



Ministry of
JUSTICE

The problems and needs of newly sentenced prisoners: results from a national survey

Duncan Stewart

Ministry of Justice Research Series 16/08
October 2008

The problems and needs of newly sentenced prisoners: results from a national survey

Duncan Stewart

**This information is also available on the Ministry of Justice website:
www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research.htm**

Offender Management and Sentencing Analytical Services exists to improve policy making, decision taking and practice in support of the Ministry of Justice purpose and aims to provide the public and Parliament with information necessary for informed debate and to publish information for future use

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy).

© Crown Copyright 2008.

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged.

First Published 2008

ISBN: 978 1 84099 156 7

Acknowledgments

SPCR is funded by the National Offender Management Service in the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. I would like to thank David Brown and Malcolm Ramsay for their support and contribution to the planning and management of this project. Thanks are also due to the Ipsos MORI team: Ashley Ames, Andrew Cleary, Katya Kostadintcheva, Hayley Muller, Jerry Latter, Okey Onyekwe, Amy Homes and all the field staff. The methodological appendix in this report draws upon a technical report provided by Ipsos MORI. Finally, special thanks are due to the Governors and staff at the participating prisons without whose support and assistance the study would not have been possible.

Contents

Implications	i
Summary	ii
1 Introduction	1
2 Method	3
3 Results	5
4 Conclusions	19
References	21
Appendix	23

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 3.1	Gross weekly earnings among prisoners working before custody	11
Figure 3.2	Use and injection of heroin, crack or cocaine powder in 4 weeks before custody	16
Table 3.1:	Personal characteristics of the sample	5
Table 3.2:	Offence categories and sentence length	7
Table 3.3:	Accommodation arrangements before custody	8
Table 3.4:	Employment history and educational background	10
Table 3.5:	Benefits claimed during the year before custody	12
Table 3.6:	Long standing physical health problems and current health rating	13
Table 3.7:	Prevalence of mental health problems before custody	14
Table 3.8:	Drugs used during the year before custody	15
Table 3.9:	Alcohol consumption during the four weeks before custody	17
Table 3.10:	Prisoners' perceptions of their needs	18

Implications

This is the first report from a large national longitudinal survey of newly sentenced adult prisoners. Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) aims to measure how prisoners' problems are addressed during and after custody and the combined effect of any support or interventions on offending and other outcomes. This report describes the problems and needs of 1,457 prisoners before the start of their sentence. Prisoners' problems included unemployment, lack of qualifications, unstable accommodation, drug misuse, heavy drinking and poor psychological health, and tended to be more severe if they were adult (aged 21 and over), female or sentenced to less than 12 months.

The findings illustrate the difficult decisions faced by offender managers, and those involved in the sentence planning process, who have to prioritise interventions and resettlement support according to individuals' needs. Rigorous assessment of prisoners' needs at the earliest, most practical opportunity is therefore essential.

Differences among the adult male, female and young offender groups reinforce the case for a differentiated approach to the development of regimes and interventions, and provision of services that are sensitive to the needs of these groups.

The needs of many prisoners are unlikely to be met because they are not in custody long enough to benefit from the range of available interventions. Opportunities for short-term prisoners to engage with resettlement support services after custody should be strengthened.

SPCR is a longitudinal study: future reports will examine provision of custodial programmes and support to address prisoners' needs and their role in reducing the likelihood of re-offending after release.

Summary

Background

Increases in the number of individuals being sentenced to custody over the last decade have been accompanied by a greater awareness of the complex and interlocking problems facing prisoners. This is the first report from a large national longitudinal survey – Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) – of newly sentenced adult prisoners. SPCR aims to measure how prisoners' problems are addressed during and after custody and the combined effect of any support or interventions on offending and other outcomes. This report describes the range of problems experienced by prisoners before the start of their sentence, and the extent to which prisoners felt they needed help and support for these problems during custody.

Method

A sample of 1,457 newly sentenced prisoners was recruited to the study, from 49 prisons in England and Wales, between November 2005 and November 2006. All interviews with prisoners were conducted by fully trained and briefed interviewers from Ipsos MORI, who were contracted by the Home Office to undertake the survey fieldwork. Sampling was undertaken using a census approach, drawing up-to-date information about the prisoner population from the Prison Service's Local Inmate Data System (LIDS). The achieved sample was weighted to be representative of all newly sentenced adult receptions (up to 4 years) during the fieldwork period.

Main findings

Results were presented for the sample as a whole and for a number of sub groups. Young offenders, aged from 18 to 20, were compared with adults (21 and over). Short-term prisoners, sentenced to less than 12 months, were contrasted with those sentenced to 12 months or more. Male and female prisoners were also compared. The key findings were as follows:

- Prisoners started their sentence with a range of substantial health and social problems. The prevalence of these problems was considerably greater than among the general adult population.
- Nearly half the sample had been unemployed in the year before custody and 13% had never had a job. Fifty-eight per cent had truanted from school regularly and 46% had no qualifications. Pre-custody employment was more likely among men, adult prisoners and those serving longer sentences.
- Fifteen per cent were living in temporary accommodation or were homeless before custody; this was more common among short-term and adult prisoners.
- A range of physical health problems were reported. A quarter reported at least one long-standing illness or disability, but two-thirds of prisoners regarded themselves to be in good health.

- The prevalence of mental health problems was high. Ten per cent of the sample was identified as likely to have a psychotic disorder and 61% a personality disorder. Over a third of prisoners reported significant symptoms of anxiety or depression. Levels of psychosis, anxiety and depression, self-harm and suicidal attempts were considerably greater among women than men.
- The majority of prisoners had used illegal drugs during the year before custody. Over half had used cannabis and a third had used heroin and crack cocaine. Use of heroin or cocaine was more likely to be reported by women, adult prisoners and those sentenced for less than one year.
- Heavy drinking, defined as drinking more than twice the recommended sensible daily limits, was reported by 36% of the sample, and was more prevalent among short-term prisoners and men.
- Prisoners tended to prioritise employment and skills deficits over health and family problems in terms of the help they wanted during the course of their sentence. Nearly half (48%) of the sample reported needing help finding employment. Help getting qualifications and improving work related skills were reported by 42% and 41% respectively. Around a third wanted help with housing and their offending behaviour.

