



Exploring the Listener Scheme in a women's prison: the importance of a gendered approach to peer support for women who self-harm in custody

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Abstract

Purpose

Without exception, research on the contribution of the Prison Listener Scheme as a form of peer support for those who self-harm in custody has focused on men's prisons. Women's experience of custody is shaped by their experiences of hegemonic masculinity that also mediate through women's roles as mothers and caregivers. Women's self-harm is similarly influenced by these gendered experiences. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Listener Scheme as a form of peer-to-peer support for women contributes to women managing their self-harm in a female prison.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper employed a case study design with mixed methods approach using a quantitative questionnaire with prison staff (n=65) and women in custody who had self-harmed (n= 30). Qualitative methods included a focus group with Prison Listeners (n10) and semi-structured interviews with women who self-harm (n10) and prison staff (n10). Four days were also spent observing the prison environment.

Findings

Findings suggest that women seek support from other women as peer Listeners for three main reasons; their previous difficult experiences with men, a displacement of the mother role and their attachment needs in custody. This paper suggests that peer support schemes internationally should be tailored to providing support for these types of gendered experience to support women who self-harm in custody. This has implications for the training and support of Listeners in women's prisons.

Research limitations/implications

This exploratory research was conducted in one female prison and while can be considered to test proof of concept is limited in its generalisability.

Originality/value

This paper suggests that Listeners providing peer-to-peer support for women in custody who self-harm will encounter triggers for this behaviour based on women's experiences including; how women relate to men; women's experience of the way custody displaces their role as mothers and women's need for safe attachments in custody. These gendered experiences have implications for the training and development of peer support schemes in women's prisons, such as the Listener scheme. Further research is needed to compare the gendered types of support Prison Listeners provide depending on whether they are located in male or female prisons.

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3 **Key words** – Prison Listener, women prisoners, self-harm, prison peer support, gender

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5 **Article Classification** – Research paper

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8 **Research question**

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11 Exploring the Listener Scheme in a women’s prison: the importance of a gendered approach
12 to peer support for women who self-harm in custody

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15 **Introduction**

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18 Self-harm defined as any “act of self-poisoning or self-injury carried out by an individual
19 irrespective of motivation” (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2011,
20 p. 4) is a gendered issue. Research testifies that the reasons why women self-harm are
21 different to their male counterparts. The literature reveals that women in custody engage
22 in self-harm for numerous reasons, which include current and previous traumatic events,
23 negative experiences of the prison environment, and isolation in a single cell (Marzano,
24 Hawton, Rivli & Fazel, 2011). Additionally, other contributing causations include the early
25 days of imprisonment (NOMS, 2012) and mental health concerns (Ministry of Justice, 2013).

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29 Research suggests that women often have significant addictions and mental health
30 problems, and are more likely to engage in self-harm (Prison Reform Trust, 2015).
31 Therefore, although women are far fewer in the UK prison population (3,797 compared to
32 their 78,675 male counterparts (Official Statistics, 2019) they account for almost 5 times
33 more incidents of self-harm than men.

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37 Historically, the prison estate has been designed for the incarceration of men (Lemgiuber,
38 2000) manifest through the architecture design and security practices. Indeed, current
39 research acknowledges the use of Trauma Informed Care and Practice for women is
40 problematic because of this ‘hostile environment’ (Jewkes, Jordan, Wright & Bendelow,
41 2019). These features of a custodial environment are evident in female prisons despite
42 research that testifies to the needs of women in custody as more complex (Ministry of
43 Justice, 2013). For example, restricted access to children (Corston, 2007; Baldwin and
44 O’Malley, 2015), prior experience of abuse (Wright et al., 2016; Prison Reform Trust, 2015),
45 mental health issues (Light et al., 2013), and the removal of coping methods such as drugs
46 and alcohol (Prison Reform Trust, 2015).

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50 Being imprisoned intensifies women’s prior experiences of abuse and exacerbates existing
51 mental health issues and/or renders women vulnerable to new episodes of mental ill health
52 such concerns: the prison environment makes women significantly vulnerable, given that
53 they were already at risk when they entered custody (Caulfield, 2016). Women are over-
54 represented in prison populations, a trend that would be reversed if, as Corston (2007)
55 advocates, women were given fewer custodial sentences.

To date, the prison estate has not been adequately adapted to meet women's needs in terms of access to treatment for mental health issues, education, employment and debt management (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Furthermore, research shows that it is extremely important to ensure that the gendered needs of women in custody are being met by the prison estate (Walker and Towl, 2016) as a gendered aspect of prison is that it represents a time of limited control for women, which can lead to self-harm (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2005; Crewe et al, 2017).

One way that the prison system can respond to women's needs is through peer-to-peer support schemes that see women supporting each other based on their common experience. There are many benefits of peer support (Farrant and Levenson, 2002), in terms of affecting better health outcomes of prisoners (Woodall et al., 2015), and the improvement of organisational skills and behaviour (Collica, 2014). The Listener Scheme is one such source of peer support that adopts the same structure and arrangements in both male and female prison establishments.

The Listener Scheme is supported by Samaritans as a registered UK charity, which trains volunteers to offer confidential advice 24 hours a day (Samaritans, 2017). Samaritans provide the Listeners Initial Training (LIT), which consists of eight sessions held over a period of 3–6 weeks that are organised within the prison establishment. The seventh training session focuses on identifying and understanding self-harm, including why individuals engage in the behaviour, the difference between self-harm and an attempt to end a life, and to equip Listeners with the skills to respond to this behaviour. The purpose of this seventh session is to identify what self-harm is and to help Listeners understand some of the reasons why prisoners engage in this behaviour,

Ongoing training provides a refresher for Listeners to help them to continue to support those who continue to self-harm in custody. Currently the content of the LIT and the refresher training is the same in male and female prisons. This means that there is limited understanding about whether the Listener Scheme should provide more gender specific support (Stewart, 2008). The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Listener Scheme as a form of peer-to-peer support for women contributes to women managing their self-harm.

Methods

The study adopted a case study design (Stake, 1995) in one women's prison. A mixed methods approach was employed to collect quantitative data using a questionnaire with prison staff (n=65) and women in custody who had self-harmed (n= 30), this enabled the use of purposive sampling to include participants in the qualitative part of the study. Qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups were captured from Prison Listeners (n=10), women in custody who self-harm (n=10) and prison staff (n=10).

Observations over a four day period were conducted on A, B, C, D, E, F wings and the Therapeutic Community that operated in the prison, which was located on J wing. The interview schedules were developed from exploring the literature to reflect women's

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3 gendered experiences of custody, which may lead to their engagement in self-harm (Crewe
4 et al, 2017). The questions explored how women used the Listener Scheme in relation to
5 their self-harm behaviour.
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8 The methods used in the study together with details of the sample of women, Listeners and
9 staff is described in more detail in a related paper (see Griffiths, Bailey & Slade, 2019).
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11 12 **Results**

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14 The findings revealed that women's experiences are inextricably linked with their gender
15 and this contributes to triggers for their self-harming behaviour in custody in three
16 interrelated ways:
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19 *The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men*

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21 *Displacement of the mother role*

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23 *Attachment needs in custody*
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27 **In turn, these experiences influence the reasons why women seek support from their**
28 **peers as Listeners.**
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33 *The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men*

34 Women in this study disclosed feelings of 'hate' towards men that they attributed to the
35 relationships they had experienced before coming into prison. "A man could do what they
36 want you know, especially when it's your husband, rape wasn't rape. I was never taught it
37 was" (Joy, prisoner). For Joy, this subsequently resulted in the use of Self-harm as a means
38 of coping within the prison environment "It has led to me, you know hurting myself, cutting!
39 I just get so angry that they get to do what they want!" (Joy, prisoner).
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43 The majority of women described themselves as relatively powerless compared with men
44 "Men have always been the important ones, in my family, the only ones with power (Nicola,
45 Prisoner).
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47 Yet women used their positions with men to manipulate "I would know what to do to get
48 what I wanted, I wasn't worried about what I had to do, I did it! (Fran, Prisoner).
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53 Listeners reported a level of understanding of hatred and manipulation of men and the use
54 of sex as a weapon as a common thread that underpinned women's crimes "We hear about
55 it a lot, the women who we listen to haven't had the best experiences with men, I get that, it
56 leads to things, I guess influences" (Katie, Prison Listener). This 'Hatred' once in custody
57 manifested in self-harm as a method to cope with their previous experiences with men.
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"It's only once I have been in here (custody) that it has hit me! That wasn't right, what he did to me isn't normal but even though I know this it leads to hurting me, that's all I can do, harm myself" (Kerry, Prisoner).

Women's narratives suggested that their negative relationships with men existed on a continuum from men undermining them "I've not had a good male role model, I don't know what that is, my relationships have been bad!" (Pippa, Prisoner) through to actual disclosures of physical abuse. "Some men do hurt women, we have that a lot, I understand if you are getting beat up by a man you would hate them" (Olivia, Prison Listener). For women in the research, they held negative feeling towards men with hate as the extreme.

This category (*The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men*) was discussed by the majority of women and the Listeners within this study, which justifies the inclusion of this as a key gendered focus in the development and running of peer support schemes to support women who self-harm in custody. This pre-existing perspective and absence of good male role models may result in the women engaging in self-harm.

