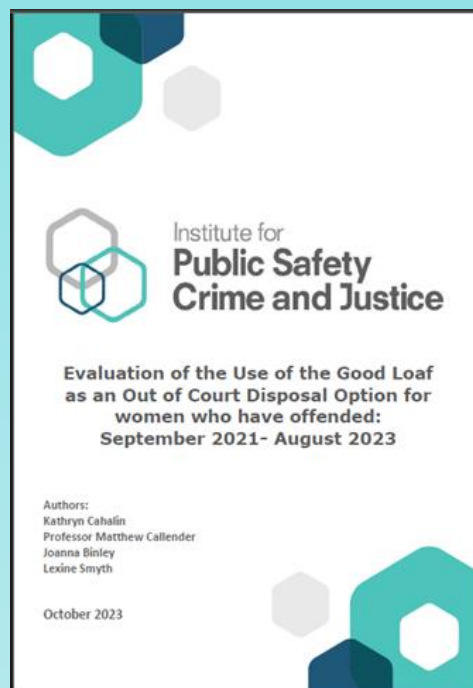


Executive Summary

This short report provides a summary of findings of two evaluations (occurring from March 2019-April 2021 and September 2021-August 2023) of an Out of Court Disposal Option for women in Northamptonshire. This involves the referral by police of women who have committed low-level offences to programmes designed to help tackle the cycle of unemployment, offending and poverty at a women’s centre.

Key messages of the evaluations are outlined below:

- ❖ Both evaluations of the use of the OOCDO have demonstrated positive benefits for women in terms of building resilience, self-esteem, and wellbeing; especially for those that have low levels to begin with.
- ❖ Women reported changes to their understanding of what healthy relationships are, understanding domestic abuse experiences, how to avoid negative situations, and feeling better equipped for future relationships. A theme highlighted across both evaluations was an improved confidence through being listened to and supported, as the women reported having increased self-esteem, and increased motivation to set and achieve goals. Further key benefits highlighted by the women referred to the learning of practical skills such as employability skills, handling finances and healthy eating.
- ❖ Over the two evaluations, the number of police recorded OOCDO referrals to the women’s centre reduced from 84 to 78, this is notable as the first evaluation period was largely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, in the first year of the second evaluation period there were 55 referrals compared to only 23 in the second year.
- ❖ The findings from the second evaluation suggests that the allocation of women to programmes may not always be addressing the issues which led to their offending behaviour. The low numbers being referred means that it may be difficult to provide women with an appropriate programme in a group setting in the time women are mandated to complete the OOCDO.
- ❖ In some cases, women were not sure if the OOCDO had been explained to them by the police and said they only understood what it was when they were contacted by the women’s centre. Women highlighted that they were in a very distressed state when they were arrested and therefore, found it difficult to absorb the information given by the police.
- ❖ Comments from women suggested that the women’s centre had been proactive in encouraging women to engage with them beyond the OOCDO. The responses from women show that some intended to continue contact and receive further support. Some women suggested that follow-up checks after the programme had finished could be beneficial to determine whether any further support is needed.
- ❖ Many female offenders have multiple unique vulnerabilities which can inhibit their ability to fully engage with services. For example, half the women declared that they had mental health issues, about a quarter said that they had a long-term physical health condition and almost a fifth could be classified as neurodiverse. Some women spoke of alcohol issues and others had limited English. Early identification of women’s vulnerabilities and specific needs will allow service providers to adapt programmes and support to better suit individual needs so that women can successfully engage with the programme.



Women in the Criminal Justice System and the Female Offender Strategy

Women within the Criminal Justice System are recognised as being some of the most vulnerable people in society. Female offenders on average have a higher prevalence of complex needs than their male counterparts; being twice as likely to suffer from depression, and more likely to report symptoms indicative of psychosis (25% compared with 15%)¹. More than half have experienced emotional, physical, or psychological abuse as a child² and 57% report having experienced domestic violence³. Evidence suggests that the factors that can lead to men and women to commit crime, and to reoffend, can vary significantly as can the way in which women respond to interventions⁴. Therefore, tailoring interventions to the specific criminogenic needs of women can be more effective than applying a non-gender specific approach⁵.