Conclusions

Most sentenced prisoners serve less than a year in custody, and have limited time and opportunity to engage with prison programmes. The findings illustrate the difficult decisions faced by offender managers, and those involved in the sentence planning and induction processes, who have to prioritise interventions and resettlement support according to individuals' needs. Rigorous assessment of prisoners' needs on reception is therefore essential.

1 Introduction

More offenders are being sentenced to custody and custodial sentence lengths have increased (Home Office, 2007a). As a consequence, the sentenced prison population has increased over the last decade, from around 49,000 in 1997 to over 65,000 in 2007 (Home Office, 2006a; Ministry of Justice, 2007). During this period, awareness of the complex and interlocking problems facing prisoners has also increased. The majority of offenders enter prison with a range of health and social problems, including poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy (Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2002). These problems and deficits are known to be associated with offending behaviour (Harper and Chitty, 2005). In response to the SEU report, the Government's *National Reducing Re-offending Action Plan* (2004) identified seven key areas or 'pathways' to support the rehabilitation of offenders: accommodation; education, training and employment; health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. Detailed delivery plans for improving the way offenders' needs are met within each pathway have also been established, as has a commitment to commission research to monitor the success of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in delivering effective interventions (Home Office, 2005). This report describes prisoners' self-reported problems and needs using data from a longitudinal survey of newly sentenced adult prisoners.

The survey, which is referred to as Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) and which is still in progress, is the first general purpose survey of prisoners since the National Prison Survey (Dodd and Hunter, 1992). Previous large scale surveys of prisoners have focused on specific issues such as mental health (Singleton *et al.*, 1998), resettlement (Niven and Olagundoye, 2002; Niven and Stewart, 2005) and criminal behaviour (Budd *et al.*, 2005). Surveys offer the best means of measuring the range of prisoners' problems and needs on reception and how these change over time because there is a lack of a comprehensive alternative source of information. For example, the Offender Assessment System (OASys), a standardised risk assessment and sentence planning tool, is not routinely available for prisoners sentenced to less than 12 months, who constitute the majority of the sentenced prison population.

SPCR uses a prospective longitudinal design to monitor the progress of a cohort of convicted prisoners starting a new sentence. The main aims are to:

- assess prisoners' problems and needs on reception;
- establish how these are addressed during and after custody; and
- identify the effect of any support or interventions on offending and other outcomes during the year after release.

Thus, SPCR will investigate the kinds of intervention or support prisoners receive in prison and after release, and which prisoners appear to benefit most. This report concerns the first of the objectives listed above, using a representative sample of 1,457 newly sentenced prisoners.¹ In addition to presenting results for the full sample, the report considers variations in the problems and needs of prisoners across three key variables associated with re-offending: age, gender and sentence length. Police National Computer (PNC) data show that released prisoners are more likely to re-offend if they are young, male and serving shorter sentences (Home Office, 2006b). Therefore, the report examines differences between:

- young offenders, aged from 18 to 20, and adult prisoners aged 21 and over;
- male and female prisoners;
- short-term prisoners, sentenced to less than 12 months, and those sentenced to 12 months or more.

¹ An additional sample of 2,500 prisoners sentenced between 18 months and four years has also been recruited, since these prisoners have a greater chance of receiving interventions during custody than those sentenced to shorter terms.

2 Method

Prisoners were eligible for participation if they were convicted adults (aged 18 or over), sentenced for a minimum of one month and a maximum of four years.² Foreign nationals subject to deportation were ineligible because they could not be followed up. Reception interviews were conducted between two to four weeks after reception into custody (to allow prisoners time to adjust to prison life). The two week requirement meant that it was not possible to include prisoners sentenced to less than one month (most prisoners serve half their sentence lengths).

All interviews with prisoners were conducted by fully trained and briefed interviewers from Ipsos MORI, who were contracted by the Home Office to undertake the survey fieldwork. Fieldwork for reception interviews took place between 16 November 2005 and 9 November 2006, at 49 prisons in England and Wales (13 reception prisons did not participate³).

Sampling

The Local Inmate Data System (LIDS) was used to select individuals for the sample. LIDS is local to each prison and provides information (updated daily) on a prison's population. A standardised LIDS query was devised for prison IT systems, to enable prison staff with access to LIDS to produce lists of prisoners eligible for the survey. Sampling was undertaken using a census approach (further details are provided in the Appendix).

The fieldwork timetable was dictated by the prisons in terms of the number of interviewers they could accommodate and when interviews could take place. In most prisons more than one round of sampling was needed. Some sampled prisoners would have been in prison too long by the time an interviewer could get to them, but by far the most significant difficulty was sampled prisoners moving to another establishment before an interview could be arranged. This reflected the unprecedented prison population pressures at the time of the fieldwork. However, a response rate of 60% was achieved.⁴ Non-response weighting was applied to align the achieved sample with the profile of prison receptions during the fieldwork period in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, sentence length and offence profile.

Data analysis

Statistical tests were limited to ten key variables only, to reduce the risk of apparent significant effects occurring by chance (Type I error). These variables were: mean age; ethnicity; marital status; stable accommodation; employment; having qualifications; poor physical health rating; symptoms of depression and anxiety (six or more); using heroin or cocaine during the four weeks before custody; and heavy drinking during the four weeks

2 Longer-term prisoners were not included because many would still be serving their sentence by the end of the four years planned for the study.

3 These prisons were unable to arrange interview days during the allotted fieldwork period.

4 See Appendix.

before custody. All 'significant' findings referred to in the text are statistically significant at the five per cent level. Percentages presented in this report are based on weighted data, but tables show the unweighted base which represents the number of prisoners within each specified category. Column percentages in tables may not add to 100% due to rounding. Values of less than 0.5% or zero in table columns are indicated by '-'.

3 Results

Characteristics of the sample

The average age of the sample was 30.1 years (standard deviation (SD) =9.1). The distribution of age ranges across the sample is shown in Table 3.1. Compared to male prisoners, a greater proportion of women were in the 25 to 29 and 40 to 49 age groups and there was a statistically significant difference in mean age. A smaller proportion of short-term prisoners were in the 18 to 20 age group than those sentenced to one to four years, and again there was a statistically significant difference in mean age.

