
Resettlement of girls and young women: developing a gender sensitive approach

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A 5-year England-wide programme which examines and promotes best practice in the resettlement of young people and young adults leaving custody.

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Learning from wider research

Findings from research on beyonduidcustody.net:



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What we are talking about?

- Some messages deriving from:
 - Extensive literature review looking at the evidence resettlement of girls and young women (available on the BYC website) – “iterative synthesis”
 - Data from qualitative depth interviews and focus groups with girls, young adult women and resettlement practitioners
 - Online survey distributed to young women and practitioners
 - Earlier resettlement research with girls (Bateman, Melrose and Brodie, 2013)

The key gender-neutral principles for resettlement

Summary on YJB website:



Findings from reviews on
beyondyouthcustody.net:



The key gender-neutral principles for resettlement

1. Continuous service throughout sentence
 - Focus on resettlement from conviction
 - Importance of information flow
 - Tying in what goes on inside with what goes on outside

2. Preparation for release period
 - Preparation of the young person – inc ROTL, release programme
 - Early preparation of the community– early assessment, acc, ETE
 - Enhanced support during release period

3. Widespread partnership coordination to address multiple needs
 - Senior-level buy-in
 - Focus on “service brokerage” rather than case working
 - Engaging other state agencies
 - Engaging non-state agencies (prioritising accommodation and employers)
 - Partnership at strategic and operational levels