The Government's Female Offender Strategy (2018) emphasised that females are less likely to be violent offenders, more often committing low-level offences, with over three quarters of women sentenced to custody receiving sentences of fewer than 12 months. This is a significant concern as females, who are more likely to be primary caregivers, are often housed in prisons further from their homes (due to the limited number of women's prisons) which is likely to cause significant suffering for both female offenders and their children⁶ ⁷. In addition, the Government's Female Offender Strategy (2018) argued that short sentences offer a limited level of public protection or any real time for rehabilitative activity, and can aggravate vulnerabilities in female offenders, indirectly raising the risk of reoffending through housing, employment, and familial instability.

A key component of the Female Offender Strategy is to reduce the female prison population, with fewer sent to custody for short periods, shifting the emphasis to community orders and/or diversion into community support. A key mechanism advocated by the Female Offender Strategy is the use of Out of Court Disposals (OCD) which enables low-level offending to be dealt with proportionately without recourse to the courts and address the underlying causes of offending.

Northamptonshire and the Use of a Women's Centre as an OCD Option

In 2019 the Northamptonshire Office for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) and The Good Loaf secured funding from the Ministry of Justice via the Female Offender Strategy to implement an OCD option specifically for women. The Good Loaf is a social enterprise, community bakery and operates three cafes, which provides programmes and opportunities for women within a women specific environment. From March 2019, Northamptonshire Police could issue a conditional caution to women that have been involved in low level offending⁸ requiring women to attend 5 sessions with The Good Loaf on one of their programmes that are designed to help tackle the cycle of unemployment, offending and poverty. Across the two evaluations there were four programmes which women were allocated to - these were a work programme, a domestic abuse programme, a safer relationships programme and a wellbeing programme. The programmes available across the two evaluation periods varied because of covid-19. On receiving the referral, The Good Loaf carry out an assessment of the women's needs and allocate the woman to the appropriate intervention or course. From the start of the introduction of the OCD Option to March 2021, an evaluation on the scheme was conducted by the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice (IPSCJ) on behalf of the OPFCC and The Good Loaf. However, the evaluation was hampered by a slow initial use of The Good Loaf as an OCD and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the OPFCC commissioned a further evaluation of the programme which ran from September 2021 to August 2023. This paper reflects on the data from both evaluations to provide a more robust understanding of the use of The Good Loaf as an OCD.

¹ Light *et al.* 2013

² Williams *et al.*, 2012

³ Prison Reform Trust, 2017

⁴ Corston, 2007

⁵ NOMS, 2015

⁶ MOJ, 2018

⁷ Roberts and Watson, 2017

⁸ A Conditional Caution is issued if the offender admits the offence and accepts the

condition(s). If the conditions are complied with or completed within the timescales determined, the case is finalised and there is no prosecution.

IPSCJ Evaluation Method

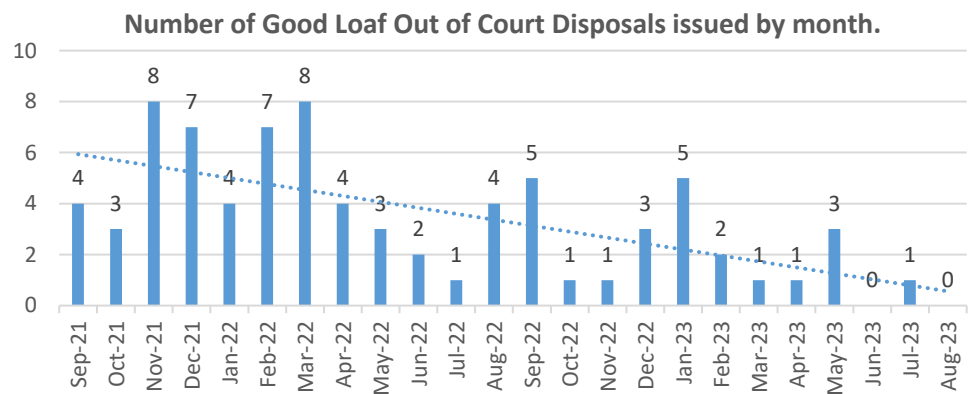
This short report draws upon findings, from quantitative and qualitative data collected in both evaluations, on the use of The Good Loaf as an OOC. A mixed method approach for data collection included the use of process data provided by the police and The Good Loaf on referrals, completion, and breaches. Surveys were used to collect pre and post measures of the women’s resilience, wellbeing, and self-esteem. These determinants were self-reported using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)⁹, the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (SWEMWBS)¹⁰ and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES)¹¹. Additionally, qualitative information on the women’s opinions, expectations, and experiences before and after the interventions was gained through the surveys and interviews.