Table 3.1: Personal characteristics of the sample

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Age							
18-20	n/a	n/a	11	25	16	10	16
21-24	n/a	n/a	20	17	20	14	19
25-29	n/a	n/a	21	18	19	26	20
30-39	n/a	n/a	30	25	29	27	29
40-49	n/a	n/a	13	11	12	17	12
50+	n/a	n/a	4	5	4	5	5
Ethnic group							
White	80	79	82	75	79	80	79
Mixed	6	5	4	7	5	5	5
Asian or British Asian	6	5	4	7	5	-	5
Black or British Black	8	10	9	10	9	14	10
Chinese or other ethnic group	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
Not classified	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Nationality							
UK	95	93	94	92	94	87	93
Foreign national	5	7	6	8	6	13	7
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>1,276</i>	<i>1,101</i>	<i>356</i>	<i>1,322</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>1,457</i>
Marital status							
Married	1	11	7	13	9	8	9
Living with a partner	15	24	23	22	22	23	22
Single	84	57	62	59	61	59	61
Widowed	-	1	1	1	1	2	1
Divorced	-	6	6	3	5	7	5
Separated	-	3	2	2	2	2	2
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>1,272</i>	<i>1,098</i>	<i>355</i>	<i>1,319</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>1,453</i>

The majority of the sample (84%) described their ethnic origin as White. The distribution of ethnic groups was similar for males and females and for young offenders and adult prisoners. However, the proportion of non-White prisoners serving sentences of one to four years was significantly greater than the proportion of white prisoners serving such terms: 39% vs 30%. This finding did not reflect differences in offence categories. Although it is difficult to differentiate ethnic origin from other factors, this is consistent with previous research which shows ethnic differences in sentencing decisions (Barclay *et al.*, 2005). Seven per cent of prisoners were classified as foreign nationals. The distribution of foreign prisoners did not differ greatly by age or sentence length, but the proportion of foreign nationals among female prisoners was twice that for males (13% vs 6%).

A third of the sample (32%) was married or living with a partner at the time of reception into custody. A significantly smaller proportion of young offenders were in this category (16%), compared to those aged 21 or over (34%). Prisoners sentenced to one year or more were significantly more likely to be married or living with a partner (36%) than those serving shorter sentences (30%), but there was no statistically significant difference by gender.

The custodial characteristics of the sample (derived from centrally held records) are shown in Table 3.2. Overall, a third of the sample (34%) had been imprisoned for acquisitive offences, most notably theft and handling stolen goods (20%). Violence against the person and motoring offences accounted for 18% and 16% of the sample respectively. The 'Other offences' category, which accounted for a fifth of prisoners, included breach of a community service or probation order (5%), breach of a suspended sentence order (2%), breach of licence conditions (2%), criminal damage (2%) and affray (2%).

A greater proportion of young offenders than adults had been sentenced for violence against the person (22% vs 17%), but the pattern was reversed for theft and handling (15% vs 22%). A greater proportion of women than men had been sentenced for theft and handling (26% vs 20%), drug offences (13% vs 7%) and fraud and forgery (9% vs 4%). In contrast, nearly a fifth of men (18%) had been sentenced for motoring offences compared to four per cent of women. A higher proportion of men had been sentenced for violence against the person (19% vs 15%).

As expected, differences by sentence length reflected the seriousness of the offence. Theft and motoring offences were more common for prisoners serving short sentences. Violence, burglary and drugs offences were more common for those sentenced to a year or more. Table 3.2 also shows that a greater proportion of young offenders and women were serving sentences of one to four years.

Table 3.2: Offence categories and sentence length

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Offence							
Violence against the person	22	17	16	23	19	15	18
Sexual offences	1	1	-	3	1	1	1
Robbery	11	1	-	7	3	2	3
Burglary	9	7	4	14	8	5	7
Theft and handling	15	22	25	10	20	26	20
Fraud and forgery	-	4	3	5	3	9	4
Drug offences	8	8	2	19	7	13	8
Motoring offences	14	17	22	4	18	4	16
Other offences	20	22	25	14	21	25	21
Offence not recorded	1	2	2	1	2	1	2
Length of sentence							
Up to 6 months	35	52	n/a	n/a	51	35	49
>6 months, <12 months	13	20	n/a	n/a	18	26	19
12 months to 4 years	52	29	n/a	n/a	32	39	32
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	181	1,276	1,101	356	1,322	135	1,457

Accommodation

Many prisoners lose their accommodation after starting a prison sentence, presenting a major difficulty in resettling prisoners after release. The accommodation status of the sample before custody is shown in Table 3.3. The most common type of accommodation was renting a flat or house, reported by a third of the sample (34%). Only 14% reported living in privately owned property; the proportion of men in this category was double that of women (15% vs 7%). Of those prisoners living in rented accommodation, 44% were renting from a Local Authority, 19% from a Housing Association and 36% from a private landlord. Renting was the most frequently reported accommodation arrangement among prisoners in the older age group and among women. Paying board and living rent free in a property owned or rented by someone else were more frequently reported by young offenders (38% and 25% respectively) than adults (16%).

Table 3.3: Accommodation arrangements before custody

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Type							
Privately owned	12	15	13	17	15	7	14
Rented	17	37	34	34	33	44	34
Paying board	38	16	19	20	20	11	19
Living rent free	25	16	16	19	17	20	17
Hostel/temporary	4	7	7	6	7	7	7
Homeless/sleeping rough	6	9	10	3	8	10	8
Other	-	1	1	-	1	1	1
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	181	1,274	1,100	355	1,320	135	1,455
Living arrangements*							
Living alone	9	20	19	17	18	23	18
Living with...							
Partner	15	38	34	34	35	28	34
Parents/in-laws	59	20	24	31	27	14	26
Adult children	-	6	6	7	6	8	6
Dependent children	20	21	19	25	21	20	21
Other adult relations	20	10	11	13	11	17	12
Friends	7	13	13	9	12	8	12
Other	11	4	6	4	5	3	5
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	169	1,162	988	343	1,210	121	1,331

* Excludes prisoners who were homeless before imprisonment

Eight per cent of the sample was homeless or sleeping rough prior to custody. Almost half (47%) of these prisoners had been homeless for less than six months, and 41% had been homeless for a year or more. Homelessness was more prevalent among prisoners sentenced to less than one year (10%) than those serving longer terms (3%).