4. Engaging the young person for positive change – shifting their identity

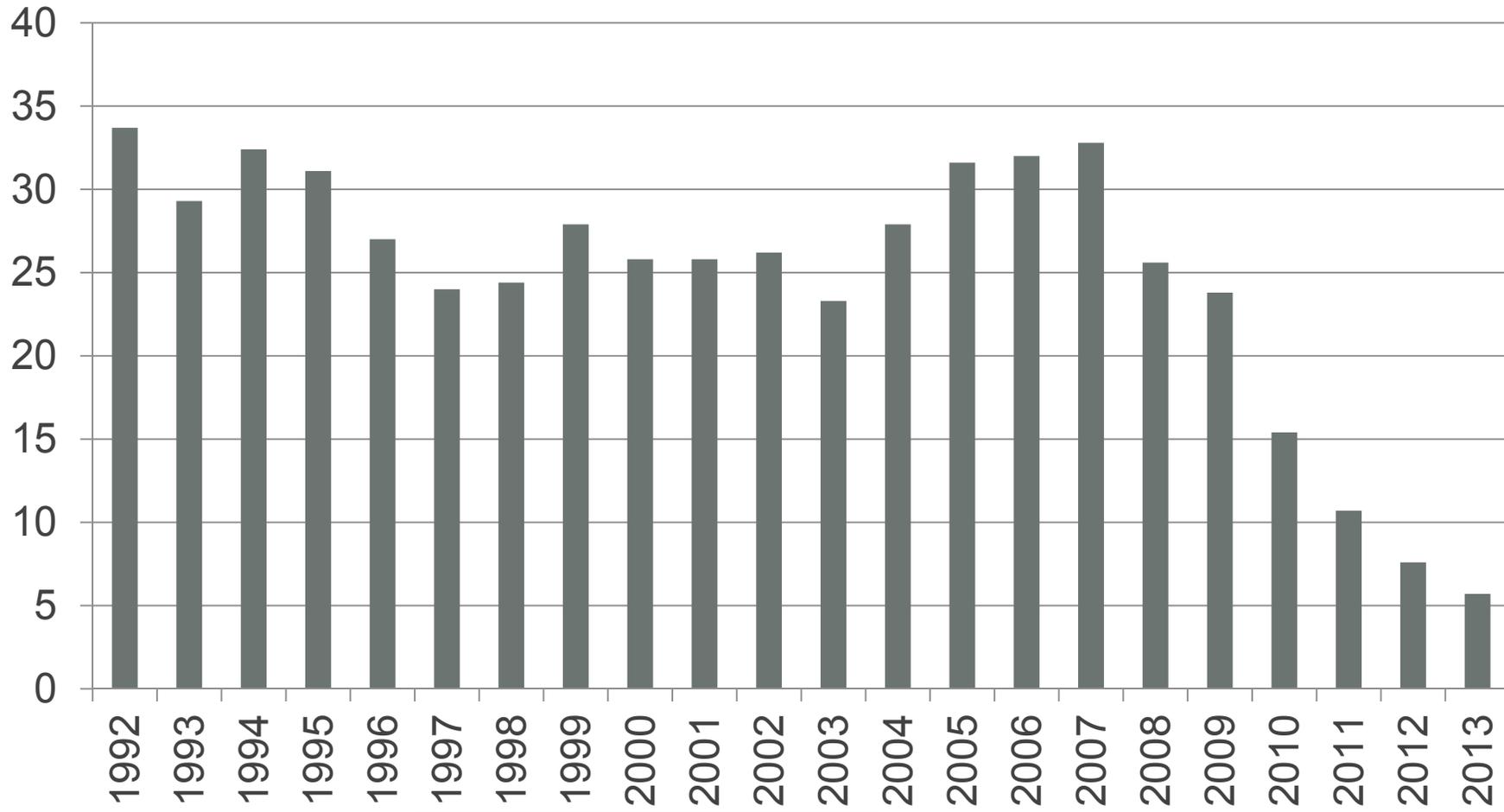
An ignored constituency

- *'An excursion through the twentieth century's developments in criminology is a journey through communities inhabited only by men, passing street corners and sea fronts occupied exclusively by male youth and into soccer stadia, youth clubs and rock venues where women and their experiences fail to register even a passing comment from the researchers'* (Scraton, 1990)
- Girls are particularly *'invisible'* because they *'fall between two stools'* (Burman and Bachelor, 2009)
- In a resettlement context, the visibility of girls is even lower because of their lower representation in the custodial population
- The evidence to date is thus largely inferential

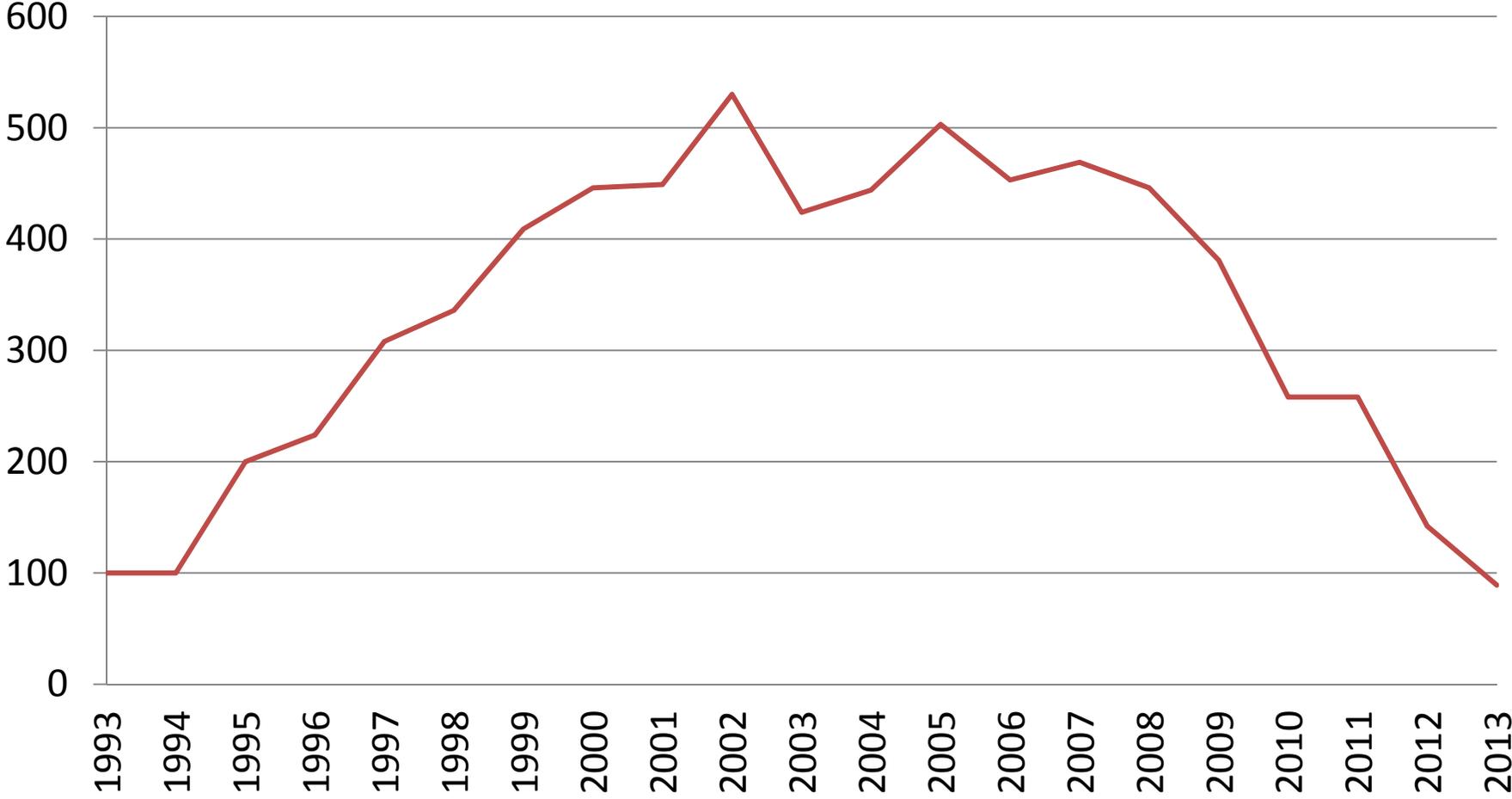
A constituency rediscovered?