Use of the Good Loaf as an Out of Court Disposal

The latest two-year evaluation period has seen a reduction in the use of The Good Loaf as an Out of Court Disposal Option by Northamptonshire Police with numbers in the second year consisting of less than 30% of the entire sample. In the first year from September 2021 to August 2023 there were 55 referrals made compared to only 23 in the second year of the evaluation. This two-year period also experienced a reduction in its use compared to the previous evaluation period, April 2019 to March 2021.

Over the two evaluations, the number of police recorded OOC referrals to the Good Loaf reduced from 84 to 78, this is notable as the previous evaluation period was largely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation: It is important that the decreased utilisation of The Good Loaf as an Out of Court Disposal Option for women is explored to establish what the reasons for its decline are so that they can be addressed.



Information from the Police on the OOC Option and The Good Loaf

When I was arrested, I didn't even understand you know because I was very distressed...and I didn't know I had to do this course.

Women were asked about whether the police described the Out of Court Disposal Option to them and what would happen next. In most cases women said that it had been explained to them. However, some women were not sure if it had been explained fully by the police and they only understood what it was when they were contacted by The

Good Loaf. Women highlighted that they were in a very distressed state when they were arrested and therefore, found it difficult to absorb the information given by the police. A couple of women talked about having felt they had been misinformed by the police of the format of the programme and what the programme was about. Additionally, a couple of women interviewed commented that they believed they had been verbally and physically mistreated by the police. This was reported to the Commissioner during the project.

They just said it was like nothing it was just a bit like a speed awareness so course so I was expecting something like that, and they said because of Covid it would probably be done online which it wasn't anything like that...

Recommendation: Police review the information women are given regarding the OOC and how and when that information is delivered, so they are fully informed. Additionally, women should be provided information on how they can make a complaint about the police if they feel that they have been mistreated.

⁹ Smith et al. 2008.

¹⁰ NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2008.

¹¹ Rosenberg, 1989.

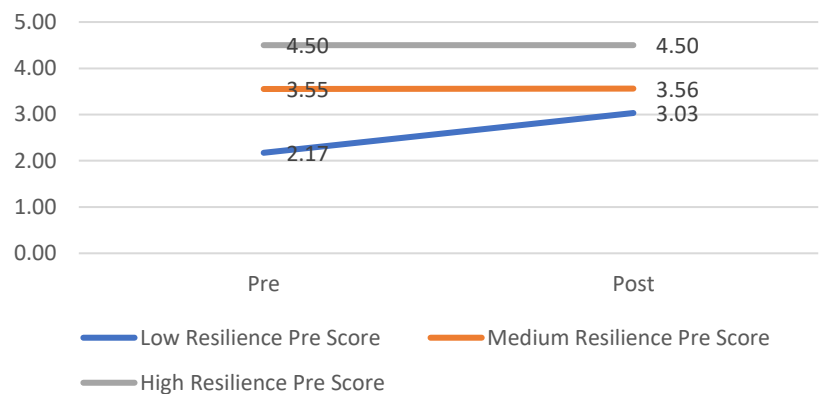
Impact on resilience, wellbeing and self-esteem

The most recent evaluation, like the previous evaluation, *shows that on average women experienced an improvement in their resilience, wellbeing and self-esteem measures pre to post intervention for all the programmes provided by The Good Loaf.*

Resilience

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) was used to measure resilience (Smith et al., 2008). The scale was developed to assess a unitary construct of resilience and contains positively and negatively worded items. The BRS score interpretation is 1.00-2.99 (Low resilience), 3-4.30 (medium resilience) and 4.31-5.00 (high resilience). Collating the pre and post scores across the two evaluations 48 cases had pre and post BRS measures, the average pre score was 2.85 (low resilience) and the average post score was 3.3 (medium resilience). Therefore, the average change in BRS score was +0.5, a positive improvement. When looking at women’s pre score those that started with low resilience saw the highest average increase in their resilience (+0.86), compared to only 0.008 for those that already had medium resilience to start with and no change for the one case that had high resilience to start with. All programmes saw an average improvement in resilience across the evaluation periods with women on the wellbeing programme, seeing the most pronounced average improvement (+0.53).