Eighty-five per cent of the sample had stable accommodation before custody (i.e. not living in temporary housing or homeless). This did not differ significantly by gender, but prisoners sentenced to less than a year were significantly less likely to have stable accommodation than longer term prisoners (82% vs 90%). Stable accommodation was also significantly less likely to be reported by adult prisoners than those aged from 18 to 20 (84% vs 90%).

Among prisoners with some form of accommodation before custody (i.e. not homeless), about a fifth (18%) were living alone. This was more common among adult prisoners (20%) than those aged from 18 to 20 (9%). A third (34%) of prisoners were living with a partner, a quarter (26%) with parents and fifth with dependent children (21%). Men and young

offenders were more likely to be living with parents; six out of ten young offenders were living with parents or parents-in-law.

Two-thirds (66%) of prisoners who had somewhere to live before custody expected to go back to the same accommodation after release from prison. Twenty-eight per cent expected to go to different accommodation after release and six per cent were unsure. The proportion expecting to return to the same accommodation was similar for men and women (66% vs 64%), short and longer sentenced prisoners (66% vs 65%), but higher for young offenders than adult prisoners (77% vs 64%).

Just over half the sample (53%) had children under the age of 18 (including stepchildren) at the time they were imprisoned. There were similar rates for men (52%) and women (55%) and for short- and longer-term prisoners (54% vs 50%). A far greater proportion of adults had children (59%) than young offenders (18%). Among those prisoners with children, 34% reported that at least one of their children was living with them before they came into prison. A similar proportion of men and women with children reported that they lived with at least one child (34% and 35% respectively). Six per cent of prisoners with dependent children were living with their children but not a partner.

Employment, training and education

Like accommodation, jobs are frequently lost after starting a prison sentence, but a criminal record is also a barrier to finding employment after release. Most of the sample had worked at some point in their lives, but 13% had never had a job (Table 3.4). Half (52%) had been in paid employment during the 12 months prior to custody. A minority (15%) were self-employed. Statistically significant differences in the proportion of prisoners employed during the year before custody were found between young offenders and adults (63% vs 51%), prisoners serving short and longer sentences (50% vs 58%) and between men and women (54% vs 33%). A similar pattern was observed for employment during the four weeks prior to custody. A third of the sample (33%) had been employed during this period. Thirty-seven per cent were unemployed, the majority of whom (70%) were looking for work.

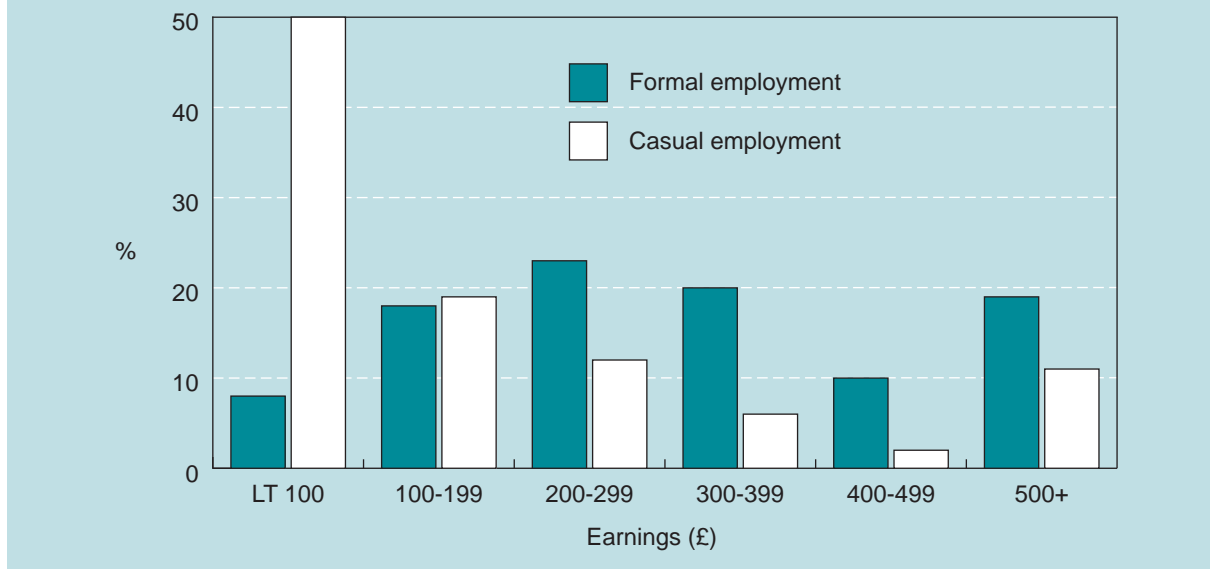
Although a greater proportion of young offenders than adults had a job (39% vs 32%), more young offenders were also unemployed and looking for work (38% vs 24%). In contrast, a greater proportion of adult prisoners reported being unable to work because of long-term sickness or disability (15% vs 2%). There were also differences by gender. A quarter of women (26%) reported being unemployed compared to 38% of men. However, a greater proportion of women reported long-term sickness/disability (17% vs 13%) or were looking after their home or family (15% vs 3%).

