

For immediate release

28 July 2010

News release

Prison violence up by almost two thirds in a decade

Official statistics obtained by the Howard League for Penal Reform have revealed today (Wednesday, 28 July) that recorded assault incidents in prison have risen by 61 per cent between 2000 and 2009. This shocking rise in violence cannot simply be attributed to the ever increasing rise in prison numbers, as the average prison population increased by 29 per cent during the same period.

In 2009 there was a total of 15,180 acts of violence in English and Welsh prisons, more than 40 a day. Serious incidents of violence have increased by 66 per cent.

Staff at Hindley young offenders institution, the largest child prison in Europe, are particularly affected with assaults on staff up by an astonishing 967 per cent, and Feltham staff are being assaulted at an increased rate of 288 per cent.

Between 2000 and 2009, there were the following notable rises in specific acts of prison violence:

- Assaults with a weapon up 44 per cent
- Assaults requiring hospital treatment up 61 per cent
- Fractures and broken bones/teeth up by 27 per cent from 139 to 204 incidents
- Non-white victims of assault up by 138 per cent
- Foreign nationals are now 197 per cent more likely to be a victim of assault
- 41 per cent increase in prisoner on officer assaults in male prisons
- 59 per cent increase in serious prisoner on officer assaults in male and female prisons

There were no recorded assault incidences involving excreta/urine between 2000 and 2006, but within two years assaults of this kind increased from zero to 253 in 2009.

Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, Frances Crook, said today: "This shocking rise in violence is far above what might be expected as we lock

up ever increasing numbers of men, women and children whose mental health problems and addictions will never be properly treated within our flooded and failing jails. As these are recorded statistics, it is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg with real levels of assaults much higher than the prison service is admitting."

"Overcrowded, squalid prison conditions lead to rioting, violence and chaos, which is dangerous for prisoners, staff and local communities. Often people leave prison more damaged and dangerous than when they first went in having spent time in our colleges of crime.

"This is why it is time for the government to look at wholesale reform of the penal system. As the Justice Secretary has stated, we should be spending more of taxpayers' money on programmes that work in reducing offending and making society safer, rather than expanding further what is already a violent, failing prison system."

In 2009, there were 15,180 assault incidents in the prison estate that resulted in a prisoner being hospitalised but in the same year the prison service only launched 1,638 serious incident investigations.

Further information

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