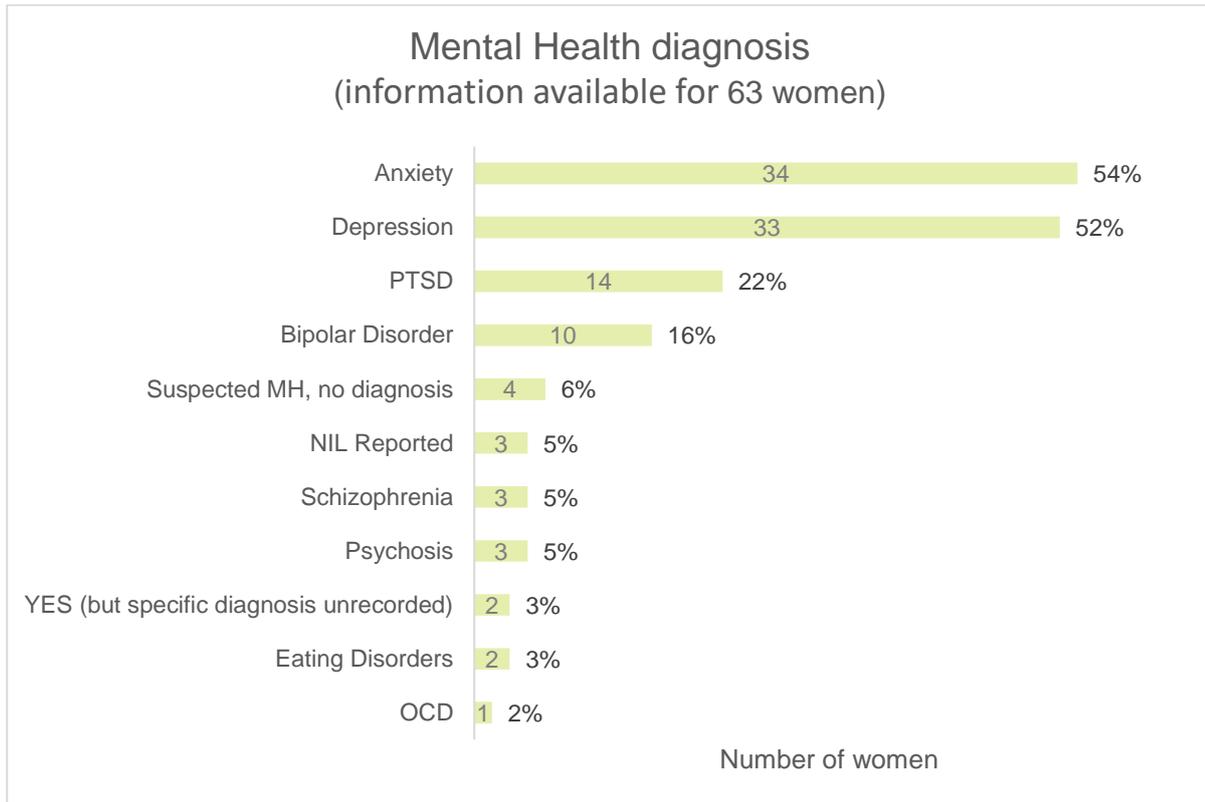
Number of women

NOTE: The percentages add to more than 100%, because one woman may have several diagnoses

FIGURE 6 NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES FOR INDIVIDUAL WOMEN

Number of mental health diagnoses
(information available for 63 women)

Category	Number	Percent
Three diagnoses	8	13%
Two diagnoses	32	51%
One diagnosis	14	22%
YES (but specific diagnosis unrecorded)	2	3%
Suspected MH, no diagnosis	4	6%
No diagnosis reported	3	5%