Displacement of the mother role

A reoccurring category within this research identified the displacement of the mother role. For women in custody this represented a number of different forms. For some women the displacement reflected their own childhood and how this had resulted in self-harm prior, and during custody. In addition, other women discussed the displacement to signify the complexities of trying to continue being a mother from within the prison environment. Furthermore, the women discussed the distress following visitations and how this resulted in self-harm.

The displacement of the mother role by virtue of being in custody could be traced back to women's childhoods and is outplayed in their behaviours in custody for example, Laura, (Prisoner) acknowledges that her mother had not played an active role in her childhood, and she experienced traumatic abuse as a consequence which led to learned self-harm behaviours. Whilst initially Laura's self-harm acted as a coping mechanism outside of the prison environment, the behaviour acted as reassurance and to an extent a comfort within the prison environment. As Laura acknowledged,

"Yes I self-harmed before prison, ten overdoses. The first was when I was 9 years old, this was something I did as a child, it is something I have brought to prison. I know I can self-harm and I will feel me. Somewhere that is strange (Laura, Prisoner).

This form of displacement is further explored by Bella linking the mothering of her own children to the past experience of her own childhood. *"Trying to be a good mum, finding it difficult as I don't know how to be a mum" (Bella, prisoner).* Bella acknowledges worthy intentions to develop her own bond with her daughter, whilst disclosing the difficulties of her own childhood, which has positioned her with doubts concerning wholesome parental models.

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3 A secondary form of the displacement category is how the women's relationships with their
4 children remain as an extremely important feature of their day-to-day life in prison even
5 when they are separated physically by virtue of being in custody. Women talked about the
6 distress associated with these separations:
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9 *"I don't know my son as an adult. He is 19 years old now. I have been in prison 11 years and I*
10 *was only with him 8 years. Even then I was there with him but not there, I had issues going*
11 *on" (Adele, Prisoner).*
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14 For the majority of the women, self-harm reported serves as a method of coping with
15 separation experiences;
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17 *"When being away from them (children) gets too much, I will harm myself, you see I blame*
18 *myself for this" (Cindy, Prisoner).* Prison Listeners recognise this experience and can share
19 other ways of dealing with the pain of separation *"We all feel it, we don't want to be away,*
20 *none of us, I'm a mother you know. I just don't self-harm, I listen and show I'm listening, I*
21 *understand the mothering and the pain. I just deal with it in other ways" (Barbara, Prison*
22 *Listener).*
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26 For some women even though separated from their children, the mothering role continues,
27 in terms of the emotional commitment and still being regarded a mother was the most
28 important thing in their lives. The women described their days as still very much occupied by
29 thoughts and worries regarding their children and this could lead to self-harm *"Visitations*
30 *can lead to me feeling sad, when they leave I have to have a way to get over the loss, hurting*
31 *myself helps in the physical sense, I am always hurting on the inside" (Ann, Prisoner).* This
32 women signifies the difficulties of seeing her children and how self-harm is used as a way of
33 coping but also Ann uses self-harm in the physical sense to see the cuts as a visual
34 representation of the pain she feels inside from being away from her children.
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38 The continued importance of the family in reference to the mothering role is portrayed by
39 Amber, (Prisoner) *"All I ever wanted was a family you know"* this is a shared characteristic in
40 which the majority of the women acknowledge and relate too. Those women who have a
41 family make this reference; however, prison means they can no longer function as a family
42 which leads to the women engaging in self-harm. Similarly, those women who have no
43 children but hold a desire for them also discuss the longing for a family which when they see
44 other women *'throwing this away (Jo, Prisoner)'* also can result in self-harm as a method of
45 coping with the family they have desired. The findings of this study illustrate that women's
46 self-harm is attributed to difficulties with the displacement of the mother role a key distress
47 for women in custody.
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52 The importance of a gender specific approach to self-harm is evident within the support
53 preferences of the prisoners, as the women acknowledge that they use the provision, as it is
54 women to women support, *"I wouldn't disclose to a male listener, it wouldn't happen. I only*
55 *disclose as the listener is a woman too, you know" (Merry, prisoner).* The woman provides
56 further details relating to damaging experiences with men, which have left her unable to
57 discuss any of her problems with a male, including a male Listener.
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3 To provide further support to the gendering of the Listener Scheme for women who self-
4 harm in custody, another prisoner identified that women are better Listeners and
5 understand each other's emotions much better than their male counterparts, by references
6 to the heightened emotions associated to the menstruation cycle. As one prisoner
7 illustrated, *"(Listeners) expect things may come in cycles for a woman to do with hormones,*
8 *menstrual cycles, I think they are more (pause) ..Well the ladies understand that women can*
9 *get highly excited or highly stressed, especially about not seeing family and children and*
10 *being shut off contact. What used to be their job in the family, suddenly they are cut off from*
11 *that role, listeners understand all of that"* (Bella, prisoner).

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16 The common characteristics in which all women share is identified within the reference to
17 hormones and the menstrual cycle. This is then related to the prison environment, which is
18 documented as particularly challenging for women. The women here is signifying the
19 displacement of her role as a mother, which is an innate role, which comes with inbuilt
20 responsibilities to her family and the feelings, which constitute her sense of self that is
21 determined by the mothering role. Listeners also share the dual disadvantage, as the
22 majority are also mothers and prisoners, which provides further support for a gendering
23 prison approach for women in custody to support their self-harm, which accounts for the
24 pains of the displacement of mothering role as a causation for this behaviour.

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28 Whether it develops from the maternal instant or the difference in hormones it has been
29 documented that women are more empathetic and are able to share their prison journey
30 with other women to an extent that men are not *"Most proactive provision (Listeners) for*
31 *peer support, there are differences between male and female, females are more willing"*
32 *(Pete, staff member).*

33 34 35 36 37 *Attachment in custody*

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39 A notable causative reason for self-harm was highlighted by the women, staff and Listeners
40 was related to their peer to peer relationships with fellow prisoners; women with whom
41 they who share the same experiences in custody. The triggers were acknowledged as
42 difficulties and the loss of attachments when the relationship ended within these close peer
43 relationships led to the women engaging in self-harm as a method of coping. Staff members
44 documented alternative reasoning, which considered external factors such as family issues,
45 which affected the women's ability to cope with custody.

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49 The majority of the staff and women acknowledged that Listener support is not exclusively
50 used to assist women to manage their self-harm but rather accessing Listeners is more
51 about having some company and someone who will stay, listen, and not judge if self-harm is
52 the behaviour being talked about or engaged in. It seemed for the majority of women that
53 being "locked up" in their cell at night induces reflection, which then stimulated a desire to
54 offload. *"It is at night, when I am on my own I think about what I've done! I need someone to*
55 *talk to, to listen, I will use a Listener then"* (Ann, Prisoner). This was supported by the
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majority of staff and women who reported that night-time is when Listener support is usually requested.

Further to this, the prospect of sharing a cell with a fellow prisoner was deemed as a positive, as opposed to the current housing at the study prison for every women to be housed alone in their own cell. As Jan acknowledged, *“Cell mates would be a good thing, even if you don’t talk, just for company” (Jan, prisoner)*.

Whilst acknowledgement was made that co-sharing women do not have to talk, there is a sense of security provided by having someone who is physically sharing the same environment during the night. This sense of company is attributed to close friendships or family members with whom sitting in silence is comfortable. It is in the shared situations and familiarity of close friendships and families that “just for company” can be obtained. In essence, friendships with fellow women take the place off albeit while in custody important relationships with family and friends that are lost to the outside world.

The success of the Listener Scheme is documented to the continuity of the Listeners this is central for both the women and the Listeners. As Poppy acknowledged, *“Here in HMP... it’s very good. I like the fact that the ladies don’t change often, you see the same familiar face and that’s more approachable” (Poppy, prisoner)*. In the absence of the ability to maintain close relationships outside, the importance of relationships in custody become critical as protective and in maintaining resilience. The women feel that isolation and being on their own is difficult, especially at night time, so they seek a familiar face in the Listeners to find comfort.

It is apparent the development of ‘relationships’ is of central importance within the research establishment, which is extended to both staff and by the women. Furthermore, for the women to feel secure in obtaining support the development of a prior relationship is required. The Listener Scheme could include the importance of attachment for women as a measure to prevent the engagement in self-harm within the core training but also to ensure the Listeners are mindful of this desire and the possible impact on self-harm in their support for women in custody.

Discussion

This section relates the findings of the current study to the wider literature on women in prison who self-harm and the use of the Listener Scheme as a form of prison peer support. The implementation of gender sensitive provisions for women in custody is not a recent suggestion; it is documented within much earlier feminist research (Covington and Bloom, 2007). Indeed, the prison environment is distinct for the genders, which signifies the requirement of specific provisions for women in custody (Covington and Bloom, 2007).