Table 3.4: Employment history and educational background

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Employment status							
Ever employed	82	89	87	88	88	81	87
Employed year before custody	63	51	50	58	54	33	52
4 weeks before custody...							
In employment	39	32	31	38	34	23	33
Unemployed, looking for work	38	24	26	25	27	13	26
Unemployed, not looking for work	6	12	12	9	11	13	11
Employment training scheme	-	1	1	1	1	2	1
Full-time education	4	1	1	2	1	4	1
Long-term sickness/disability	2	15	14	10	13	17	13
Looking after home/family	1	5	4	5	3	15	4
Other	10	11	11	9	10	15	11
Unweighted base (N)							
	179	1,267	1,093	353	1,312	134	1,446
Education							
Regular truant	70	55	58	56	58	56	58
Permanently excluded from school	52	37	42	35	41	30	40
No qualifications	48	46	49	40	46	45	46
Unweighted base (N)							
	179	1,266	1,089	356	1,311	134	1,445

Among prisoners who had been employed during the four weeks prior to custody, the average gross weekly wage (or equivalent for those who worked for less than a week) was £372 (SD=443; median=£297). However, weekly salaries varied considerably. Figure 3.1 shows the proportion earning six categories of gross weekly income from formal employment. Nine per cent earned less than £100 per week, while 19% earned £500 or more. Almost a quarter (23%) earned between £200 and £299 per week, which was the most commonly reported earnings category.

Figure 3.1: Gross weekly earnings among prisoners working before custody



The majority of prisoners (61%) who were employed during the four weeks prior to custody expected to return to the same job after release. Thirty per cent did not expect to return to the same job and nine per cent were unsure. Of the former, the most common reasons cited were that they had lost their job because of imprisonment (18%), the job was temporary (15%) and they had left of their own accord (12%). A greater proportion of short term prisoners expected to return to the same job after release than those sentenced to a year or more (68% vs 49%).

Twenty-four per cent of the sample reported doing some casual cash in hand work during the 12 months before coming into custody, and eight per cent had done so in the four weeks before custody. Half (51%) of prisoners who were employed during the four weeks prior to custody had also done some casual work, compared to 27% of those who had not been employed during this period. The average weekly (or equivalent) cash-in-hand wage was £172 (SD=199; median=£96). As Figure 3.1 also shows, half (50%) of prisoners who did some casual work during the four weeks before custody earned less than £100 per week. Higher categories of earnings were far less prevalent than for formal employment.

Of the prisoners who were classified as unemployed during the four weeks prior to custody, over a third (38%) reported that there was no specific reason which was stopping them getting or looking for a job. The reasons cited by others were as follows: previous criminal record (16%); drug or alcohol addiction (14%); lack of skills/qualifications (12%); accommodation problems (10%); and health problems (5%).

Data for prisoners' educational background are also shown in Table 3.4. Over half the sample (58%) had regularly truanted from school and 40% had been excluded from school (32%

had both truanted and been excluded). These problems were notably high among young offenders (70% and 52% respectively). Almost half the sample (46%) reported having no academic or vocational qualifications. Short-term prisoners were significantly more likely to have no qualifications than those sentenced to one to four years (49% vs 40%), but there was no statistically significant difference by age group or gender.

Claiming benefits

Sixty-two per cent of the sample reported claiming benefits during the 12 months before custody (Table 3.5). Although a similar proportion of men and women claimed benefits during this period, there were differences by gender in the types of benefits claimed.

Table 3.5: Benefits claimed during the year before custody

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Any benefit	54	63	64	56	61	68	62
Jobseekers allowance	47	33	36	32	36	19	35
Income support	8	19	19	13	15	37	17
Housing benefit	6	13	13	10	11	22	12
Council tax benefit	3	8	8	6	6	20	7
Sickness/incapacity	1	18	15	15	15	18	15
Other	3	4	4	4	3	13	4
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>1,271</i>	<i>1,097</i>	<i>355</i>	<i>1,318</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>1,452</i>

A greater proportion of male than female prisoners claimed jobseekers allowance (36% vs 19%). However, a greater proportion of women claimed income support (37% vs 15%), housing benefit (22% vs 11%) and council tax benefit (20% vs 6%). The types of benefits claimed were generally similar for short- and longer-term prisoners, but there were differences by age. Almost half (47%) of young offenders were claiming jobseeker’s allowance compared to under a third (33%) of adults. Conversely, a higher proportion of adults claimed income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit, and sickness/ incapacity benefit.

Health

Prisoners were asked to indicate any long-standing illnesses or disability they suffered from (Table 3.6). Over a quarter (27%) of the sample reported a long-standing physical disorder or disability. Musculo skeletal and respiratory complaints were most the commonly reported problems. As might be expected, long-standing disorders were more common among adult prisoners than young offenders (29% vs 12%).

Table 3.6: Long standing physical health problems and current health rating

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Long-standing illness or disability							
Musculo skeletal	2	13	11	14	12	11	12
Respiratory system	6	9	9	8	8	11	8
Heart/circulatory system	-	5	4	4	4	5	4
Digestive system	3	5	5	4	5	6	5
Ear/eye problems	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
Skin complaints	1	2	2	3	2	5	2
Diabetes	-	2	1	2	1	2	1
Epilepsy	1	3	3	2	2	5	3
Any of these	12	29	26	27	26	31	27
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>1,274</i>	<i>1,098</i>	<i>354</i>	<i>1,318</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>1,452</i>
Good health rating	83	66	68	70	69	61	69
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>1,274</i>	<i>1,099</i>	<i>356</i>	<i>1,320</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>1,455</i>

Prisoners were also asked to rate their current physical health status on a five-point Likert scale. Around two-thirds of the sample (69%) regarded themselves as being in good or very good health. Young offenders and men were significantly more likely to rate their health status positively than adults or women. There was no statistically significant difference by sentence length.

It was not feasible for this wide-ranging survey to include a formal diagnosis of psychiatric disorders. Following a similar approach to that employed by a national study of psychiatric morbidity among prisoners (Singleton *et al.*, 1998), a survey-based measure of likely psychosis was used. Prisoners were categorised as likely to have psychosis if they reported being prescribed antipsychotic drugs, had been admitted to hospital for a mental health problem during the year before custody, or responded positively to item 5(a) of the Psychosis Screening Questionnaire (hearing voices; Bebbington and Nayani, 1995). On this basis, ten per cent of the sample was categorised as likely to have a psychotic disorder (Table 3.7). The rate for female prisoners was double that for males (18% vs 9%).

The prevalence of personality disorder among the sample was estimated using the Standardised Assessment of Personality – Abbreviated Scale (SAPAS; Moran *et al.*, 2003). The eight items (scored 0 or 1) of the scale were summed, with scores of three or more indicating a positive screen. As Table 3.7 shows, 61% of the sample was assessed as having a personality disorder. There was little difference by sentence length, but the rate was higher for men than for women (62% vs 57%), and for adults compared to young offenders (63% vs 53%).