Number of women
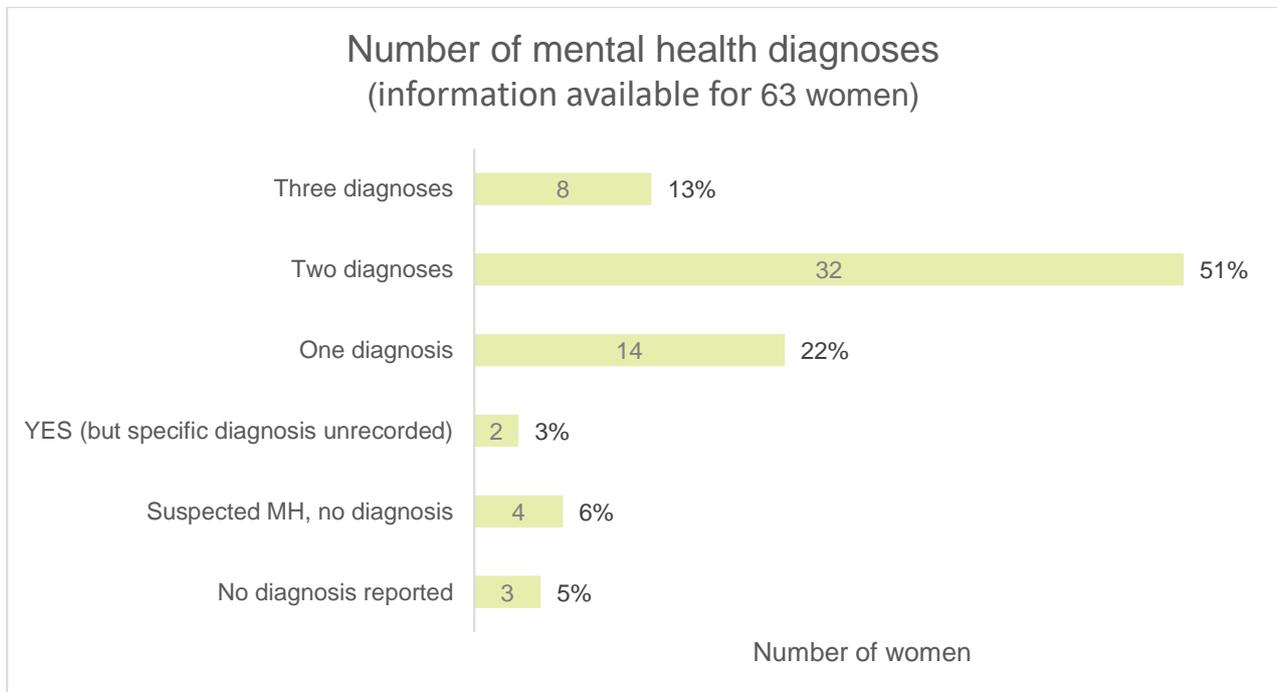
FIGURE 7 IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Impact of mental health
(information available for 60 women)

Category	Number of women
Significant daily impact	17 — 28%
Moderate impact	24 — 40%
Well managed - medication	4 — 7%
Well managed - no medication	3 — 5%
Minimal impact	10 — 17%
Not Applicable	2 — 3%