The findings of this study address the aims of this paper by supporting a gendered approach for women who self-harm in custody and use peers as a source of support. The findings of this study identified that women in custody self-harm as a result of specific gendered issues,

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3 these being the difficulties they experience with men, the displacement of their mother role
4 and the requirements of attachment in custody. The findings of this study support the
5 application of a gendered approach for women who self-harm in custody in relation to the
6 use of peers as a source of support.
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10 11 *The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men*

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13 The findings of the current research identifies negative experiences of women with men
14 which can result in the women engaging in self-harm as a coping mechanism in prison.
15 Indeed, while previous research documents the history of abuse that women in custody
16 experience, which is distinct to male prisoners (Crewe et al, 2017; Macdonald, 2013; Light et
17 al 2013) the literature does not explore the manipulation by women in custody who
18 experience this abuse, which identifies an original finding of the current research.
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21 Research suggests that 53% of women in custody had experienced abuse that was
22 emotional, physical or sexual, whereas only 27% of men had endured such abuse (Prison
23 Reform Trust, 2015). Indeed, research alludes to the relationship between historical abuse
24 experienced by women prior to being in custody (Wright et al., 2016), and women's
25 engagement in self-harm as a coping method to deal with the ongoing emotional toll of this
26 experience (Macdonald, 2013). Therefore, incorporating the difficult experiences the
27 women experience with men that leads to them engaging in self-harm within peer support
28 schemes such as the Listener Scheme enables these supporters to be aware of the central
29 issues for women which leads to their engagement in self-harm.
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34 *Displacement of the mothering role*

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36 A reoccurring category which has been identified is the displacement of the mother role. For
37 women in this study this category represented a number of different definitions. For some
38 women the displacement reflected their own childhood and how this had resulted in self-
39 harm prior and during custody. In addition, other women discussed the displacement to
40 signify the complexities of trying to continue being a mother from within the prison
41 environment. Furthermore, the women discussed the distress following visitations and how
42 this resulted in self-harm. Whilst these differences exist within the overarching category of
43 the displacement of the mother role they all are interlinked through the discussion of the
44 importance of the mother role either for themselves as mothers or retrospectively as
45 children.
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50 The findings of the current research support the body of literature, which suggests it is the
51 removal of the mother role by virtue of being physical incarcerated that women in prison
52 find extremely traumatic (Corston, 2007; Baldwin and O, Malley, 2015; Hairston, 1991;
53 Crewe et al, 2017).
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56 The detrimental impact of the absence of the mothering role constructs a role strain, which
57 if the women are able to continue engaging in mothering activities such constraints are
58 reduced (Berry and Eigenberg, 2003). The current research documents the displacement of
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3 the mothering role, in which the womens' mothering role is thereby prevented following
4 incarceration. This study identifies that the information reported by the women results in a
5 role strain as they try to continue being a mother whilst in custody. Evidently, before
6 imprisonment the women within the research held an ideology of their roles as mother,
7 however being placed in prison is not included as part of the mothering role. In essence, the
8 women within the research know how to mother but face complexities at mothering within
9 prison.
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13 This study supports the existing literature, which documents that losing contact with family
14 members, especially children is a significant concern for women in prison (Crewe et al,
15 2017). It is clear that the mothering from the prison estate constitutes a restricted role; in
16 which engagement in self-harm for women in the current research represents a release. It is
17 thereby crucial for peer support provisions in custody to explore this concern to contribute
18 to the support of women who self-harm in custody.
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22 In addition, as the Listeners are also women prevented from their mothering role so they
23 hold a shared understanding that enables an empathetic approach, with the core
24 characteristics constituting being a woman, mother and being in custody. Worrall (1981)
25 acknowledges the gendered approach, which documents the solidarity of women prisoners
26 as a gendered issue.
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29 The women in this study also discussed the displacement of the mother role from a
30 different perspective, relating to the women during their childhood and their own mother.
31 These reflections were discussed by the women and linked to their engagement in self-
32 harm, within this perspective the displacement of the mother role during childhood had led
33 to the engagement in self-harm in childhood, which was continued in custody as a method
34 of coping. Whilst the association between childhood trauma and self-harm for women in
35 custody is supported by the literature (Howard, Karatzias, Power and Mahoney, 2017), how
36 this relates to the absence of the mother role is not explored and therefore provides a
37 unique insight from this study.
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41 *Attachment in custody*

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43 The Listener Scheme enabled the building of connections between women in custody and
44 their peers so that women know there is someone they can turn to in times of distress.
45 Whilst the Listener Scheme might not always be the source of support women seek in prison
46 it offers an empathetic approach (Foster and Magee, 2011), which in turn contributes to
47 helping women manage their self-harm in custody. Indeed this supports the findings of this
48 study to include gender specific training within the Listener Scheme for women who self-
49 harm in custody.
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53 The loosing of attachment to family members is signified as a noteworthy causation for the
54 engagement in self-harm for the women within this study, as they disclosed details of the
55 breakdown of personal relationships, the restricted contact with children and the rejection
56 from family members following incarceration. A category throughout the data was the
57 desire for attachment to other prisoners in the form of relationships and to staff members
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3 who cared for their self-harm. The need to belong whilst in prison to a family is supported
4 by previous research and identified as producing a search for a collective identity within the
5 prison (Liebling, Arnold & Straub, 2011) . The importance of attachment is central to women
6 who self-harm in custody and therefore should be focused upon during the delivery of
7 prison support schemes, such as the Listener Scheme.
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10 The case study design incorporating mixed qualitative methods used within this research
11 provides an in-depth understanding of women's concerns in prison which in turn trigger and
12 reinforce self-harming behaviours. The Listener Scheme is one source of support so that
13 women can begin to manage their self-harm behaviours in prison. While the research is
14 conducted in one women's prison, the understanding of women Listeners' experiences of
15 providing support in a women's prison is relevant to all prisons in the female estate.
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19 Indeed, the use of qualitative data means the findings of the currently study are unable to
20 be replicated. This study does however, provide a richness of in-depth data which can be
21 used as a guide to incorporate gender specific approaches to peer support provisions for
22 women who self-harm in custody.
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27 **Conclusion**

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29 Whilst the implementation of gender specific prisons for women in custody is not a new
30 concern, ensuring gendered specific concerns are included within prison peer support
31 schemes is currently under researched. Despite the significant benefits including gendered
32 related concerns could have for the engagement of self-harm for women in custody.
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35 Peer support provisions internationally should include a gender specific approach for
36 women in custody who self-harm, taking in to account the key findings from this paper,
37 relating to the previous difficulties of women with men prior and during custody which can
38 lead to their engagement in self-harm. Additionally, that the 'mother role' is central for
39 women in custody, which has already been acknowledged in the literature, however that
40 the displacement of the mother role is complex, for some women focusing on the present,
41 for others on their childhood and for some a combination of the two. What is clear from this
42 study is that the displacement of the mother role is traumatic for women and acts as a
43 causation for self-harm whilst in custody. Peer support schemes in custody should
44 acknowledge the importance of the displacement of this role but also the positive impact
45 women Prison Listeners supporting fellow women in custody can have.
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50 Currently the same training is provided for Listeners in male and female prisons although
51 individual differences occur between settings in the operation of the scheme. The findings
52 of this study suggest that the scheme may benefit from incorporating the gender
53 differences identified in this study regarding the reasons for self-harm and accessing the
54 service . By providing a to nuanced service for women, Listeners may be able to better
55 respond to the experiences they are likely to encounter when supporting fellow women in
56 custody.
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3 As a starting point Listener training could better reflect an understanding of the triggers for
4 women's self-harm that relates to their difficult experiences with men, the displacement of
5 their mother role and their needs for attachments in custody. One way to address the
6 above is for the content of the training for prison Listeners to be tailored to gender
7 awareness raising, particularly in relation to women who self-harm in custody.
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10 11 12 **Further research**

- 14 1. To further research the employment of a gendered approach to other prison peer
15 support provisions, such as the insiders scheme, the buddy scheme (Part of the
16 Therapeutic Community), The Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPT),
17 Shannon Trust's Turning Pages scheme and Health trainers.
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3 Dr David Crepaz-Keay,

4 Many thanks for your constructive feedback on our paper: 'Exploring the Listener Scheme in a women's
5 prison: The importance of a gendered approach to peer support for women who self-harm in custody'
6 Please see below for detailed comments and amendments.
7

8 Many thanks.

9 Best wishes

10
11 Dr Louise Griffiths
12
13

14 **Response to Reviewer Comments**

15 **Comments:**

16 The topic is interesting and relevant, it is important that where the motivation for problematic behaviour
17 differs for men and women that those who support individuals displaying such behaviour are trained
18 appropriately and receive support.
19

20 **Comment:** I was curious about the lack of content that related to the listeners experiences of training,
21 and whether they found the training to equip them to deal with the specific needs of female offenders,
22 or if this was something they developed themselves or innately because of the shared experience of
23 being a women (with probable similar difficulties).
24

25 **Amendment:** The Listeners in the current study perceived the training provided for their role positively
26 "As Listeners we do receive training on self-harm, it is part of that. We are, do feel ready to help others.
27 Sometimes no matter how much training you have it comes down to being a woman and well a prisoner"
28 (Mary, Listener). Which signifies that the Listeners within this study use their relation nature which they
29 acknowledge a gendered attribute to offer support, which supports the formalisation of this when
30 implementing peer support schemes for women in custody.
31

32 My main feedback centres around ensuring that you have captured sufficient information on the
33 methodology. At present there are a number of questions / gaps that reduce the quality of the overall
34 paper. I think a number of the questions I have posed would be addressed by adding a thematic map
35 and giving further consideration to the links between the different concepts you have identified.
36