Mean pre and post BRS score by category of resilience women started in

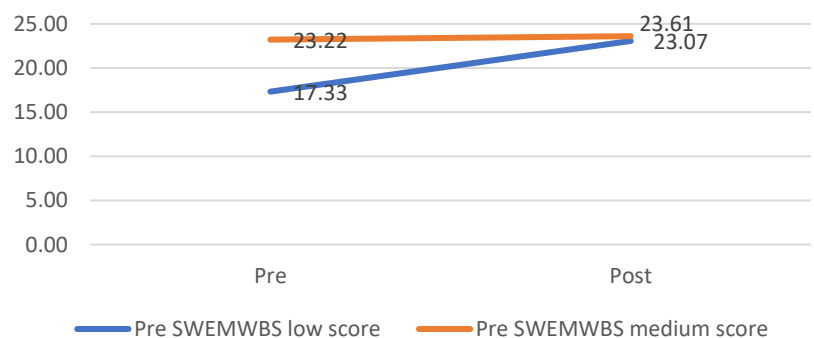


Wellbeing

In the first evaluation period the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (WEMWBS) was used to measure wellbeing. Scores on the scale range between 14 and 70 and a higher score denotes a higher level of mental wellbeing. Scores 40 or below indicate ‘probable depression’, scores 41 to 44 indicate ‘possible depression’, scores 45 to 59 indicate ‘Average wellbeing’ and scores 60 or above indicate ‘High wellbeing’. There were 30 cases with WEMWBS pre and post scores, the average pre-score was 45.57 whereas the average post score was 51.87, meaning there was an average improvement in WEMWBS scores of 6.3. In most cases (23, 77%) women saw an increase/ improvement in their WEMWBS score.

In the second evaluation wellbeing was measured using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). Higher scores indicate higher levels of mental wellbeing with the highest possible score being 35. The recommended cut off points are low wellbeing = 7.0-19.5, medium wellbeing = 19.6-27.4 and high wellbeing = 27.5-35.0¹² Across 21 cases with pre and post scores the average pre-score was 19.96 (the lower end of what would be classed as ‘medium wellbeing’) and the average post score was 23.41 (the middle range of what would be classed as ‘medium wellbeing’), meaning that the average improvement in scores pre to post was 8.44.

Mean pre and post SWEMWBS scores by category of wellbeing women started in



¹² This is calculated by putting approximately 15% of participants into high wellbeing and

15% into low wellbeing. Using this approach, UK population samples put score ranges as follows, the top 15% of scores range from

27,5-35 and the bottom 15% from 7.0-19.5. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/>

Two-thirds (14, 66%) of women saw an increase in their SWEMWBS score. When looking at women’s pre score women that started with low wellbeing saw the highest average increase in their wellbeing (6.09), compared to only 0.54 of those that already had medium wellbeing. All programmes saw an average improvement in wellbeing across the evaluation periods with the work programme, seeing the most pronounced average improvement in both evaluation periods.

Self-Esteem

Self-Esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). It uses a scale of 0–30 where a score less than 15 may indicate problematic low self-esteem. In the first evaluation there were 31 cases with RSES pre and post scores. In this sample the average pre-score was 15.5 whereas the average post score was 19.5, meaning there was an average improvement in BRS scores of 4.03. In most cases (77%, 24) women saw an increase/ improvement in their BRS score, 13% (4) saw a reduction and 10% (3) saw no change.

In the second evaluation, across 18 cases the average pre-score was 16.5 and the average post score was 19.7, representing an average increase pre to post of 3.2. In just under three quarters of cases (72%,13) women saw an increase/ improvement in their RSES score. Therefore, collating the data across the two evaluations, 49 cases had pre and post RSES measures where the average pre score was 15.88 and the average post score was 19.59. When looking at women’s pre score women that started with low self-esteem saw the highest average increase in their self-esteem (4.4), compared to 3.24 for those that would not have been classed as having low self-esteem. Women on all programmes saw an average improvement in self-esteem across the evaluation periods with the domestic abuse and wellbeing programmes seeing the most pronounced average improvement (+4.0 and +3.96 respectively).

Mean pre and post RSES score by category of wellbeing women started in



Benefits from Women’s Perspectives

Women reported a range of different benefits from the programme and the further support provided by The Good Loaf. Women were asked how useful the course was in meeting their needs. During the most recent evaluation, over a third (9, 36%) selected ‘very useful’, the same proportion (9, 36%) selected ‘useful’ and a further 16% (4) selected ‘fairly useful’. Two women (8%) selected ‘not very useful’ and only one

(4%) woman selected not at all useful. When asked

how the course could be made better, of the 26 responses, a high proportion (11) said that nothing could be improved.

