

Embargo: 00.01 Monday 8 May 2006

Press release

Government failing to tackle re-offending by young men

According to a major new report published today (8th May) by the Howard League for Penal Reform the public is being put at risk by Government failures to tackle re-offending.

Out for Good: the resettlement needs of young men in prison is the largest investigation into young offenders (18 - 20 years old) to have been undertaken in England and Wales. The report finds that despite young men having the highest rate of offending and re-offending, they have been largely ignored by Government initiatives to cut crime.

Every month, over a thousand young men are sent to prison. It costs £35,000 a year to keep them inside, yet the study found that little constructive work takes place in prison or on release, and nearly 70% of those released from prison will be reconvicted within two years.

The research shows that many young men in prison had significant problems including violent and abusive backgrounds and had extensive experiences of poverty.

Robert, age 20, discussed his experiences growing up:

"My dad just used to take the piss really, beat you for something silly and that..."

I did hit my dad for hitting my mum once; you should never hit a woman. I wouldn't ever physically hit a woman like my dad done to my mum. Busted her eyes, split her lip, broke her arm, broke her leg, broke her ribs.

I've had to just sit there at night and listen to it and that gave me nightmares, and I used to have a baseball bat under my bed, and I used to say to Richie [little brother] 'lets go down stairs and give it to him.' And he'd be like 'no, it will just make him worse,' scared and that. That used to make me more angry. Why should my brother be scared of our own mum and dad when they should be there to love us, make us feel not scared, make us feel loved.

The next morning I did feel sorry, and my dad shouted at me and gave me a hiding for what I did, but I feel better in my heart because I've gone down there and I've stuck up for my mum. It's a hard thing seeing your mum with broken ribs, broken arm, in hospital, it's not good."

The report calls for fundamental change in the way services think about how to work with young men in order to reduce their offending. Prison was found to confirm a criminal identity on the young men rather than helping them to reject offending.

All the young men interviewed were asked what would help them stop committing crime. They said:

- gaining employment (55%)
- having stable housing (26%)
- being in a relationship (24%)
- having a child (20%)
- having positive family relations (20%)
- managing their drug use (17%)
- managing their alcohol use (15%).

Out for Good concludes that the current operation of the criminal justice system does little to ensure that young adult offenders make amends for what they have done, or recognise the impact of their behaviour on individual victims, their families and the wider community.

Speaking today, Finola Farrant, author of the report said:

"Young men are responsible for a significant amount of crime. However, our research shows that sending these young men to prison does virtually nothing to ensure that they will live crime free lives on release, or worse, it makes their re-offending all the more predictable.

There is an urgent need for the Home Secretary, and indeed many other Government departments to take responsibility for this failure to tackle re-offending. Such criminal neglect of young offenders puts the public at risk of further offending."

Information for editors

The research took place in three, geographically diverse, Young Offender Institutions.

86 young men took part in the research.

Recommendations include:

- 1 Greater use of community sentences
- 2 Young adult offenders should make amends for their crimes
- 3 All young adult offenders should have access to an advocate
- 4 Family mediation should be offered to all young adult offenders
- 5 The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 should be repealed
- 6 The Government should carry out a public education campaign highlighting the problems caused by violence, both in the home and on the streets
- 7 There should be improved access to substance misuse services for young adults
- 8 The Government urgently needs to review current housing legislation in relation to single young men
- 9 Educational and employment opportunities should be improved for young adult offenders
- 10 Resettlement services for those in custody should be more widely available

Out for Good: the resettlement needs of young men in prison is launched at 11.30am Monday 8 May.

The Howard League for Penal Reform is holding a conference on 31 May to explore what practical measures can be developed to work more effectively with young adults.

Out for Good was funded by the Big Lottery.