The severity of ten anxiety and depression symptoms was measured using the psychological health subscale of the Maudsley Addiction Profile (MAP; Marsden *et al.*, 1998). Prisoners were asked how often they had experienced each symptom during the four weeks before custody, scored on a five-point Likert scale. Table 3.7 shows the number of symptoms reported at least 'sometimes' during this period. Over four-fifths of the sample (82%) reported one or more symptom, and a third (36%) reported between six and ten symptoms. The prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms was greater among female prisoners. Over half of women (56%) reported having six to ten symptoms compared to a third of men (34%). This difference was statistically significant. Only nine per cent of women had no symptoms, compared to 19% of men.

Table 3.7: Prevalence of mental health problems before custody

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Likely psychosis	8	10	10	8	9	18	10
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	181	1,276	1,101	356	1,322	135	1,457
Positive personality disorder screen	53	63	62	61	62	57	61
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	178	1,270	1,093	355	1,313	135	1448
Anxiety/depression							
No symptoms	24	17	17	18	19	9	18
1-5 symptoms	46	47	48	43	48	35	47
6-10 symptoms	31	37	34	39	34	56	36
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	180	1,260	1,084	356	1,307	133	1,440
Suicide attempt(s)							
Year before prison	6	8	8	6	7	19	8
4 weeks before prison	1	3	3	1	2	5	2
Self-harm							
Year before prison	5	6	6	5	5	14	5
4 weeks before prison	1	2	2	3	2	8	2
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	181	1,270	1,095	356	1,317	134	1,451

Table 3.7 also shows that a fifth (19%) of women had attempted suicide during the year before custody, nearly three times the rate reported by men. Likewise, deliberate self-harm was more prevalent among female prisoners than males. Fourteen per cent of women reported harming themselves during the year before custody compared to five per cent of men.

Drugs

Prisoners were asked about their lifetime illicit drug use, and use of drugs during the year and four weeks before their current prison sentence. The majority of the sample (80%) had used an illicit drug during their lives. Cannabis was the most commonly reported drug (70%), but significant proportions of the sample had used cocaine powder (43%), crack cocaine (41%), amphetamines (37%) and heroin (37%). Table 3.8 shows the proportion of prisoners who reported using drugs during the year before custody. Over two-thirds of the sample (69%) had used at least one drug during the year before custody. Over half (54%) had used cannabis, and around a third had used crack cocaine (32%) and heroin (31%). A quarter (25%) reported using cocaine powder during this period.

Table 3.8: Drugs used during the year before custody

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Any drug	75	68	71	66	70	65	69
Cannabis	66	52	54	52	55	45	54
Heroin	10	35	35	22	30	44	31
Non-prescribed methadone	3	11	12	6	9	17	10
Non-prescribed tranquilizers	7	18	19	13	16	26	17
Crack	15	35	36	23	30	49	32
Cocaine powder	35	23	24	26	25	17	25
Amphetamines	17	13	16	10	14	11	14
Ecstasy	24	12	14	13	15	7	14
LSD	7	2	3	2	3	2	3
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	181	1,272	1,097	356	1,318	135	1,453

There were differences in patterns of drug use by age, sentence length and gender. A greater proportion of young offenders reported using cannabis, cocaine powder and ecstasy than adult prisoners. However, a greater proportion of adults reported use of heroin, non-prescribed methadone or tranquilizers, and crack cocaine. Use of cannabis and cocaine powder differed little by sentence length, but a greater proportion of short-term prisoners had used heroin, non-prescribed methadone or tranquilizers, and crack cocaine. A greater proportion of men than women had used cannabis and cocaine powder. However, half the women (49%) had used crack cocaine and 44% had used heroin compared to 30% of men.

Although fewer prisoners reported using drugs in the four weeks before custody, the difference from one year rates was small: 62% of the sample had used a drug during the four-week period. The pattern of use during four weeks before custody was similar also, with cannabis (46%), heroin (28%) and crack cocaine (25%) being the most commonly used

drugs. Differences by age, sentence length and gender in patterns of use found for the year before custody were apparent for the four weeks before custody.

Figure 3.2 shows the proportion of the sample who had used heroin, cocaine powder or crack cocaine (HCC) during the four weeks before custody. These drugs are generally regarded as causing the most individual and social harm (Godfrey *et al.*, 2002). Forty-one per cent of the sample reported HCC use during the four week period. Rates of HCC use were significantly higher for adults than for young offenders (43%vs 28%), for prisoners sentenced to less than one year than those serving shorter terms (44% vs 35%), and for women than men (52% vs 40%).