- *'Arrests of teenage girls and women reach record levels: more than 250,000 detained by police in one year'*
(The Guardian, 29 January 2009)
- *'1 in 3 girl offenders are thugs: Violence is the most common first-time crime for under-17s'*
(Daily Mail, 11 February 2011)
- *'Rise of the violent ladette: girl gangs on rampage blamed on cheap booze'*
(Evening Standard, 21 August 2012)

And the reality: girls' total indictable offending (thousands):1992/2013



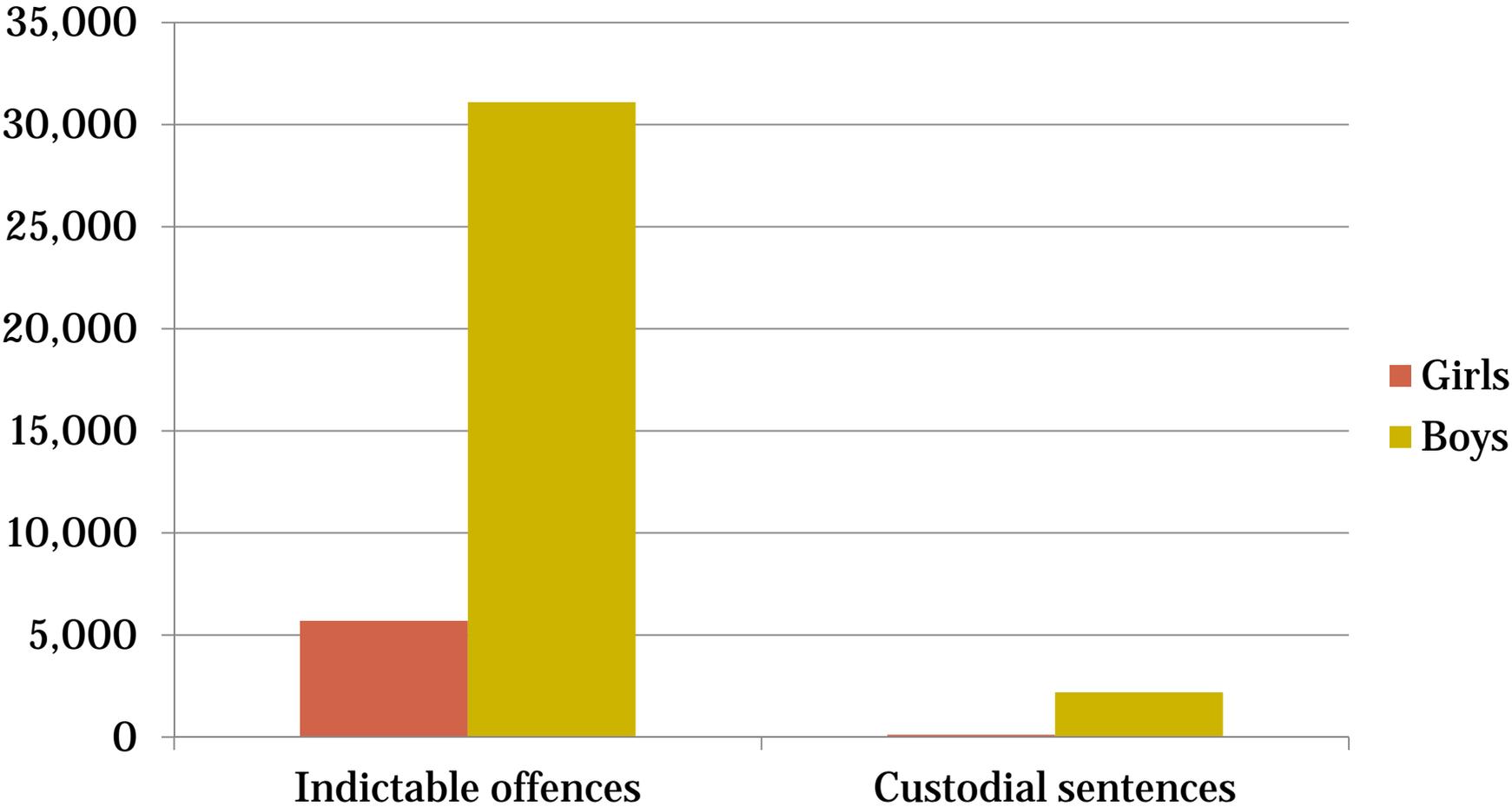
Girls sentenced to custody: 1992/2013



Under 18 female custodial population

Date	Number of girls in custody
December 2008	158
December 2009	134
December 2010	107
December 2011	105
December 2012	60
December 2013	59
August 2014	44
September 2014	49

Boys v girls



“Iterative synthesis”

- Very limited literature on what works with girls and young people in resettlement.

So, synthesised evidence from.....

- Criminogenic needs
- Effective work with girls and young women in youth justice
- Effective resettlement with adult females