37 **Response:** Full thematic map would include information relating to subsequent papers/ or already
38 published papers so unable to include.
39

40 Additional Questions:

41 1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?:
42 The area explored has minimal research currently and offers relevant points of evaluation on the use of
43 the listeners scheme within female prisons.
44

45 2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant
46 literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work
47 ignored?: Paper introduces the topic of peer support via the listeners scheme for offenders that self
48 harm as exclusively focused on research within male establishments. The paper by Michelle Jaffe
49 (2012)The Listener Scheme in Prisons: Final report on the Research Findings, Presented to Samaritans
50 (available online) contains some relevant information to the content of the paper that has not been
51 included.
52

53 **Amendment:** With few exceptions, research has been conducted within the male prison estate, the few
54 existing studies have explored the use of the Listener Scheme for the general support of women in
55 custody (Jaffe, 2012), rather than in relation to the behaviour of self-harm.
56

57 The benefits of the Listener Scheme to the prisoners' obtaining support has been explored in great
58 depth, as have the benefits to the Listeners themselves (Farrant and Levenson, 2002; Jaffe, 2012;
59 Foster and Magee, 2011), alongside the negative aspects of the scheme (Foster and Magee, 2011; Syed
60 and Blanchette, 2000). Nonetheless, to date there has been an absence of a significant focus on the
Listener Scheme and its contribution to supporting women who self-harm in custody. This paper

explores how peer support schemes such as the Listener Scheme can incorporate gender specific elements into the scheme to support women who self-harm in custody.

Comment Page 1 Line 23: what specific research details differences in male and female self harm? The paper argues for the need for a gendered approach and therefore further explanation of the differences between the motivations for self harm would assist this argument

Amendment: Research suggests that women often have significant addictions and mental health concerns and are more likely than their male counterparts to engage in self-harm (Prison Reform Trust, 2017). In addition, women's self-harm acts as a coping method for 'intrapersonal issues' which documents self-harm as a result of frustration and lack of control in custody as opposed to 'interpersonal issues' which documents self-harm as a result of relationship difficulties with partners (Walker et al, 2017).

Comment: Page 1: Line 30 - is this a causal link? if so, this should be specified

Amendment: "will" changed to "May"

Comment: Page 1: line 44 - cites the needs of women in prison as more complex than those of men, I recommend changing the language, the source document refers to the needs of women being different to those of men, not necessarily more complex

Amendment: that women have distinct needs in prison

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?:

Comment: Further description of the case study design and methods selected would be beneficial.

Amendment: Previous research into the Listener Scheme predominately focuses on male prisoners, with a limited number of studies (Jaffe, 2012) focusing on the Listener Scheme within the female prison estate. Furthermore, to date, previous research has yet to examine the ways in which the Listener Scheme can support women to manage their self-harm behaviour in custody. Yin (2013) supports the use of a case study design in response to the research which endeavours to answer "how" and "why" questions, considered to align with a case study approach, as a response to the explanatory nature of the questions. Indeed, by employing a case study design approach detailed insights were obtained from the women themselves to aid in enhancing the support provided by Listeners to women who engage in self-harm in prison.

Comment: What was the questionnaire used within the study to collect quantitative data? Further information about this would be helpful, e.g. reliability / validity or reference if appropriate.

Amendment:

The research was collected in two stages, the first stage involved a researcher-developed questionnaire and subsequent interviews with women prisoners and also staff, as well as a focus group with prison Listeners. Stage two included observations of the prison site to confirm the findings from stage one.

The questionnaire acted as a screening tool to ensure that the participants who were invited to take part in an interview had prior experience of self-harm and the Listener Scheme. For this reason, a questionnaire was employed which provided a source of quantitative data which was then analysed to enable the screening of potential participants.

The questionnaire obtained general information about the women's background, which included the length of the current prison sentence, if it was their first time in prison, if they had children, their relationship status and who they had contact with outside of prison. The questionnaire for the staff also included some background information, such as their role within the prison, if they had additional responsibilities such as an ACCT case manager and whether they had worked in other prisons.

Comment: there needs to be a description of the methods used to analyse the qualitative data - is this

1
2
3 thematic analysis? It is stipulated that these areas are interrelated, a thematic map would be helpful
4 here.

5
6
7 **Amendment:**

8
9 The qualitative data was analysed using Constructivist Grounded Theory as this enabled analysing the
10 data as the research process evolved, in order to consider whether or not changes to the subsequent
11 direction of the research were necessary (Charmaz, 2014). This influenced the later interviews as the
12 schedule was amended to ask additional question to explore the emerging categories in more detail.

13 Constructivist Grounded Theory expands on qualitative research to answer the 'why' questions within the
14 data by considering the impact of the values of the researcher and participants on the study through
15 careful exploration of the language and meanings used by these specific groups (Charmaz, 2017). The
16 use of constructive grounded theory was also aligned with the case study design framework and
17 gendered approach, which considers the influence of the researcher being female as a vital component
18 of the theoretical positioning (Charmaz, 2017).

19 The analysis involved looking at the participants' transcripts and using line-by-line coding to identify
20 what the participant was trying to articulate (Glaser, 1998). By using line- by- line coding, categories
21 emerged from within the data (Charmaz, 2014). Focus coding was then used to considers the context of
22 the line- by- line codes. In addition, memos were made during the research to assist in providing the
23 context of the participants' line- by- line coding.

24 The categories, which emerged during this coding of stage 1 data identified areas which required further
25 details to provide an extensive exploration into the Listener Scheme and what contributions of support
26 the scheme has made for self-harm. The revisiting of codes and categories is essential when using
27 grounded theory as a method of analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). During the second stage of the
28 data collection, the categories which were identified within the first data collection stage were either
29 confirmed or discounted. The same grounded theory approach was also applied to stage 2 of the data
30 collection (prison observations).

31
32 **Response:** Full thematic map would include information relating to subsequent papers/ or already
33 published papers so unable to include.

34 4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie
35 together the other elements of the paper?: How was the potential for bias explored / controlled for?

36
37 **Comment:** The SSI was based on research highlighting the gendered experience of offenders within
38 custody and how this related to self harm, it is therefore unclear whether there are experiences less
39 related to gender that contribute to self harm that are not captured due to the structure of the
40 interview. This limitation should be acknowledged / explored, as it relates to the training.

41
42 **Amendment:**

43 The results of this study identify that women have distinct needs in custody which influence the use of
44 self-harm as a method of coping. This paper focuses specifically on the findings from the research which
45 support the implementation of a gendered approach within peer support schemes such as the Listener
46 Scheme. This paper therefore doesn't include alternative causations for self-harm which may be
47 experienced by both women and men in custody.

48
49 **Comment:** Page 4, Line 48/49: this sentence is out of context with the remaining results, is this
50 another experience on the continuum of women's experiences with men? is it a difficult experience that
51 has led the participant to need to manipulate or is this not a difficult experience? integrating this into the
52 understanding of the other data would be helpful.

53
54 **Amendment:** Yet women used their positions with men to manipulate "I would know what to do to get
55 what I wanted, I wasn't worried about what I had to do, I did it! (Fran, Prisoner) – quotation removed.

56
57 **Comment:** Page 5, line 9/10: the extract does not appear to reflect a woman being undermined by a
58 man

59 **Amendment:** Extra information from the quote included "I wasn't trusted with anything and he would
60 take what I had"

Comment: Page 6: line 57/58: this sentence fits also with the previous theme regarding the difficult experiences with men and links the theme to the case study for gendered approach to peer support i.e. that a woman with difficult experiences with men would not want a male listener, obviously this would not happen in a female prison but it shows the support for female to female support more effectively - I would consider moving this.

Amendment: Move this quotation to 'difficult experiences with men' section of the results.

The importance of a gender specific approach to self-harm is evident within the support preferences of the prisoners, as the women acknowledge that they use the provision, as it is women to women support, "I wouldn't disclose to a male listener, it wouldn't happen. I only disclose as the listener is a woman too, you know" (Merry, prisoner). The woman provides further details relating to damaging experiences with men, which have left her unable to discuss any of her problems with a male, including a male Listener.

Comment: page 7: this is an important area that would seem to be better represented with a separate theme, or the title of the theme could be revised

Amendment: Title of theme has been amended to "Attachment needs of women in custody: The importance of peer relationships"

Comment: page 7 line 48: the staff seem to be highlighting other attachment issues e.g. family issues, perhaps it is reflecting attachment needs whilst in custody rather than the attachments being exclusively within custody

Amendment: Addressed by the change of the title for this theme "Attachment needs of women in custody: The importance of peer relationships"

Comment: page 8 line 3 - Are you saying that the listeners scheme is meeting the attachment needs of the women? this would be an interesting point to elaborate on

Amendment: Indeed, for the women within this study the use of the Listener Scheme was central to the management of their self-harm as a source of attachment in custody. Whilst the Listeners may not have been used during the engagement in self-harm, the support provided prior and after this behaviour was paramount for the women and provided an essential source of attachment in custody.

page 10: line 26/27: The reference needs to be more clearly linked to the findings from the research. Currently it does not read as though it is connected.

