



PRISONER SURVEY 2017

KEY THEMES SUMMARY



16th Series

Research, Strategy and Innovation

James Carnie

March 2018

16th PRISONER SURVEY 2017: SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

Overall Bulletin

In terms of everyday living, prisoners' ratings of the main components that comprise prison existence – atmosphere, cleanliness, hygiene, food and visits – have remained consistent and favourable over the years.

Successive Prisoner Surveys have been able to report a decline in self-reported drug use since the early 2000s. The number of prisoners reporting they have 'ever' used illegal drugs in prison' has decreased from 58% in 2001 to 39% in 2017.

The upward trend in alcohol related problems and offending in the mid-2000s appears to have stabilised. Over the last ten years the figures on alcohol related issues have declined. In 2017, 39% of the prisoner population reported being drunk at the time of their offence, which although still stark, is a 10% decrease from figures a decade ago (49% on 2008).

New to the Survey this year were questions on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Over two fifths of the prison population (44%) reported that their parents or adults in their home had slapped, hit, kicked, punched or beat each other up. Similarly, 45% reported that their parents or adults in their home had hit, kicked or physically hurt them. Over one fifth of respondents reported that someone at least five years older than them (including adults), had tried to touch them or have them touch sexually (22%).

Young People in Custody

Although young people in custody were still consuming considerably more than their adult counterparts at the time of committing the offence (56% young people; 38% adults), there is evidence of a downward trend over the last few years in problematic alcohol related issues.

Over the last four years those reporting being drunk at the time of the offence has decreased by 22 points from 78% in 2011 to 56% in 2017. Those reporting that drinking had affected relationships with family has dropped by 11% from 49% in 2011 to 38% in 2017. While these figures still remain of concern, there are indications of a positive direction of travel.

Almost half (46%) of young people were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence, again down on previous years (55% in 2015; 49% in 2013 and 56% in 2011). However, counter to that trend around a half (46%) indicated their drug taking was a problem for them on the outside which is up on previous years (38% in 2015; 36% in 2013 and 35% in 2011). Young people in custody's relationship with drink, of course, is but a reflection of wider social trends in alcohol consumption reported across Scotland in recent years; general consumption appears to be down, but hard core pockets of 'problem drinking', often but not always in areas of multiple deprivation, remain.

Although down on the 2015 figure, over a half (54% in 2017; 62% in 2015) stated they carried a knife, compared to 41% of adult prisoners. Reported gang membership was also decreasing, down from 35% in 2013 to 25% in 2015 to 12% in 2017.

Over two fifths of young people (46%) reported being in care as a child, compared to a quarter of adult prisoners (25%).

Women in Custody

There has been a modest increase in those reporting being drunk at the time of the offence from 34% in 2015 to 38% in 2017. However, this still remains 12% lower than in the earlier part of the decade when half of women in custody (50% in 2011) reported being drunk at the time of their offence. Around a third were still reporting that alcohol was affecting family relationships (33% in 2015; 36% in 2017).

Considering the time series data available from 2007 to 2017, the upward trend in the mid-2000s in more women reporting - being drunk at time of offence; alcohol has affected relationships; alcohol has affected ability to keep a job; and alcohol will be a problem on release - appears to have stabilised and is showing some signs of decline. Nonetheless alcohol usage and binge drinking among young women in custody leading to problematic behaviour and serious health concerns remains a serious concern.

However, there are less encouraging trends in respect of drug use among women in custody with an eight point increase in those reporting being under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence (53% in 2017; 45% in 2015). Similarly, those declaring drug taking was problem for them on the outside increased by nine points (49% in 2017; 38% in 2015). These results are now considerably higher than the equivalent for men in custody (53% vs 35% and 49% vs 37% respectively).

Well over a third of women reporting in the survey had been in care as a child (38% n=71) compared to quarter of men reporting (25% n=639). Just over a fifth (22% n=48) of all women reporting were in care at the age of sixteen (21% in 2015; 20% in 2013).