- Indicative research on resettlement of girls and young women

Girls' pathways into offending

- Male factors hold true for females, but some other factors characterise females:
 1. Poor relationships
 - home relationships- abuse from (step) parents. Wider victimisation. Domestic abuse.
 - Wider victimisation. Let down by adults (Sharpe 2012). Exploitation.
 - More significant relationships with peers. Sources of support, status and identity – *‘over boys, defending personal reputation, as a response to name calling, or being the subject of gossip’* (Nacro, 2008)
 - Partner relationships and parenthood trigger for offending rather than desistance
 2. Increased mental health issues – including self harm and substance misuse
 3. Socio – economic factors, exacerbated by a gendered focus on consumerism in the form of fashion and beauty

Girls' pathways into offending

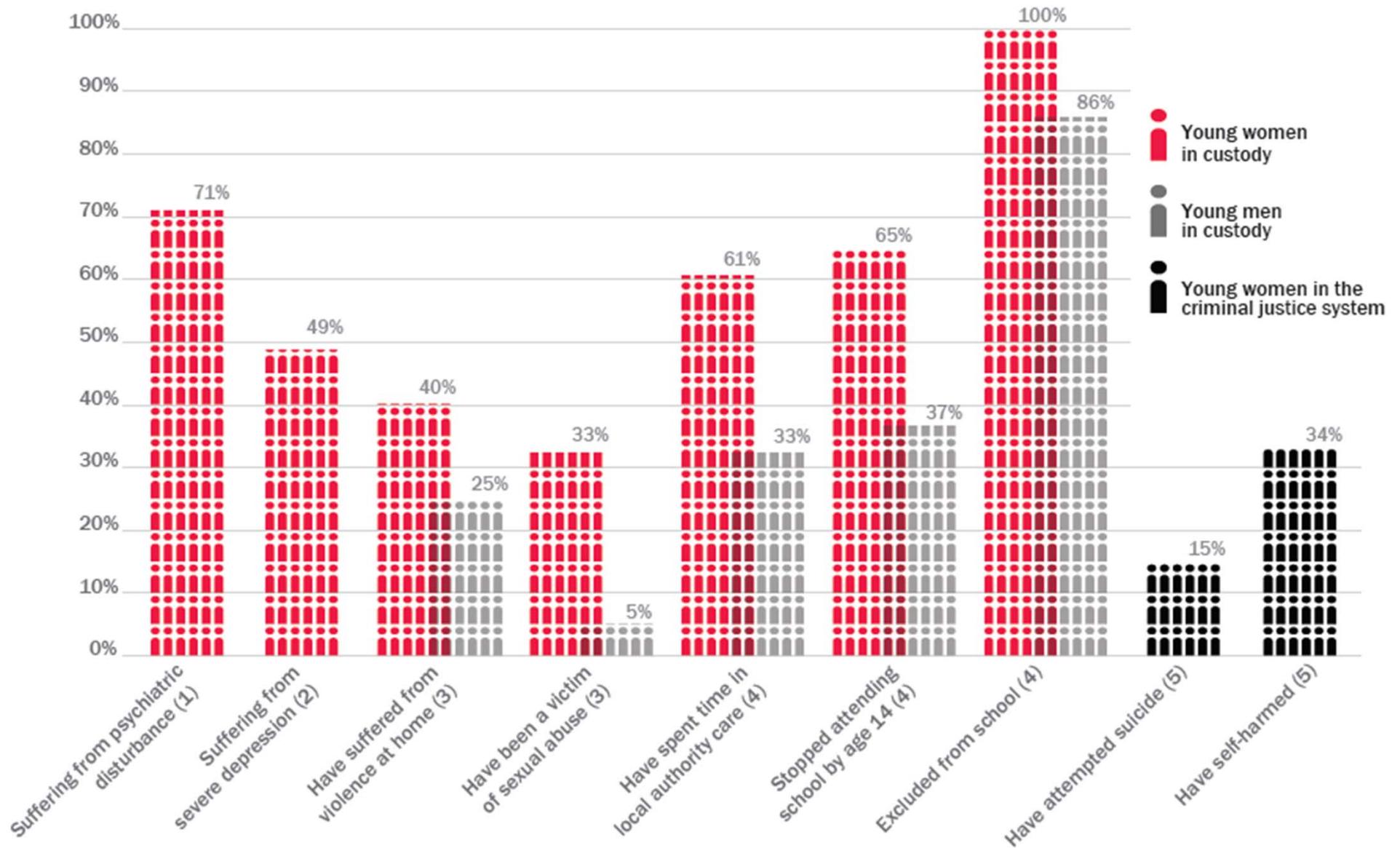
- Resulting in
 1. A vulnerable position
 2. Disempowerment
 3. Negative and fragile personal narrative