Comment: Page 10: line 29: The paragraph may flow better if it is moved to before the previous paragraph (line 22). The conclusions drawn within paragraph (line 22) can be applied to the latter paragraph - i.e. female listeners may also have experiences of absent mothers, thus this point can be applied to both, and greater emphasis can be added here to the peer support training approach requiring a sensitivity to such issues.

Amendment: The following paragraph has been moved as suggested:

In addition, as the Listeners are also women prevented from their mothering role so they hold a shared understanding that enables an empathetic approach, with the core characteristics constituting being a woman, mother and being in custody. Worrall (1981) acknowledges the gendered approach, which documents the solidarity of women prisoners as a gendered issue.

It is thereby crucial for peer support provisions in custody to be sensitive to this concern in order to fully support women who self-harm in custody.

Comment: Page 10: line 58: this would be expected because the SSI was based on literature that focused on gendered experiences in custody - modifying the wording e.g. "the specific issues related to gender that were identified from the data were"

Amendment: The specific issues related to gender that were identified from the data were

Comment: Page 10, line 43: the paragraph needs to make clearer how the empathetic approach taken

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2
3 by the listeners that helps women manage self harm supports the need for a gendered approach within
4 the training - are you saying that an empathetic approach is more beneficial with females and this is the
5 reason for specific focus on gender during the training? or is it related to the earlier point regarding
6 connections between women?

7
8 **Amendment:** Indeed, an empathetic approach is beneficial for women in custody, which supports the
9 findings of this study to include gender specific training within the peer support schemes for women who
10 self-harm in custody.

11
12
13 5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice
14 and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the
15 paper?:

16
17 **Comment:** Greater attention could be paid to exploring the strengths and limitations of the study as
18 well as extrapolating other areas for research and more detailed implications for training of listeners

19
20 **Amendment:**

21
22 Furthermore, the use of a case study design limits the generalisation of the findings to the research site.

23 For example, the Listener Scheme as a source of peer support could include the triggers identified by
24 this paper within their training, such as the difficulties women may have experienced with men, the
25 displacement of the mother role and the importance of peer support as a source of attachment in
26 custody.

27 The results of this study identify that women have distinct needs in custody which influence the use of
28 self-harm as a method of coping. This paper focuses specifically on the findings from the research which
29 support the implementation of a gendered approach within peer support schemes such as the Listener
30 Scheme. This paper therefore doesn't include alternative causations for self-harm which may be
31 experienced by both women and men in custody.

32 This research supports the development of gender specific peer support for women who self-harm in
33 custody which can be used by the prison estate to incorporate/ design schemes to be not only be
34 mindful of these triggers but to tailor the support provided within these schemes to ensure distinctions
35 are made within the male and female prison estate in relation to how self-harm is supported.

36
37 2. To develop a gendered training course for prison peer support schemes to support women who self-
38 harm in custody.

39
40 **Comment:** page 11 line 50 / page 12 line 1: these paragraphs appear to be saying the same point.

41 While the research is conducted in one women's prison, the understanding of women Listeners'
42 experiences of providing support in a women's prison is relevant to all prisons in the female estate. -
43 Deleted
44 Deleted

45
46 6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical
47 language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid
48 to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.:

49
50 **Comment:** Page 2: Line 54 - sentence is unclear

51
52 -Amended

53
54 **Comment:** The introduction section could be improved by restructuring so the topics flow in a more
55 logical fashion. For example, explaining the context (prisons), the needs of women as different to men,
56 response to these needs (self harm), available support (listeners scheme), pulling this together with the
57 discussion of the importance of the gendered approach to such support.

58
59 **Amendment:** Restructured as suggested by reviewer

60
61 **Comment:** Page 7:line 42/43: remove "who"

62
63 **Amendment:** Removed

Comment: Page 11: line 56/57: remove "to"

Amendment: Removed

The entire document requires proof reading for grammar.

Reviewer: 2

Recommendation: Minor Revision

Comment:

In the results you talk about the loss of opportunity to become a mother while in prison. But although you refer to the displacement of the mother role focusing on the present and on childhood in the results then return to them in the discussion and conclusion you do not refer to the loss of opportunity to become a mother again.

Amendment: Whilst for some women this represented a missed opportunity of becoming a mother, which is now unlikely because they are in custody

a loss opportunity to become a mother, for others on their childhood and for some a combination.

Additional Questions:

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Yes it is an interesting addition to the literature

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: Yes it gives a good account of the current literature

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: Yes the argument builds logically and creates the case for the research.

Research methods are comprehensive and appropriate

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: The authors refer to a previous paper in which they described their methodology in more detail In this article the description is adequate for providing context to the study results.

5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: The research provides specific recommendations for practice which are consistent with the finding of the paper.

There is one area mentioned in the results which is not referred to again and which is another important finding. I have discussed this in more detail in the authors notes.

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: It is very readable and engaging.

There are a number of small typos and punctuation errors. I have listed the ones I noticed in the attached word document but there may well be more so I suggest a detailed re read.

Amendments made.

Exploring the Listener Scheme in a women's prison: The importance of a gendered approach to peer support for women who self-harm in custody

Abstract – (250 words)

Purpose

Without exception, research on the contribution of the Prison Listener Scheme as a form of peer support for those who self-harm in custody has focused on men in prison. Women's experience of custody is shaped by their experiences of hegemonic masculinity that also mediate through women's roles as mothers and caregivers. Women's self-harm is similarly influenced by these gendered experiences. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Listener Scheme as a form of peer-to-peer support for women contributes to women managing their self-harm in a female prison.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper employed a case study design with a mixed methods approach using a quantitative questionnaire with prison staff (n=65) and women in custody who had self-harmed (n= 30). Qualitative methods included a focus group with Prison Listeners (n10) and semi-structured interviews with women who self-harm (n10) and prison staff (n10). Four days were also spent observing the prison environment.

Findings

Findings suggest that women seek support from other women as peer Listeners for three main reasons; their previous difficult experiences with men, a displacement of the mother role and their attachment needs in custody. Research suggests that women often have significant addictions and mental health concerns and are more likely than their male counterparts to engage in self-harm (Prison Reform Trust, 2017). In addition, women's self-harm acts as a coping method for 'intrapersonal issues' which documents self-harm as a result of frustration and lack of control in custody as opposed to 'interpersonal issues' which documents self-harm as a result of relationship difficulties with partners (Walker et al, 2017). This paper suggests that peer support schemes internationally should be tailored to providing support for these types of gendered experience to support women who self-harm in custody. This has implications for the training and support of Listeners in women's prisons.

Research limitations/implications

This exploratory research was conducted in one female prison and while can be considered to test proof of concept is limited in its generalisability.

Originality/value

This paper suggests that Listeners providing peer-to-peer support for women in custody who self-harm may encounter triggers for this behaviour based on women's experiences including; how women relate to men; women's experience of the way custody displaces their role as mothers and women's need for safe attachments in custody. These gendered

experiences have implications for the training and development of peer support schemes in women's prisons, such as the Listener scheme. Further research is needed to compare the gendered types of support Prison Listeners provide depending on whether they are in male or female prisons.

Key words – Prison Listener, women prisoners, self-harm, prison peer support, gender

Article Classification – Research paper

Research question

Exploring the Listener Scheme in a women's prison: the importance of a gendered approach to peer support for women who self-harm in custody

Introduction

Historically, the prison estate has been designed for the incarceration of men (Lemgiuber, 2000) manifest through the architecture design and security practices. Indeed, current research acknowledges the use of Trauma Informed Care and Practice for women is problematic because of this 'hostile environment' (Jewkes, Jordan, Wright & Bendelow, 2019). These features of a custodial environment are evident in female prisons despite research that women have distinct needs in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2013). For example, restricted access to children (Corston, 2007; Baldwin and O'Malley, 2015), prior experience of abuse (Wright et al., 2016; Prison Reform Trust, 2015), mental health issues (Light et al., 2013), and the removal of coping methods such as drugs and alcohol (Prison Reform Trust, 2015).

Research suggests that women often have significant addictions and mental health problems and are more likely to engage in self-harm (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Therefore, although women are far fewer in the UK prison population (3,797 compared to their 78,675 male counterparts (Official Statistics, 2019) they account for almost 5 times more incidents of self-harm than men.

Being imprisoned intensifies women's prior experiences of abuse and exacerbates existing mental health issues and/or renders women vulnerable to new episodes of mental ill health, with such concerns: the prison environment makes women significantly vulnerable, given that they were already at risk when they entered custody (Caulfield, 2016). Women are over-represented in prison populations, a trend that would be reversed if, as Corston (2007) advocates, women were given fewer custodial sentences.