Personally, I don't think there is a way to improve. It was perfect. The mix of courses and café work was great, and the session content was really good.



Women were asked to rate whether the programme had changed how they think or act in any way. 4 (16%) said 'a lot', 7 (28%) said 'quite a lot', 11 (44%) said 'a little' and 3 (12%) said not at all. One woman described the programme as having changed her life in combination with her also attending Alcoholics Anonymous *"my life is very different than it was 6 months ago"*. Others commented that it changed their

Changed my mindset - it has changed for example if I get into a relationship for instance, I understand boundaries and consent and that would change my decisions and actions.

understanding of what healthy relationships are, understanding Domestic Abuse experiences, how to avoid negative situations, and feeling better equipped for future relationships. A theme highlighted across both evaluations was an improved confidence through being listened to and supported, as the women reported having increased self-esteem, and increased motivation to set and achieve goals. Further key benefits of The Good Loaf, highlighted by the women referred to learning practical skills such as employability skills, handling finances and healthy eating.

Future Contact

Comments from women suggested that The Good Loaf had been proactive in encouraging women to engage with them beyond the OOC. The responses from women show that some intended to continue contact and receive further support through attending courses, volunteering or receiving support with issues such as accommodation. Additionally, comments suggest that women know that The Good Loaf is somewhere that they can return to in the future, if they are not currently in the right place to engage further with The Good Loaf. It was suggested by some women that it would be useful to have a follow-up from The Good Loaf in case additional support is needed.

Research by Gelsthorpe et al. (2007) examining provisions for women offenders in the community found that sufficient time is needed to build trust and secure relationships between female offenders and service providers so that efforts to promote change and wellbeing are successful. Gelsthorpe and Wright (2015) question the extent to which it is possible to effectively support female offenders within a time-limited criminal justice framework and therefore suggest community services should have the capacity to allow women to return to the programme or centre for continued support when required. As some of the women who are referred to The Good Loaf will have issues which may continue to arise and impact their lives, it can be beneficial to women for The Good Loaf to sustain contact after course completion to continue to promote development. It is also encouraged that service providers establish wider community networking and signposting to more specialised services after women's involvement.

Recommendation: The Good Loaf could consider adding follow-up checks after women complete the OOC to their current process to provide longer term support or signposting if needed.

Engagement (breaches, including possible reasons for disengagement)

According to police data, 83% (64) of 78 cases were recorded as having complied with The Good Loaf OOC, whilst 17% (13) were recorded as having breached. These figures reflect data on compliance rates of all OOCs across England and Wales as approximately 83% of conditional cautions are complied with by offenders¹³. Evidence suggests that breaching occurs across all OOC programmes and is not simply unique to The Good Loaf. However, there is the potential to increase engagement by considering the causes of breaching which include difficulties around time and location, especially for women who may struggle to organise arrangements for childcare and work. Another potentially significant cause for disengagement may be the poor allocation of women to programmes, as some of the women reported that they felt the programme was not relevant to their needs or the cause behind their offending; *"Did not feel that course was necessary, (I) was not happy about starting the course, wanted help related with the reason for the referral"*. The initial assessment and identification of female offenders' needs is integral to be able to refer them to the necessary services and is more likely to enhance positive programme engagement and outcomes.

¹³ Ministry of Justice (2013)

Assignment to Programmes

The findings from the evaluation (Sep 21 to Aug 23) suggests that the allocation of women to programmes may not be addressing the issues which led to their offending behaviour. The allotment of women to programmes appears to be more strongly related to the time-period women were referred, with the Wellbeing Programme being more prominent in the first year of the evaluation and the work programme being more prominent in the second year.

Why I am here, it just had no relevance at all...if it was more, say like the courses and things were more towards why you are here sort of thing rather than doing arts and crafts and things like that...

In addition, analysis of the offences that women indicated that they had committed in the pre surveys suggests that there were a high number of cases where the offence involved their children either in terms of neglect, being drunk in charge of a child or having an altercation with their child. In these cases, women were referred to either the Wellbeing Programme or the Work Programme, which would not directly address these offences. The low numbers being referred to The Good Loaf means that it may be difficult to

Recommendation: The processes by which women are assigned to specific OOC providers based on individual needs should be reviewed as well as the processes to identify the *right* intervention/support by providers allocated.

provide women with an appropriate programme in a group setting in women' mandated time to complete the OOC. In their evaluation of a Revised Conditional Cautioning Framework in Northumbria, Rowe *et al.* (2022) identified resourcing as a key challenge for pathway providers partly due to lower than anticipated referrals, which restricted the range of programmes and opportunities that could be offered.