A vulnerable population

- My life before I came in was a bit complicated cos my mum's still in jail, my sister wasn't really on a talking basis with me and my little brother had just got taken into care, so life was a bit hectic [then] I went jail.'
- 'I started drinking quite a lot and getting in more trouble and then arguing with my mum a lot more and then getting in more trouble, so argue with her and walked out the house [I was] about 9 [drinking] cider'
- 'I don't like being in here but it's safer for me here rather than the hostel I was in'
- 'I think we're all vulnerable, whether we're quiet or loud, we're all vulnerable'

A more vulnerable population



Girls' pathways into offending

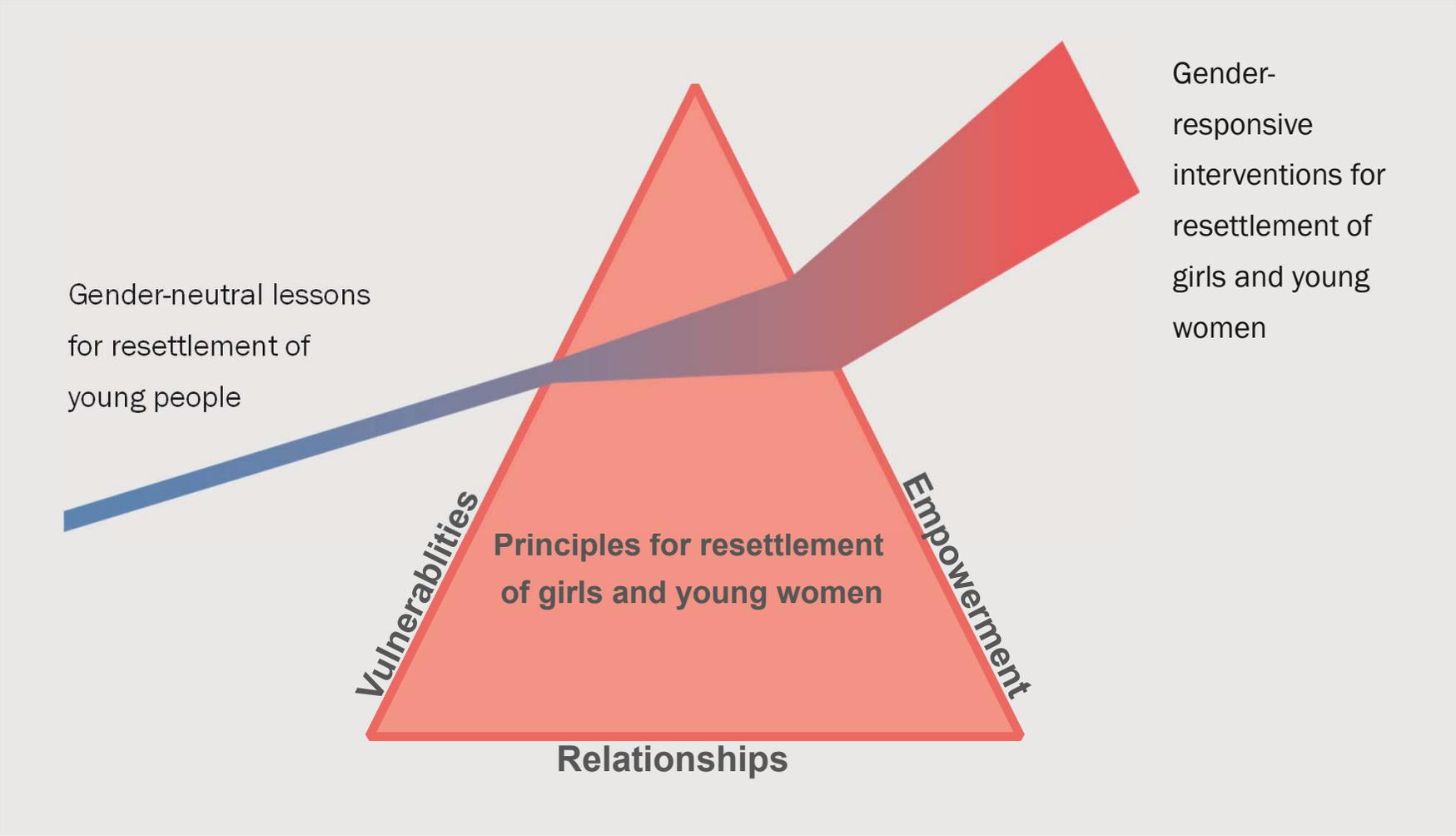
- Resulting in
 1. A vulnerable position.
 2. Disempowerment
 3. Negative and fragile personal narrative.
- Offending due to:
 1. Lack of ability to desist (coercion, incapacity)
 2. Trying to empower themselves (negatively)