To date, the prison estate has not been adequately adapted to meet women's needs in terms of access to treatment for mental health issues, education, employment and debt management (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Furthermore, research shows that it is extremely

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2
3 important to ensure that the gendered needs of women in custody are being met by the
4 prison estate (Walker and Towl, 2016) as a gendered aspect of prison is that it represents a
5 time of limited control for women, which can lead to self-harm (HM Inspectorate of Prisons,
6 2005; Crewe et al, 2017).
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9 Self-harm defined as any “act of self-poisoning or self-injury carried out by an individual
10 irrespective of motivation” (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2011,
11 p. 4) is a gendered issue. Research testifies that the reasons why women self-harm are
12 different to their male counterparts. The literature reveals that women in custody engage
13 in self-harm for numerous reasons, which include current and previous traumatic events,
14 negative experiences of the prison environment, and isolation in a single cell (Marzano,
15 Hawton, Rivli & Fazel, 2011). Additionally, other contributing causations include the early
16 days of imprisonment (NOMS, 2012) and mental health concerns (Ministry of Justice, 2013).
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20 One way that the prison system can respond to women’s needs is through peer-to-peer
21 support schemes that see women supporting each other based on their common
22 experience. There are many benefits of peer support (Farrant and Levenson, 2002), in terms
23 of affecting better health outcomes of prisoners (Woodall et al., 2015), and the
24 improvement of organisational skills and behaviour (Collica, 2014). The Listener Scheme is
25 one such source of peer support that adopts the same structure and arrangements in both
26 male and female prison establishments. **With few exceptions, research has been conducted
27 within the male prison estate, the few existing studies have explored the use of the Listener
28 Scheme for the general support of women in custody (Jaffe, 2012), rather than in relation to
29 the behaviour of self-harm.**
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34 The Listener Scheme is supported by Samaritans as a registered UK charity, which trains
35 volunteers to offer confidential advice 24 hours a day (Samaritans, 2017). Samaritans
36 provide the Listeners Initial Training (LIT), which consists of eight sessions held over a period
37 of 3–6 weeks that are organised within the prison establishment. The seventh training
38 session focuses on identifying and understanding self-harm, including why individuals
39 engage in the behaviour, the difference between self-harm and an attempt to end a life, and
40 to equip Listeners with the skills to respond to this behaviour. The purpose of this seventh
41 session is to identify what self-harm is and to help Listeners understand some of the reasons
42 why prisoners engage in this behaviour,
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46 Ongoing training provides a refresher for Listeners to help them to continue to support
47 those who continue to self-harm in custody. Currently the content of the LIT and the
48 refresher training is the same in male and female prisons. This means that there is limited
49 understanding about whether the Listener Scheme should provide more gender specific
50 support (Stewart, 2008).
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54 **The benefits of the Listener Scheme to the prisoners’ obtaining support has been explored
55 in great depth, as have the benefits to the Listeners themselves (Farrant and Levenson,
56 2002; Jaffe, 2012; Foster and Magee, 2011), alongside the negative aspects of the scheme
57 (Foster and Magee, 2011; Syed and Blanchette, 2000b). Nonetheless, to date there has been**
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3 an absence of a significant focus on the Listener Scheme and its contribution to supporting
4 women who self-harm in custody. This paper explores how peer support schemes such as
5 the Listener Scheme can incorporate gender specific elements into the scheme to support
6 women who self-harm in custody.
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9

10 11 **Methods**

12
13 The research approach and data collection methods used in the study, together with details
14 of the sample of women, Listeners and staff is described in more detail in a related paper
15 (see Griffiths, Bailey & Slade, 2019). In summary, the study adopted a case study design
16 (Stake, 1995) in one women's prison. Previous research into the Listener Scheme
17 predominately focuses on male prisoners, with a limited number of studies (Jaffe, 2012)
18 focusing on the Listener Scheme within the female prison estate. Furthermore, to date,
19 previous research has yet to examine the ways in which the Listener Scheme can support
20 women to manage their self-harm behaviour in custody. Yin (2013) supports the use of a
21 case study design in response to the research which endeavours to answer "how" and
22 "why" questions, which is considered to align with a case study approach, as a response to
23 the explanatory nature of the questions. Indeed, by employing a case study design approach
24 detailed insights were obtained from the women themselves to aid in enhancing the
25 support provided by Listeners for women who engage in self-harm in custody.
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31 The research was collected in two stages, the first stage involved a research-developed
32 questionnaire and subsequent interviews with women prisoners and staff, as well as a focus
33 group with prison Listeners. Stage two included observations of the prison site to validate
34 the findings from stage one. A mixed methods approach was employed to collect
35 quantitative data using a questionnaire with prison staff (n=65) and women in custody who
36 had self-harmed (n= 30), this enabled the use of purposive sampling to include participants
37 in the qualitative part of the study. The questionnaire acted as a screening tool to ensure
38 that the participants who were invited to take part in an interview had prior experience of
39 self-harm and the Listener Scheme. For this reason, a questionnaire was employed which
40 provided a source of quantitative data which was then analysed to enable the screening of
41 potential participants.
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46 The questionnaire obtained general information about the women's background, which
47 included the length of the current prison sentence, if it was their first time in prison, if they
48 had children, their relationship status and who they had contact with outside of prison. The
49 questionnaire for the staff also included some background information, such as their role
50 within the prison, if they had additional responsibilities such as an ACCT case manager and
51 whether they had worked in other prisons.
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55 Qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups were captured
56 from Prison Listeners (n=10), women in custody who self-harm (n=10) and prison staff
57 (n=10). Observations over a four-day period were conducted on A, B, C, D, E, F wings and
58 the Therapeutic Community that operated in the prison, which was located on J wing. The
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3 interview schedules were developed from exploring the literature to reflect women's
4 gendered experiences of custody, which may lead to their engagement in self-harm (Crewe
5 et al, 2017). The questions explored how women used the Listener Scheme in relation to
6 their self-harm behaviour.
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9 The qualitative data was analysed using Constructivist Grounded Theory as this enabled
10 analysing the data as the research process evolved, in order to consider whether changes to
11 the subsequent direction of the research were necessary (Charmaz, 2014). This influenced
12 the later interviews as the schedule was amended to ask additional question to explore the
13 emerging categories in more detail.
14
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16 Constructivist Grounded Theory expands on qualitative research to answer the 'why'
17 questions within the data by considering the impact of the values of the researcher and
18 participants on the study through careful exploration of the language and meanings used by
19 these specific groups (Charmaz, 2017). The use of constructive grounded theory was also
20 aligned with the case study design framework and gendered approach, which considers the
21 influence of the researcher being female as a vital component of the theoretical positioning
22 (Charmaz, 2017).
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26 The analysis involved looking at the participants' transcripts and using line-by-line coding to
27 identify what the participant was trying to articulate (Glaser, 1998). By using line- by- line
28 coding, categories emerged from within the data (Charmaz, 2014). Focus coding was then
29 used to considers the context of the line- by- line codes. In addition, memos were made
30 during the research to assist in providing the context of the participants' line- by- line
31 coding.
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35 The categories, which emerged during the coding of the stage 1 data identified areas which
36 required further details to provide an extensive exploration into the Listener Scheme and
37 what contributions of support the scheme for self-harm. The revisiting of codes and
38 categories is essential when using grounded theory as a method of analysis (Glaser and
39 Strauss, 1967). During the second stage of the data collection, the categories which were
40 identified within the first data collection stage were either confirmed or discounted. The
41 same grounded theory approach was also applied to stage 2 of the data collection (prison
42 observations).
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49 Results

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51 The findings revealed that women's experiences are inextricably linked with their gender
52 and this contributes to triggers for their self-harming behaviour in custody in three
53 interrelated ways:
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56 *The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men*

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58 *Displacement of the mother role*
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Attachment needs of women in custody: The importance of peer relationships

In turn, these experiences influence the reasons why women seek support from their peers as Listeners.

The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men

Women in this study disclosed feelings of 'hate' towards men that they attributed to the relationships they had experienced before coming into prison. "A man could do what they want you know, especially when it's your husband, rape wasn't rape. I was never taught it was" (Joy, prisoner). For Joy, this subsequently resulted in the use of self-harm as a means of coping within the prison environment "It has lead to me, you know hurting myself, cutting. I just get so angry that they get to do what they want" (Joy, prisoner).

Most women described themselves as relatively powerless compared with men "Men have always been the important ones, in my family, the only ones with power (Nicola, Prisoner).

Listeners reported a level of understanding of hatred and manipulation of men and the use of sex as a weapon as a common thread that underpinned women's crimes "We hear about it a lot, the women who we listen to haven't had the best experiences with men, I get that, it leads to things, I guess influences" (Katie, Prison Listener). This 'Hatred' once in custody manifested in self-harm as a method to cope with their previous experiences with men. "It's only once I have been in here (custody) that it has hit me! That wasn't right, what he did to me isn't normal but even though I know this it leads to hurting me, that's all I can do, harm myself" (Kerry, Prisoner).

The importance of a gender specific approach to self-harm is evident within the support preferences of the prisoners, as the women acknowledged that they use the provision, as it is women to women support, "I wouldn't disclose to a male listener, it wouldn't happen. I only disclose as the Listener is a woman too, you know" (Merry, prisoner). The woman provides further details relating to damaging experiences with men, which have left her unable to discuss any of her problems with a male, including a male Listener.

Women's narratives suggested that their negative relationships with men existed on a continuum from men undermining them "I've not had a good male role model, I don't know what that is, my relationships have been bad! I wasn't trusted with anything and he would take what I had" (Pippa, Prisoner) through to actual disclosures of physical abuse. "Some men do hurt women, we have that a lot, I understand if you are getting beat up by a man you would hate them" (Olivia, Prison Listener). For women in the research, they held negative feelings towards men with hate as the extreme.