Number of women
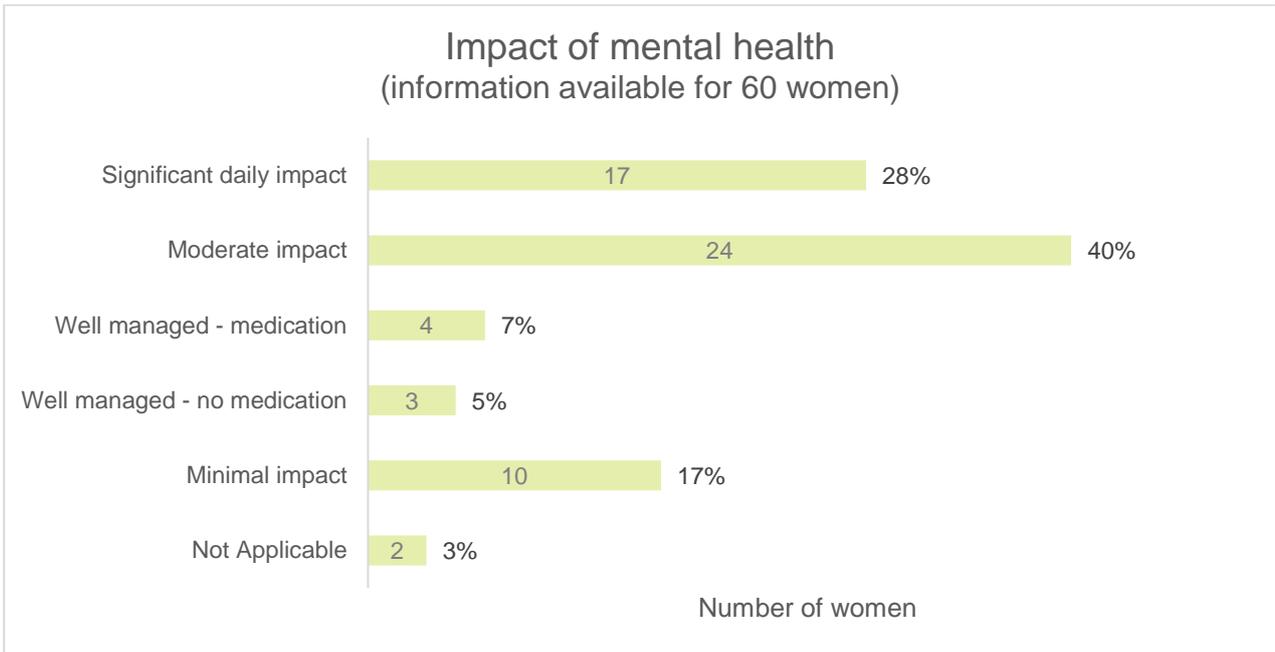
FIGURE 7 CURRENT AOD (PRIMARY)

Current AOD use - primary
(information available for 60 women)

Number of women

Category	Value	Percent
Benzos	1	2%
Heroin	1	2%
Cannabis	6	10%
Alcohol	7	12%
Ice	10	17%
NIL reported	35	58%
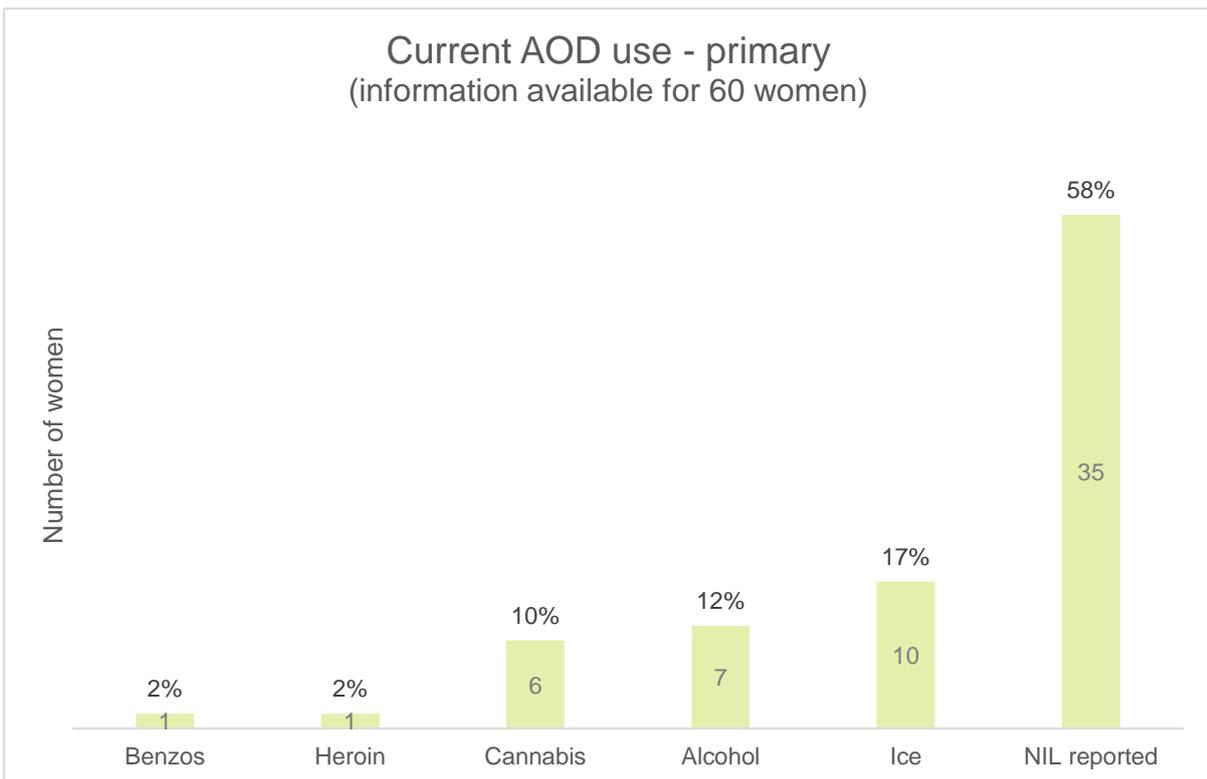
FIGURE 8 FINANCIAL STRESSORS