Implications for working with girls

1. The gender neutral lessons for resettlement support still valid
2. Resettlement must acknowledge address the vulnerabilities of girls and young women
 - Recognise levels of trauma and victimisation
 - Safe environments, non-confrontational approaches
3. A focus on past, present and future relationships
 - Past trauma and abusive relationships
 - Present engagement with professionals
 - Future positive and supportive relationships to promote non-delinquent identities
4. Empower girls and young women to make positive choices
 - Structural support
 - Promoting agency through participation in planning, empowerment in supervision



A model: the gender prism



Picking up some issues: relationships

- **Maintaining / promoting relationships in the community**
 - more flexible use of release on temporary licence
 - improved support for family members and friends to visit
 - improved support to families to empower them to provide support in turn

‘The family members suffer. The family are important’
- **Relationships with professionals. Effective relationships:**
 - cross the custody /community transition
 - Provide a good model of non-coercive exploitative relationships
 - Involve girls planning their own resettlement: *‘the experts in their own lives’*
- **Staff who care**

Girls distinguish between staff who care and those who don't

‘Yeah, certain people go there to actually work, to help people but certain people just see it “it's a job, let me just get paid”, do you know what I'm saying...?’

Picking up some issues: empowerment and agency

- **Girls tend to display two different attitudes towards their future**
 - A sense of optimism associated with a conviction that it is within their power to make their future and give up offending; or alternatively
 - A sense of fatalism – frequently associated with a resignation that they will reoffend
- **Agency:** *‘Nothing’s really that hard, you can do it’*
- **Fatalism:** *‘...nothing works ... I’m a bit nervous. I’m not sure if I’m strong enough...’*
- **Staff who are seen as caring are better able to foster a sense of agency**
‘I’m excited about leaving, I think about it every day. I’m thinking about going on a course, my YOT worker’s arranged, it’s a childcare and youth work course. I’m going to start it in here, and then finish outside’

Picking up some issues: addressing vulnerabilities

- **Trauma informed practice**

Recognising the reality of previous victimisation and potential negative experiences of previous agency intervention

The importance of a gender sensitive environment for the delivery of services

Acknowledging difference

- **Provision of emotional – as well as practical – support**

- **Realistic expectations**

Deprivation of liberty is traumatic – but so is the transition back to the community (Hazel and Bateman, 2014)

Some questions for practice

- Is it really different for girls, and if so, in what ways?
- What are the implications for service providers – both in custody and in the community?
- Should services be gender specific? What does that mean in real terms?
- What are the obstacles to promoting agency and showing girls that professional service providers care, and how might they be overcome?