Women scored higher than their male counterparts on all of the items in the ACE assessment indicating a greater level of adverse experience during childhood. Particularly noticeable was exposure to inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Remands

In most areas of prison life, remand prisoners have very similar views to convicted prisoners. Atmosphere, relationships and cleanliness all receive high ratings while the quality of food and choice of menu traditionally receive low satisfaction ratings from both the remand and convicted population.

There was a modest reduction in the number of remands reporting being drunk at the time of the offence (43% in 2017; 50% in 2015). However, more remand prisoners continue to report being drunk at the time of their offence compared to convicted prisoners (43% remand; 38% convicted); that drinking affected their relationship with family (37% remand; 31% convicted); and more were worried that alcohol would be a problem for them upon their release (28% remand; 16% convicted).

On all items on the mental wellbeing scale, remand prisoners continued to report lower levels of positive functioning than convicted prisoners (e.g. 58% remands felt optimistic about the future against 69% convicted). It is not abundantly clear why this should be so, but it may be connected to the 'shock' of incarceration and the uncertainty hanging over a remand prisoner's personal circumstances in terms of a court appearance and possible conviction,

with the unsettling consequences of a custodial sentence which may result in loss of work, changes to accommodation arrangements and general disruption to family life and stability.

Looked After as Children

One in four prisoners disclosed that they had been in care as a child. Around one quarter (26% in 2017; 27% in 2013; 28% in 2011) indicated that during their up-bringing they had been in care at some point and under one in five (16% in 2017; 17% in 2013 20% in 2011) had been in care at the age of sixteen.

When mental health and drug and alcohol misuse are analysed, more prisoners who have been 'looked after as children' present with problems. Positive scores for mental well-being were universally lower across the range of indicators for those who declared themselves to have been in care at some point in their childhood, both for adults and young people.

Almost half of those prisoners who had been in care (49% in 2017; 48% in 2015) reported that drug taking was a problem for them on the outside, compared with three in ten prisoners (30%) who were never in the care. Half of prisoners (47% in 2017; 51% in 2015) who had been in care as a child reported being drunk at the time of their offence, compared with 36% of all other prisoners.

Nearly two thirds of prisoners who reported being in care as a child had carried a knife (61% in 2017; 66% in 2015) compared to a third those who were not in the care system (33%).

Almost two thirds of those who were in care as a child (62% in 2017; 62% in 2015) reported witnessing violence between their parents/carers, compared with just on one third of those who were not in care (32%).

Military Veterans

In respect to basic relationships, atmosphere, contact with family and friends, cleanliness and other environmental matters, the experience of military veteran prisoners is no different to that of any other prisoner.

Fewer military veterans reported being drunk at the time of the offence (29% in 2017; 37% in 2015) compared to all other prisoners (40%) reporting. One quarter (24%) reported that drinking affected their relationship with family compared to 32% of all other prisoners. Just on one in ten (12%) military veteran prisoners were worried that alcohol would be a problem for them upon their release compared to one fifth (20%) of all other prisoners reporting in the survey.

Far fewer military veterans (26%) reported being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence when compared to all other prisoners (39%) who said this was the case. Similarly, fewer military veteran prisoners (26%) reported that drug taking was a problem for them on the outside when compared to all other prisoners (37%). Military veteran prisoners generally appear to have fewer issues with drug use when compared to all other prisoners.

On the vast majority of items in the mental wellbeing scale, military veteran prisoners reported slightly lower levels of positive functioning than other prisoners (e.g. 63% veterans felt optimistic about the future against 67% other).

There was little difference between military and non-military prisoners reporting in the survey in relation to domestic violence. A quarter of military veterans (23%) have been involved in violence against their spouse and one fifth (18%) had at some point been convicted of an offence involving violence against their spouse or partner compared to all other prisoners (24% & 20% respectively).

Older Prisoners

In some fields such as positive experiences of their hall's atmosphere, relations with staff/other prisoners and mental health (with a few exceptions), prisoners over fifty demonstrate little difference from other prisoners. On the other hand, in areas such as drug and alcohol use prisoners over fifty reported considerably lower problems and challenges.