Financial stressors
(information available for 60 women)
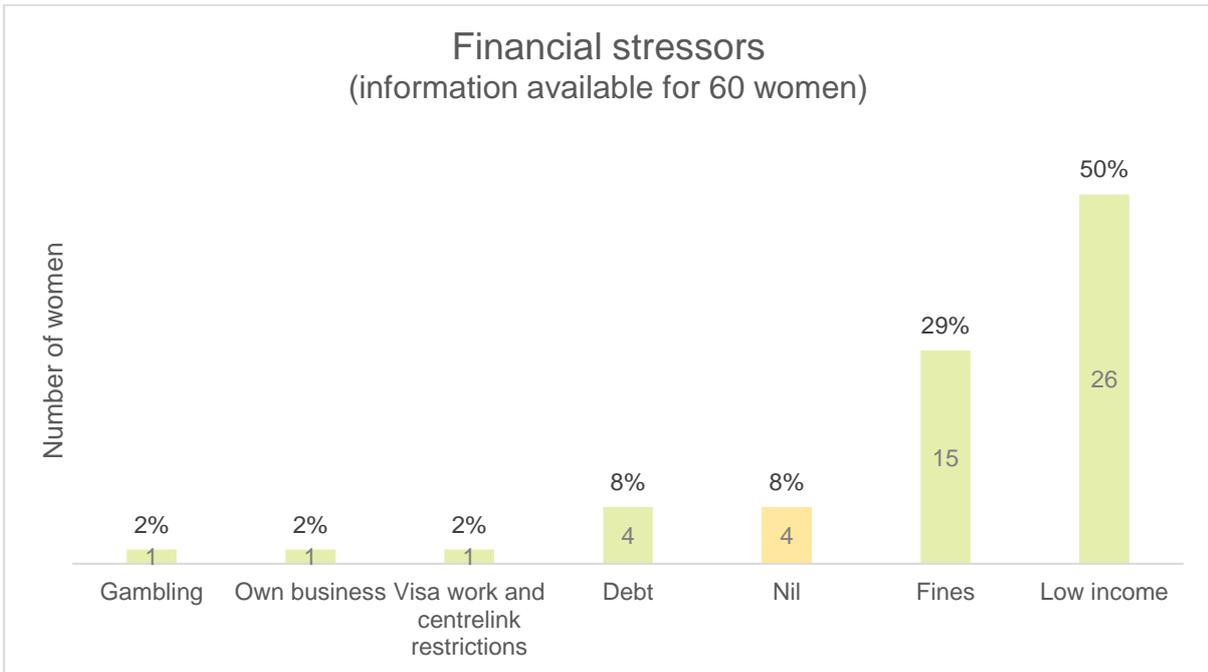
FIGURE 9 JUSTICE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Justice System connection
(information available for 62 women)
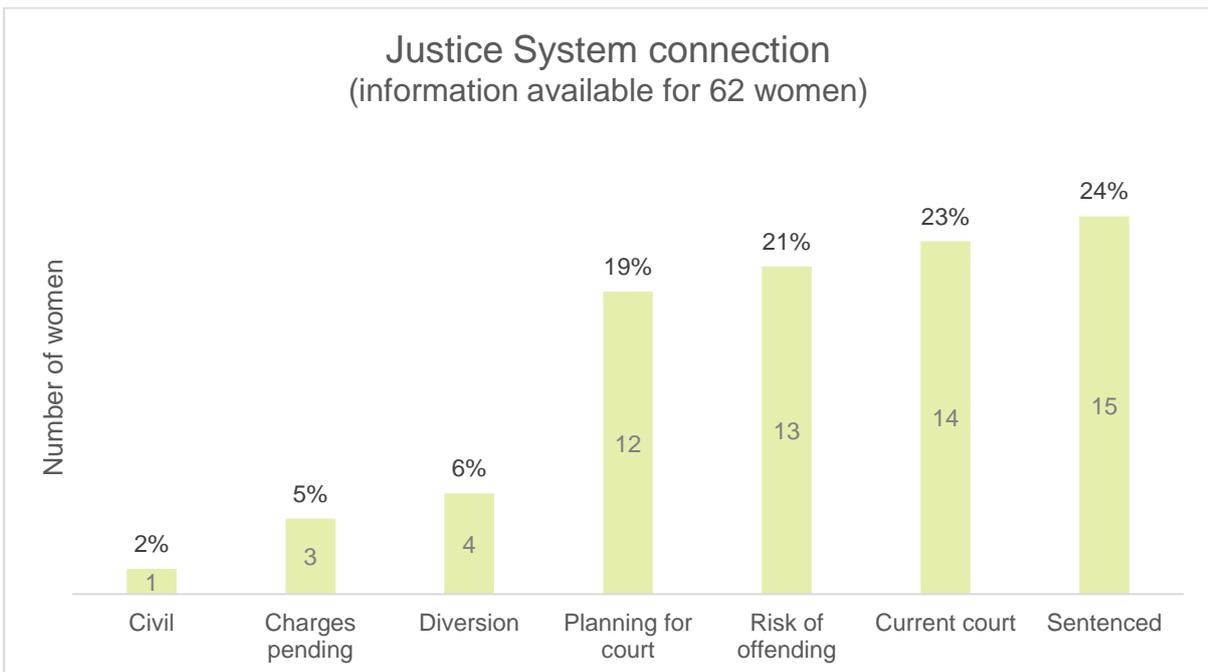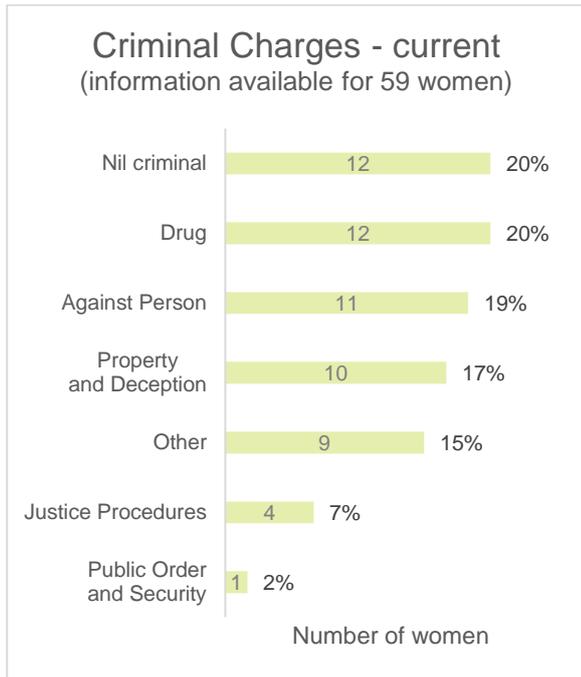
FIGURE 10 CRIMINAL CHARGES CURRENT

FIGURE 11 CRIMINAL CHARGES HISTORICAL

Criminal Charges - current
(information available for 59 women)

Nil criminal	12 — 20%
Drug	12 — 20%
Against Person	11 — 19%
Property and Deception	10 — 17%
Other	9 — 15%
Justice Procedures	4 — 7%
Public Order and Security	1 — 2%

Number of women

Offences - historical
(information available for 53 women)

Nil criminal	13 — 25%
Other	11 — 21%
Drug	9 — 17%
Property and Deception	9 — 17%
Against Person	6 — 11%
Public Order and Security	3 — 6%
Justice Procedures	2 — 4%

Number of women