



Professor Tammi Walker - Psychology, Durham University

The Psychological Impact of Criminalisation for Non-Payment of Fines on Women's Lives

Background

Women continue to be disproportionately criminalised for non-payment of low-level fines, including TV licence evasion, Council Tax debt, and truancy-related penalties, despite evidence that these sanctions often reflect underlying social and structural vulnerabilities rather than criminal intent. The Women's Justice Board highlights that such forms of criminalisation overwhelmingly affect women living in poverty, those with caring responsibilities, and those who have fallen through gaps in social support systems, leading to avoidable entry into the criminal justice system (CJS) and unnecessary harm. This punitive approach fails to account for gendered pathways into offending—often shaped by trauma, domestic abuse, financial insecurity and caregiving burdens—and can escalate into prosecution, community sentences, or custodial punishment for issues rooted in economic precarity rather than criminality.

Aims and Methods

The suggested project will explore women's lived experiences of prosecution for TV licence, Council Tax or truancy-related fines, examining impacts on wellbeing, family life and further criminalisation. It will use interviews with affected women and practitioners, alongside analysis of local authority and court practices, to identify gendered drivers of disproportionate punishment and propose fairer, trauma-informed alternatives.

Relevance

The project bridges interests of various psychology subdisciplines, including forensic psychology, health and feminist psychology.

Training

The candidate's research activity will be based in Durham, Psychology. They will join the Health and Justice Forensic Research Lab. Besides a training in general research skills, the candidate will develop a deeper understanding of mixed-methods approaches and applied policy-focused psychological research.

Suitable for

PhD and MSc by Research students.

References and Further Read

Grace, S., O'Neill, M., Walker, T., King, H., Baldwin, L., Jobe, A., Lynch, O., Measham, F., O'Brien, K., & Seaman, V. (Eds.). (2022) *Criminal Women* (1st ed.). Bristol University Press.

Taylor, J., & Walker, T. (2022). Intersectional Inequalities and Women in Secure Settings. In J. Tomlin & B. Völlm (Eds.), *Diversity and Marginalisation in Forensic Mental Health Care*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003184768-5>

Walker, T. (2021). Trauma Informed Care in the Criminal Justice System. In D. A. Crighton & G. J. Towl (Eds.), *Forensic Psychology* (pp. 735-750). Wiley.