Fewer prisoners over fifty reported being drunk at the time of their offence (22% vs. 43%) and fewer reported that drinking had a negative impact upon their lives - 11% reported that drinking affected their ability to hold down a job (compared to 19% of all other prisoners), and 22% reported that drinking affected their relationship with their family (compared to 35% of all other prisoners). Drinking habits amongst prisoners over fifty, along with their adverse effects, were also reported as lower than all other prisoners, including an inability to stop drinking once started (13% vs. 26%) and a failure to do what was normally expected because of drinking (10% vs. 20%).

Considerably fewer prisoners over fifty reported that their drug taking was a problem on the outside (14% vs. 41% of all other prisoners) and a similar proportions reported being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence (16% vs. 43%).

Just over one third of older prisoners (37%) stated that they had a disability, compared with 32% of a younger prisoners. A greater number of older prisoners reported having a long-term illness (49%) compared to prisoners under the age of fifty (31%).

Ethnic Minority and Foreign National Prisoners

Generally, the views of ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners with regard to many aspects of prison life, e.g. relationships, atmosphere, cleanliness, visits etc. are, with some exceptions, very similar to other prisoners.

Ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners were more likely to report 'never' having served a prison sentence (43%) or being on remand (42%) compared to prisoners reporting in the main survey (34% and 29% respectively).

Considerably fewer ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners (26%) were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence, compared with two in five (39%) reporting in the main prisoner survey 2017. Similar proportions are to be found in relation to drug taking as a problem on the outside, where 26% of ethnic and foreign national prisoners indicated issues against 39% of all other prisoners. However, sixteen percent reported using illegal drugs in prison in the month preceding the survey - an increase from those reporting in earlier surveys (4%).

In terms of alcohol use inside and outside prison, one fifth of ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners (21% in 2017; 22% in 2015) admitted to being drunk at the time of their offence compared two fifths (40%) of all other prisoners reporting in the main prisoner survey.

Small numbers reported alleged discrimination regarding their race (n= 41 respondents; 29%) and discrimination against regarding religion or beliefs (n= 31 respondents; 23%). However, a majority (78%) of ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners reporting felt that they were able to observe their religion/beliefs in prison. Similarly, a significant proportion were of the opinion that their religion/beliefs were respected by staff (79%) and by other prisoners (80%).

Custodial History and Substance Abuse

Examining custodial history and substance misuse reveals, not unexpectedly, that the greater the number of times an offender has been incarcerated, the greater the association with problematic drug and alcohol use.

There is undoubtedly increasing drug use amongst all prisoners who have served more sentences – of those who had never been in custody before, only 14% reported ever having used drugs in prison; but by the time over 10 sentences have been served, that proportion rises to 77%. When only women are considered, of the ‘never’ group 11% report ever using drugs in prison, while within the ‘over 10 times’ group, 90% indicate custodial drug use.

Twenty percent of all ‘never’ group prisoners were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence, while within the ‘over 10 times’ group that figure rose to 62%. Nineteen percent of the ‘never’ group considered their drug taking a problem on the outside which rose to 57% for the ‘over 10 times’ group.

In respect of alcohol marked differences persist; for all prisoners, 29% of the ‘never’ group and 45% of the ‘over 10 times’ group reported being drunk at the time of their offence. Similarly, with regard to alcohol disrupting family relationships, 20% of the ‘never’ group declared problems on that indicator while that was double in the ‘over 10 times’ group at 41%.

In relation to being in care, for both males and females alike, there is a strong correlation between the number of times a prisoner has been in prison and whether they were previously in care (49% of the ‘over 10 times’ group compared to 12% of the ‘never’ group).

It is not entirely clear whether it is increasingly problematic substance misuse which leads to repeat offending and successive jail sentences or whether successive jail sentences prompt and promote hazardous substance misuse in the community and in prison as a mechanism for coping with life’s adversities. Common sense would suggest that both of these propositions have explanatory power and in reality, probably act in consort to reinforce chaotic lifestyles, substance misuse, addiction and offending behaviour.