

WOMEN IN PRISON IN ENGLAND & WALES

FACTSHEET

1. Population

As of 21 October 2016 there were 3,857 women in custody. In October 2015 there were 3,848 and October 2013 3,851. (During the last year the male population has remained similarly stable.) The number of women in prison nearly trebled between 1993 and 2005, to 4,470. While numbers had started slowly to reduce, there are still 1,900 more women in prison today than there were 20 years ago.

2. Receptions

There were 8,818 female first receptions into prison in 2015. There were an additional 1,204 recall admissions. There has been a significant increase in these numbers over the past year due to the sub-12 month group receiving supervision for the first time.

3. Remand

In 2010 19 per cent of the female population was on remand. That figure – at 524 – is now 14 per cent. Forty five per cent of women prisoners first entered prison on remand. However, less than half of women remanded by magistrates' courts and subsequently found guilty receive a prison sentence.

4. Sentence Lengths

Most women entering prison serve very short sentences. Three in five sentenced women entering prison in 2015 were serving six months or less. In 1993, only a third of women entering custody were sentenced to six months or less.

Twenty six per cent of all women in prison and 28 per cent of women serving sentences of under 12 months had no previous convictions, compared to 12 per cent of men.

5. Types of Offences

Eighty five per cent of women *entering* prison under sentence have committed a non-violent offence (This is based on receptions and not a snapshot). At 30 June 2016, 69 per cent of remanded women and 59 per cent of women under an immediate custodial sentence were there for a non-violent offence, compared to 61 per cent and 46 per cent of men.

Forty two per cent of women entered custody under sentence in 2015 for theft and handling stolen goods.

Fewer women are in prison for drug offences in the last ten years (June 2006 1163, 2010 829 and 2015 420) however the number in custody for violent offences has gone up (June 2006 678, 2010 898 and 2015 913).

6. ROTL

Between January and March 2016, there were 76,407 incidences of ROTL from prisons in England & Wales. This is a 14 per cent reduction since the same period in 2015. However, the number of ROTL incidences for females actually increased by 8 per cent, compared to a 16 per cent decrease for males over the same period.

7. Children

According to 2005 research from Alison Lieblich two-thirds of imprisoned women are mothers of children under 18. A third of these have children under five, and a further 40 per cent have children between five and ten. It's estimated that in 2010 more than 17,240 children were separated from their mothers by imprisonment.

A recent MoJ study estimated that 24-31 per cent of all women offenders have one or more child dependents. This is based on data from the police national computer matched with DWP benefits data, identifying female offenders who made a child benefit claim at the time of their disposal in 2012.

Only nine per cent of children with mothers in prison are cared for by their fathers in their mother's absence.

8. Mental Health

Fifty three per cent of women in prison report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child, compared to 27 per cent of men. Forty six per cent of women in prison report having suffered a history of domestic abuse.

Women in custody are five times more likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population. They're nearly twice as likely as men in prison to be identified as suffering from depression (65 per cent versus 37 per cent), and more than three times as likely as women in the general population (19 per cent). Almost a third (30 per cent) of women in custody had a psychiatric admission prior to entering prison. Of all the women sent to prison, 46 per cent say they have attempted suicide at some time in their life.

In the 12 months to June 2016, there were 7,596 incidents of self-harm by female prisoners, up six per cent on the previous year. This is a rate of 1,961 self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, compared with 1,854 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in the previous year (353 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners). 1,152 female prisoners self-harmed in the most recent 12 month period, a two per cent reduction on the previous year. This is a rate of 297 female prisoners per 1,000 compared to 115 male prisoners per 1,000. While female self-harmers are more prolific than males – 6.6 incidents per self-harming female as opposed to 3.1 per self-harming male on average - male self-harmers have more than four times the proportion of self-harm incidents requiring hospitalisation, 8.4 per cent for males, 2.1 per cent for females.

While 59 per cent of remand and 40 per cent of sentenced male prisoners in the sample had a neurotic disorder (depressive episode, Generalised Anxiety Disorder, mixed anxiety and depressive disorder, phobia, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and panic) the corresponding figures for women were 76 per cent and 63 per cent.