Catering for Individual Needs and Potential Barriers to Engagement

Many female offenders have multiple unique vulnerabilities which can inhibit their ability to fully engage with services. Thus, early identification of female offenders' vulnerabilities such as substance misuse, mental health issues and neurodiversity will allow service providers to adapt programmes and support to better suit individual needs, so that women can successfully engage with the programme. Issues around suitable referrals and the range of available programmes was demonstrated within the most recent evaluation of The Good Loaf as an OOC, as concern over relevance of the programmes to tackling the cause of offences was highlighted.

Recommendation: It would be beneficial to complete a strategic needs assessment that maps the needs of the women and the service provision landscape to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to address underlying causes of offending behaviours.

Mental Health Support

A high proportion of the women (49%) self-reported that they have a mental health issue within the evaluation from September 21 to August 23. This is predominantly higher than the recorded proportion within the wider population of England, as data suggests about 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week.¹⁴ Addressing mental health was a clearly identified need prior to Covid-19. Covid-19 encouraged the acceleration of this agenda, so The Good Loaf created the Wellbeing Programme to provide mental health support but also to be able to deliver a programme that did not rely on external organisations during Covid-19. However, given the high proportion of women with self-identified mental health needs; the change in circumstances post the Covid-19 pandemic; and the recent reduction in use of the Wellbeing Programme in favour of the Work Programme, it may be beneficial for The Good Loaf to review how mental health issues are being supported in the cohort.

Recommendation: Consider whether an external service with mental health expertise and/or if an increase in partnership working with mental health services to provide additional or ongoing support for the women, would be of benefit.

¹⁴ McManus *et al.* 2016

Alcohol Misuse

In this evaluation two women spoke of alcohol issues, one of which felt alcohol was her primary issue and did not have a post survey. The other women had referred themselves to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and credits the combination of the two interventions as the reason she was able to turn her life around. She noted that her alcohol issue was not picked up in Custody, even after speaking with a doctor; she felt that they assumed that it was a domestic abuse issue. Such cases demonstrate how

The conversation that I had with the doctor in custody ... everyone was obsessed with if there was domestic violence in the relationship, there was none ... alcohol was the problem. Nobody understood that until I spoke with (The Good Loaf).

more focus is needed on identifying risk factors such as substance/alcohol misuse prior to referral (whilst in custody) so that women can be referred to relevant organisations and initially access specialist support (such as AA).

Further Challenges to Engagement

Vulnerabilities such as neurodiversity, physical disability, trauma, or language barriers, which are commonly identified among offenders, can also be a barrier to effective engagement and compliance with OOCs. Just under 1 in 5 women that completed pre-surveys classed themselves as having a learning disability, ADHD or Autistic Spectrum Disorder. In addition, one case in the process data was recorded as not having completed the pre-survey due to having learning difficulties. Data monitoring of women’s neurodiverse needs will allow for a better understanding of whether engagement and outcomes for this cohort differ.

For this evaluation period, 47 (60%) of the 78 women that were referred to The Good Loaf for an OOC completed pre-surveys. In 5 cases the reason recorded for not completing the pre-surveys was a language barrier, therefore inhibiting their ability to participate in the evaluation process. More significantly, such language barriers are likely to have hindered their ability to fully engage with and benefit from The Good Loaf provision. Women cannot be expected to effectively engage and develop from OOCs designed to prevent reoffending behaviour if they are impeded by language differences. Vulnerabilities such as neurodiversity and language barriers should be identified and recorded early so that the necessary supportive provisions (such as a translator) can be made.

Discussion and Implications

The two evaluations of The Good Loaf as a provider of OOC programmes has demonstrated that women-based community programmes can positively support female offenders to develop and change their damaging beliefs and behaviours by building resilience, self-esteem and healthy relationships. However, as outlined within this short report there are improvements to the system of OOCs which practitioners and policy makers should consider, surrounding the identification of individual needs, informed participation, engagement, and provision of specialist services. Female offenders have specific criminogenic risk factors and needs which should be supported through tailored interventions which address the underlying causes of offending.

If you would like to know more about the full evaluation report (October 2023) on which this short report is based please contact the Director of the IPSCJ at the University of Northampton Professor Matthew Callender (matthew.callender@northampton.ac.uk).

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