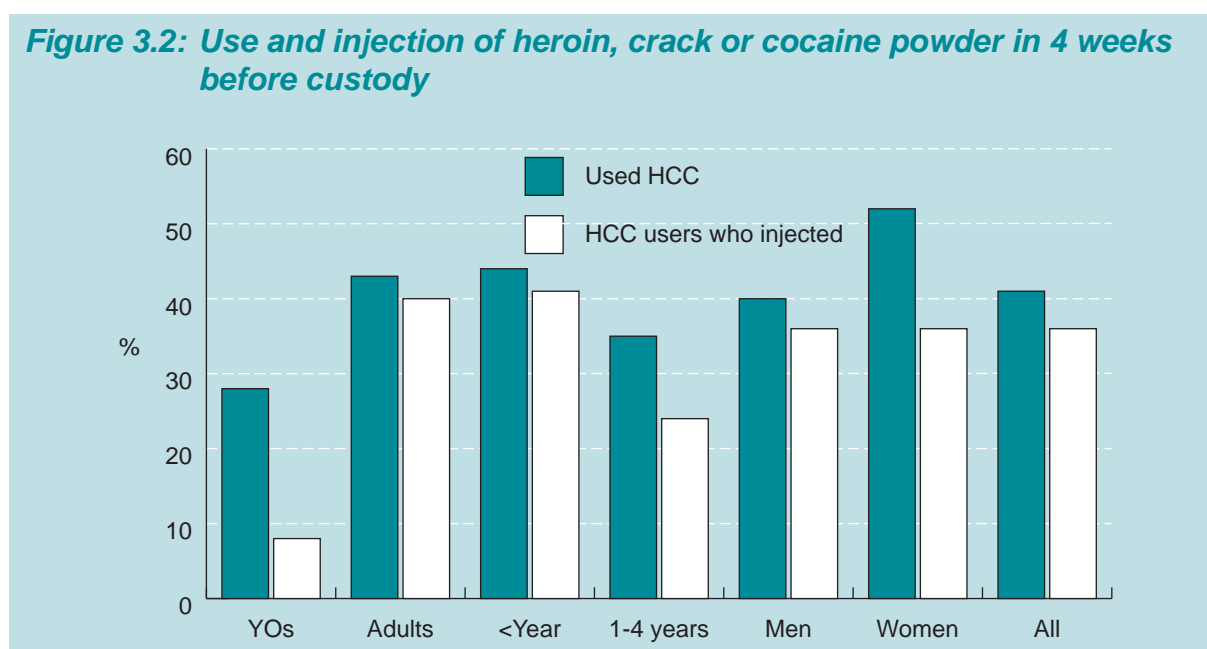


Figure 3.2 also shows rates of injecting among those who used these drugs during the same period. Two-fifths of adult HCC users (40%) had injected HCC compared to only eight per cent of young offenders. There was also a difference between HCC users sentenced to short- and longer-term sentences (41% vs 24%), but rates of injecting were the same for male and female HCC users (36%).

Alcohol

The reception questionnaire asked prisoners to recall the quantity and frequency of their alcohol consumption during the four weeks before custody (Table 3.9).

A third (34%) of the sample had not consumed any alcohol during this period. Those who had consumed alcohol were classified as either occasional (1-3 days), weekly (4-27 days) or daily (28 days) drinkers. A third of the sample (36%) drank on a weekly basis and a fifth (21%) had consumed alcohol every day during the four weeks before custody. Of the drinkers, 31% had drunk on a daily basis. Half of women (50%) were non-drinkers compared to a third

of men (32%). However, men were more likely to be weekly drinkers than women (38% vs 22%). About a fifth of both men and women drank on a daily basis. Daily drinking was more common among short-term prisoners (24%) than those sentenced to a year or more (13%).

Table 3.9: Alcohol consumption during the four weeks before custody

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
No alcohol	29	35	33	35	32	50	34
Occasional	12	9	10	9	10	9	10
Weekly	42	35	33	43	38	22	36
Daily	17	21	24	13	21	18	21
Heavy drinking	42	35	39	31	38	22	36
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>177</i>	<i>1,250</i>	<i>1,081</i>	<i>346</i>	<i>1,294</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>1,427</i>

Eighty per cent of daily drinkers, 53% of weekly drinkers and 37% of occasional drinkers consumed at least ten units of alcohol on a typical drinking day. Quantity and frequency data were combined to construct a measure of heavy drinking, defined as consuming more than twice the recommended sensible daily drinking limits (3 units for women and 4 for men) at least once per week.

Thirty-six per cent of the sample was classified as a heavy drinker. There were statistically significant differences in rates of heavy drinking by sentence length and gender. Heavy drinking was significantly more likely among prisoners sentenced to less than one year than for those serving longer sentences (39% vs 31%), and nearly twice the proportion of men than women were classified as a heavy drinker (38% vs 22%).

Self-perceived needs

This section describes prisoners’ own assessment of the types of help or support they felt they needed during their current sentence. Prisoners were asked to indicate from a list which (if any) types of help or support they needed. Responses are shown in Table 3.10, ranked in order of frequency. Four-fifths (82%) of the sample reported needing help or support for at least one type of problem, although only five per cent of women thought that they had no needs to be addressed during custody. Prisoners tended to prioritise employment related issues over health and family problems. The most frequently reported need among the sample was help in finding employment, cited by nearly half (48%) of prisoners, but improving qualifications (42%) and work-related skills (41%), finding accommodation (37%) and offending behaviour (34%) were also common needs. The average (median) number of needs for the sample was three. Reflecting variations in the prevalence of these problems among subgroups, a greater proportion of women than men needed help in almost every area. Young offenders had greater a need for help with literacy/numeracy and qualifications.

Adult prisoners were more likely to need help with a drugs and health problems. Except for drugs, there were few differences between short- and longer-term prisoners.

Table 3.10: Prisoners' perceptions of their needs

	Age (%)		Sentence length (%)		Gender (%)		All (%)
	Young offenders	Adults	Less than 1 year	1-4 Years	Men	Women	
Need help with...							
Finding employment	52	48	47	52	48	57	48
Getting qualifications	51	40	40	45	41	55	42
Work-related skills	45	40	39	44	39	54	41
Finding accommodation	26	40	38	36	37	40	37
Offending behaviour	28	35	34	33	33	47	34
Drug problem	15	32	32	23	28	44	29
Literacy/numeracy	24	21	22	19	21	18	21
Mental health	14	22	22	18	18	49	21
Medical problem	9	22	19	21	18	33	20
Alcohol problem	16	16	17	14	16	16	16
Family problem	8	16	15	16	14	28	15
None of these	24	16	18	16	19	5	18
<i>Unweighted base (N)</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>1,276</i>	<i>1,101</i>	<i>356</i>	<i>1,322</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>1,457</i>

4 Conclusions

The findings from this survey illustrate the range of substantial health and social problems experienced by sentenced prisoners before custody. These extend beyond offending and include unemployment, lack of qualifications, unstable accommodation, drug misuse, heavy drinking and psychological health problems. Consistent with previous research (SEU, 2002), the prevalence of sentenced prisoners' problems was greater than among the general adult population: for example, the proportion of the SPCR sample who were unemployed was approximately eight times greater, and the proportion with no qualifications was about three times greater. The proportion of prisoners who used drugs in the year before custody was over six times greater than for the general population.⁵

Although this message is not new, comparisons with previous research should be treated with caution because of differences in the methodologies, samples and measures used. Nevertheless, comparisons between the SPCR findings and those of the 1997 Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (Singleton *et al.*, 1998) and the 2001 and 2003 Resettlement Surveys of prisoners nearing release (Niven and Olagundoye, 2002; Niven and Stewart, 2005; Ramsay *et al.*, 2005) suggest that prisoners' problems have increased since the 1990s, but have been relatively stable in recent years. For example, around a fifth of sentenced men and a quarter of sentenced women from the Psychiatric Morbidity Survey reported use of heroin in the year before custody. This increased to around a third of males and half of females from both SPCR and the 2001 Resettlement Survey. Comparisons also show an increase in the prevalence of crack cocaine use, with a similar widening of the disparity in rates of use between men and women.