This category (*The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men*) was discussed by the majority of women and the Listeners within this study, which justifies the inclusion of this as a key gendered focus in the development and running of peer support schemes to support

women who self-harm in custody. This pre-existing perspective and absence of good male role models may result in the women engaging in self-harm.

Displacement of the mother role

A reoccurring category within this research identified the displacement of the mother role. For women in custody this represented several different forms. For some women the displacement reflected their own childhood and how this had resulted in self-harm prior, and during custody. In addition, other women discussed the displacement to signify the complexities of trying to continue being a mother from within the prison environment. Furthermore, the women discussed the distress following visitations and how this resulted in self-harm.

The displacement of the mother role by virtue of being in custody could be traced back to women's childhoods and is outplayed in their behaviours in custody for example, Laura, (Prisoner) acknowledges that her mother had not played an active role in her childhood, and she experienced traumatic abuse as a consequence which leads to learned self-harm behaviours. Whilst initially Laura's self-harm acted as a coping mechanism outside of the prison environment, the behaviour acted as reassurance and to an extent a comfort within the prison environment. As Laura acknowledged,

"Yes, I self-harmed before prison, ten overdoses. The first was when I was 9 years old, this was something I did as a child, it is something I have brought to prison. I know I can self-harm and I will feel me. Somewhere that is strange (Laura, Prisoner).

This form of displacement is further explored by Bella linking the mothering of her own children to the experience of her own childhood. *"Trying to be a good mum, finding it difficult as I don't know how to be a mum" (Bella, prisoner).* Bella acknowledges worthy intentions to develop her own bond with her daughter, whilst disclosing the difficulties of her own childhood, which has positioned her with doubts concerning wholesome parental models.

A secondary form of the displacement category is how the women's relationships with their children remain as an extremely important feature of their day-to-day life in prison even when they are separated physically by virtue of being in custody. Women talked about the distress associated with these separations:

"I don't know my son as an adult. He is 19 years old now. I have been in prison 11 years and I was only with him 8 years. Even then I was there with him but not there, I had issues going on" (Adele, Prisoner).

For most of the women, self-harm reported serves as a method of coping with separation experiences;

"When being away from them (children) gets too much, I will harm myself, you see I blame myself for this" (Cindy, Prisoner). Prison Listeners recognise this experience and can share

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3 other ways of dealing with the pain of separation *"We all feel it, we don't want to be away,*
4 *none of us, I'm a mother you know. I just don't self-harm, I listen and show I'm listening, I*
5 *understand the mothering and the pain. I just deal with it in other ways"* (Barbara, Prison
6 *Listener*).
7
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9 For some women even though separated from their children, the mothering role continues,
10 in terms of the emotional commitment and still being regarded a mother was the most
11 important thing in their lives. The women described their days as still very much occupied by
12 thoughts and worries regarding their children and this could lead to self-harm *"Visitations*
13 *can lead to me feeling sad, when they leave I have to have a way to get over the loss, hurting*
14 *myself helps in the physical sense, I am always hurting on the inside"* (Ann, Prisoner). This
15 woman signifies the difficulties of seeing her children and how self-harm is used as a way of
16 coping but also Ann uses self-harm in the physical sense to see the cuts as a visual
17 representation of the pain, she feels inside from being away from her children.
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21 The continued importance of the family in reference to the mothering role is portrayed by
22 Amber, (Prisoner) *"All I ever wanted was a family you know"*. This is a shared characteristic
23 in which most of the women acknowledge and relate too. Those women have a family make
24 this reference; however, prison means they can no longer function as a family which leads
25 to the women engaging in self-harm. Similarly, those women who have no children but hold
26 a desire for them also discuss the longing for a family which when they see other women
27 *'throwing this away'* (Jo, Prisoner) also can result in self-harm as a method of coping with
28 the family they have desired. The findings of this study illustrate that women's self-harm is
29 attributed to difficulties with the displacement of the mother role a key distress for women
30 in custody.
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35 To provide further support to the gendering of the Listener Scheme for women who self-
36 harm in custody, another prisoner identified that women are better Listeners and
37 understand each other's emotions much better than their male counterparts, by references
38 to the heightened emotions associated to the menstruation cycle. As one prisoner
39 illustrated, *"(Listeners) expect things may come in cycles for a woman to do with hormones,*
40 *menstrual cycles, I think they are more (pause) ..Well the ladies understand that women can*
41 *get highly excited or highly stressed, especially about not seeing family and children and*
42 *being shut off contact. What used to be their job in the family, suddenly they are cut off from*
43 *that role, Listeners understand all of that"* (Bella, prisoner).
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48 The common characteristics in which all women share is identified within the reference to
49 hormones and the menstrual cycle. This is then related to the prison environment, which is
50 documented as particularly challenging for women. The woman here is signifying the
51 displacement of her role as a mother, which is an innate role, which comes with inbuilt
52 responsibilities to her family and the feelings, which constitute her sense of self that is
53 determined by the mothering role. Listeners also share the dual disadvantage, as the
54 majority are also mothers and prisoners, which provides further support for a gendering
55 prison approach for women in custody to support their self-harm, which accounts for the
56 pains of the displacement of mothering role as a causation for this behaviour.
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3 Whether it develops from the maternal instinct or the difference in hormones it has been
4 documented that women are more empathetic and are able to share their prison journey
5 with other women to an extent that men are not *“Most proactive provision (Listeners) for
6 peer support, there are differences between male and female, females are more willing”*
7 *(Pete, Staff member)*.
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9

10 11 12 *Attachment needs of women in custody: The importance of peer relationships*

13
14 A notable causative reason for self-harm as highlighted by the women, staff and Listeners
15 was related to their peer to peer relationships with fellow prisoners; women with whom
16 they share the same experiences in custody. The triggers were acknowledged with the loss
17 of attachments when the relationships ended which resulted in the women engaging in self-
18 harm as a method of coping. Staff members documented alternative reasoning, which
19 considered external factors such as family issues, which affected the women’s ability to
20 cope with custody.
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24 The majority of the staff and women acknowledged that Listener support is not exclusively
25 used to assist women to manage their self-harm but rather accessing Listeners is more
26 about having some company and someone who will stay, listen, and not judge if self-harm is
27 the behaviour being talked about or engaged in. It seemed for most women that being
28 “locked up” in their cell at night induces reflection, which then stimulated a desire to
29 offload. *“It is at night, when I am on my own, I think about what I’ve done! I need someone
30 to talk to, to listen, I will use a Listener then” (Ann, Prisoner)*. This was supported by most
31 staff and women who reported that night-time is when Listener support is usually
32 requested.
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37 **Indeed, for the women within this study the use of the Listener Scheme was central to the**
38 **management of their self-harm as a source of attachment in custody. Whilst the Listeners**
39 **may not have been used during the engagement in self-harm, the support provided prior**
40 **and after this behaviour was paramount for the women and provided an essential source of**
41 **attachment in custody.**
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43

44 Further to this, the prospect of sharing a cell with a fellow prisoner was deemed as a
45 positive, as opposed to the current housing for every woman to be housed alone in their
46 own cell. As Jan acknowledged, *“Cell mates would be a good thing, even if you don’t talk,
47 just for company” (Jan, prisoner)*.
48
49

50 Whilst acknowledgement was made that co-sharing women do not have to talk, there is a
51 sense of security provided by having someone who is physically sharing the same
52 environment during the night. This sense of company is attributed to close friendships or
53 family members with whom sitting in silence is comfortable. It is in the shared situations
54 and familiarity of close friendships and families that “just for company” can be obtained. In
55 essence, friendships with fellow women take the place off albeit whilst in custody important
56 relationships with family and friends that are lost to the outside world.
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3 The success of the Listener Scheme is documented to the continuity of the Listeners, this is
4 central for both the women and the Listeners. As Poppy acknowledged, *"Here in HMP... it's*
5 *very good. I like the fact that the ladies don't change often, you see the same familiar face*
6 *and that's more approachable"* (Poppy, prisoner). In the absence of the ability to maintain
7 close relationships outside, the importance of relationships in custody become critical as
8 they are protective and maintain resilience. The women feel that isolation and being on
9 their own is difficult, especially at night-time, so they seek a familiar face in the Listeners to
10 find comfort.
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14 It is apparent the development of 'relationships' is of central importance within the research
15 establishment, which is extended to both the women and staff. Furthermore, for the
16 women to feel secure in obtaining support the development of a prior relationship is
17 required. The Listener Scheme could include the importance of attachment for women as a
18 measure to prevent the engagement in self-harm within the core training but also to ensure
19 the Listeners are mindful of this desire and the possible impact on self-harm in their support
20 for women in custody.
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24 The Listeners in the current study perceived the training provided for their role positively
25 *"As Listeners we do receive training on self-harm, it is part of that. We are, do feel ready to*
26 *help others. Sometimes no matter how much training you have it comes down to being a*
27 *woman and well a prisoner"* (Mary, Listener). Which signifies that the Listeners within this
28 study use their relation nature which they acknowledge a gendered attribute to offer
29 support, which supports the formalisation of this when implementing peer support schemes
30 for women in custody.
31

32 Discussion

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35 This section relates the findings of the current study to the wider literature on women in
36 prison who self-harm and the use of the Listener Scheme as a form of prison peer support.
37 The implementation of gender sensitive provisions for women in custody is not a recent
38 suggestion; it is documented within much earlier feminist research (Covington and Bloom,
39 2007). Indeed, the prison environment is distinct for the genders, which signifies the
40 requirement of specific provisions for women in custody (Covington and Bloom, 2007).
41

42
43
44 The findings of this study address the aims of this paper by supporting a gendered approach
45 for women who self-harm in custody and use peers as a source of support. The findings of
46 this study identified that women in custody self-harm as a result of specific gendered issues,
47 these being the difficulties they experience with men, the displacement of their mother role
48 and the requirements of attachment in custody. The findings of this study support the
49 application of a gendered approach for women who self-harm in custody in relation to the
50 use of peers as a source of support.
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The difficult experiences of women (in prison) with men

The findings of the current research identify negative experiences of women with men which can result in the women engaging in self-harm as a coping mechanism in prison. Indeed, while previous research documents the history of abuse that women in custody experience, which is distinct to male prisoners (Crewe et al, 2017; Macdonald, 2013; Light et al 2013) the literature does not explore the manipulation by women in custody who experience this abuse, which identifies an original finding of the current research.

Research suggests that 53% of women in custody had experienced abuse that was emotional, physical or sexual, whereas only 27% of men had endured such abuse (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Indeed, research alludes the relationship between historical abuse experienced by women prior to being in custody (Wright et al., 2016), and women's engagement in self-harm as a coping method to deal with the ongoing emotional toll of this experience (Macdonald, 2013). Therefore, incorporating the difficult experiences the women experience with men that leads to them engaging in self-harm within peer support schemes such as the Listener Scheme enables these supporters to be aware of the central issues for women which, leads to their engagement in self-harm.

Displacement of the mothering role

A reoccurring category which has been identified is the displacement of the mother role. For women in the study this category represented several different definitions. For some women the displacement reflected their own childhood and how this had resulted in self-harm prior and during custody. **Whilst for some women this represented a missed opportunity of becoming a mother, which is now unlikely as a result of being in custody.**

In addition, other women discussed the displacement to signify the complexities of trying to continue being a mother from within the prison environment. Furthermore, the women discussed the distress following visitations and how this resulted in self-harm. Whilst these differences exist within the overarching category of the displacement of the mother role, they all are interlinked through the discussion of the importance of the mother role either for themselves as mothers or retrospectively as children.

The findings of the current research support the body of literature, which suggests it is the removal of the mother role by virtue of being physically incarcerated that women in prison find extremely traumatic (Corston, 2007; Baldwin and O, Malley, 2015; Hairston, 1991; Crewe et al, 2017).

The detrimental impact of the absence of the mothering role constructs a role strain, which if the women are able to continue engaging in mothering activities such constraints are reduced (Berry and Eigenberg, 2003). The current research documents the displacement of the mothering role, in which the women's' mothering role is thereby prevented following incarceration. This study identifies that the information reported by the women results in a role strain as they try to continue being a mother whilst in custody. Evidently, before imprisonment the women within the research held an ideology of their roles as mother,

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3 however being placed in prison is not included as part of the mothering role. In essence, the
4 women within the research know how to mother but face complexities at mothering within
5 prison.
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8 In addition, as the Listeners are also women prevented from their mothering role, they hold
9 a shared understanding that enables an empathetic approach, with the core characteristics
10 constituting being a woman, mother and being in custody. Worrall (1981) acknowledges the
11 gendered approach, which documents the solidarity of women prisoners as a gendered
12 issue.
13

14
15 This study supports the existing literature, which documents that losing contact with family
16 members, especially children is a significant concern for women in prison (Crewe et al,
17 2017). The mothering from the prison estate constitutes a restricted role; in which
18 engagement in self-harm for women in the current research represents a release. It is
19 thereby crucial for peer support provisions in custody to be sensitive to this concern in order
20 to fully support women who self-harm in custody.
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24 The women in this study also discussed the displacement of the mother role from a
25 different perspective, relating to the women during their childhood and their own mother.
26 These reflections were discussed by the women and linked to their engagement in self-
27 harm, within this perspective the displacement of the mother role during childhood leads to
28 the engagement in self-harm in childhood, which was continued in custody as a method of
29 coping. Whilst the association between childhood trauma and self-harm for women in
30 custody is supported by the literature (Howard, Karatzias, Power and Mahoney, 2017), how
31 this relates to the absence of the mother role is not explored and therefore provides a
32 unique insight from this study.
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35 36 *Attachment needs of women in custody: The importance of peer relationships*

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38 The Listener Scheme enabled the building of connections between women in custody and
39 their peers so that women know there is someone they can turn to in times of distress.
40 Whilst the Listener Scheme might not always be the source of support women seek in prison
41 it offers an empathetic approach (Foster and Magee, 2011), which in turn contributes to
42 helping women manage their self-harm in custody. Indeed, an empathetic approach is
43 beneficial for women in custody, which supports the findings of this study to include gender
44 specific training within the peer support schemes for women who self-harm in custody.
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48 The loosening of attachment to family members is signified as a noteworthy causation for
49 the engagement in self-harm for the women within this study, as they disclosed details of
50 the breakdown of personal relationships, the restricted contact with children and the
51 rejection from family members following incarceration. The specific issues related to gender
52 that were identified from the data were the desire for attachment to other prisoners in the
53 form of relationships and to staff members who cared for their self-harm. The need to
54 belong whilst in prison to a family is supported by previous research and identified as
55 producing a search for a collective identity within the prison (Liebling, Arnold & Straub,
56 2011). The importance of attachment is central to women who self-harm in custody and
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3 therefore should be focused upon during the delivery of prison support schemes, such as
4 the Listener Scheme.
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6 **Strengths and limitations of the research study**

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8 The results of this study identify that women have distinct needs in custody which influence
9 the use of self-harm as a method of coping. This paper focuses specifically on the findings
10 from the research which support the implementation of a gendered approach within peer
11 support schemes. This paper therefore doesn't include alternative causations for self-harm
12 which may be experienced by both women and men in custody.
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16 The case study design incorporating mixed qualitative methods used within this research
17 provides an in-depth understanding of women's concerns in prison which in turn trigger and
18 reinforce self-harming behaviours. The Listener Scheme is one source of support so that
19 women can begin to manage their self-harm behaviours in prison.
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22 Indeed, the use of qualitative data means the findings of the current study are unable to be
23 replicated. Furthermore, the use of a case study design limits the generalisation of the
24 findings to the research site. This study does, however, provide a richness of in-depth data
25 which can be used as a guide to incorporate gender specific approaches to peer support
26 provisions for women who self-harm in custody not only in the UK but also internationally.
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29 The Listener Scheme as a source of peer support could include the triggers identified by this
30 paper within their training, such as the difficulties women may have experienced with men,
31 the displacement of the mother role and the importance of peer support as a source of
32 attachment in custody.
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35 This research supports the development of gender specific peer support for women who
36 self-harm in custody which can be used by the prison estate to incorporate/ design schemes
37 to be not only be mindful of these triggers but to tailor the support provided within these
38 schemes to ensure distinctions are made within the male and female prison estate in
39 relation to how self-harm is supported.
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46 **Conclusion**

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48 Whilst the implementation of gender specific prisons for women in custody is not a new
49 concern, ensuring gendered specific concerns are included within prison peer support
50 schemes is currently under researched, despite the significant benefits including gendered
51 related concerns could have for the engagement of self-harm for women in custody.
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54 Peer support provisions internationally should include a gender specific approach for
55 women in custody who self-harm, taking in to account the key findings from this paper,
56 relating to the previous difficulties of women with men prior and during custody which can
57 lead to their engagement in self-harm. Additionally, that the 'mother role' is central for
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women in custody, which has already been acknowledged in the literature, however that the displacement of the mother role is complex, for some women focusing on the present, a loss opportunity to become a mother, for others on their childhood and for some a combination. What is clear from this study is that the displacement of the mother role is traumatic for women and acts as a causation for self-harm whilst in custody. Peer support schemes in custody should acknowledge the importance of the displacement of this role but also the positive impact women Prison Listeners supporting fellow women in custody can have.

Currently the same training is provided for Listeners in male and female prisons although individual differences occur between settings in the operation of the scheme. The findings of this study suggest that the scheme may benefit from incorporating the gender differences identified in this study regarding the reasons for self-harm and accessing the service. By providing a nuanced service for women, Listeners may be able to better respond to the experiences they are likely to encounter when supporting fellow women in custody.

As a starting point Listener training could better reflect an understanding of the triggers for women's self-harm that relates to their difficult experiences with men, the displacement of their mother role and their needs for attachments in custody. One way to address the above is for the content of the training for prison Listeners to be tailored to gender awareness raising, particularly in relation to women who self-harm in custody.

Further research

1. To further research the employment of a gendered approach to other prison peer support provisions, such as the insider's scheme, the buddy scheme (Part of the Therapeutic Community), The Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPT), Shannon Trust's Turning Pages scheme and Health trainers.
2. To develop a gendered training course for prison peer support schemes to support women who self-harm in custody.

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