The prevalence of other problems such as housing and employment reported by the SPCR prisoners is consistent with the two Resettlement Surveys, but again is greater than the Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. In terms of mental health, the level of likely psychosis for the SPCR prisoners is higher than that identified by both clinical and lay interviews in the Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. Despite the apparent increase in prevalence, both studies identified approximately twice the proportion of women than men as likely to have psychosis. In contrast, the prevalence of personality disorder identified from the screening instrument used in SPCR is similar to levels diagnosed from Psychiatric Morbidity Survey clinical interviews.

Reception into prison offers an opportunity to assess these problems and to plan appropriate support and interventions. The results of this survey illustrate the need for rigorous assessment procedures for all prisoners starting a new sentence. The extent to which prisoners' problems can be addressed during custody depends on sentence length and the

⁵ Comparisons were made using employment and skills figures published by the Office for National Statistics (2007) and rates of drug use reported in the British Crime Survey (Roe and Man, 2006). Differences in the ways these data were collected and measured means that comparisons are indicative only.

availability of interventions at particular prisons. The majority of sentenced prisoners are not in custody long enough to be eligible for the most intensive programmes, while access to some programmes is limited by waiting lists. In this context, the findings illustrate the difficulty faced by offender managers and those involved in the sentence planning process in prioritising interventions and resettlement support for individual prisoners.

It is, therefore, interesting that the present sample of prisoners rated employment and skills deficits most highly in terms of the help they would like to receive during their sentence. Nearly half the sample reported that they needed help finding employment, while two-fifths needed help getting qualifications and improving work related skills. Recent reviews have concluded that vocational training programmes and broader employment related support/ advice services (e.g. job search) are the most effective means of helping prisoners and socially disadvantaged individuals into work (Dench *et al.*, 2006; Hurry *et al.*, 2006), although it is more typical for prisoners to arrange employment, training or education through friends, family or personal contacts (Niven and Stewart, 2005).

It is also notable that prisoners were more reluctant to recognise some prevalent problems as requiring support or intervention. The level of need for help with employment, getting qualifications and accommodation was broadly in line with the proportion of prisoners reporting problems in these areas. However, needing help with drug, alcohol and mental health problems was reported by considerably less than the proportion of prisoners who were recent users of heroin or cocaine, heavy drinkers or had significant psychiatric symptoms. For many, the most immediate problem to be tackled on reception may be managing drug withdrawal or elevated levels of anxiety and distress. This is especially pertinent for more vulnerable prisoners with a history of self-harm or suicide attempts, and women in particular. The reluctance to acknowledge problems in these areas may reflect the relative importance prisoners attached to other factors in terms of successful resettlement at the end of their sentence, but they are important to prisoners' safety and wellbeing.

The kinds of problems reported by prisoners in this survey are known to be associated with offending behaviour, but it is much less clear how these 'dynamic' risk factors are related to re-offending after a term of custody. Recent evidence suggests that factors such as drug use, employment and accommodation problems are associated with re-offending among released prisoners (May *et al.*, 2008). However, a range of 'static' risk factors were more strongly predictive of re-offending, particularly age and criminal history variables. Future reports from SPCR will explore these complex relationships in more detail, and consider the role of custodial programmes and support in reducing the likelihood of prisoners re-offending after release.

References

- Anderson, T. and Arch, J. (2004). *Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR): Feasibility Study*. London: National Centre for Social Research.
- Barclay, G., Munley, A. and Munton, T. (2005). *Race and the criminal justice system: An overview to the complete statistics 2003-2004*. London: Home Office.
- Bebbington, P. and Nayani, T. (1995). The psychosis screening questionnaire. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 5, 11-19.
- Budd, T., Collier, P., Mhlanga, B., Sharp, C. and Weir, G. (2005). *Levels of self-report offending and drug use among offenders: Findings from the Criminality Surveys*. Home Office On-line Report 18/05.
- Dench, S., Hillage, J., Coare, P. (2006). *The impact of learning on unemployed, low-qualified adults: A systematic review*. DWP Research Report 375. London: DWP.
- Dodd, T. and Hunter, P. (1992). *The national prison survey 1991*. London: OPCS.
- Harper, G. and Chitty, C. (2005). *The impact of corrections on re-offending: A review of 'what works'*. Home Office Research Study 291. London: Home Office.
- Home Office (2004). *Reducing re-offending national action plan*. London: Home Office.
- Home Office (2005). *The national reducing re-offending delivery plan*. London: Home Office.
- Home Office (2006a). *Offender management caseload statistics 2005: England and Wales*. London: Home Office.
- Home Office (2006b). *Re-offending of adults: Results from the 2003 cohort*. London: Home Office.
- Home Office (2007a). *Sentencing statistics 2005: England and Wales*. London: Home Office.
- Hurry, J., Brazier, L., Parker, M. and Wilson, A. (2006). *Rapid evidence assessment of interventions that promote employment of offenders*. DfES Research Report 747. London: DfES.

Lewis, S., Vennard, J., Maguire, M., Raynor, P., Vanstone, M., Raybould, S. and Rix, A. (2003). *The resettlement of short-term prisoners: An evaluation of seven pathfinders*. RDS Occasional Paper 83. London: Home Office.

Marsden, J., Gossop, M., Stewart, D., Best, D., Farrell, M., Lehmann, P., Edwards, C. and Strang, J. (1998) The Maudsley Addiction Profile (MAP): A brief instrument for assessing treatment outcome. *Addiction*, 93(12): 1857-1867.

May, C., Sharma, N. and Stewart, D. (2008). *Factors linked to re-offending: a one year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*. London: Ministry of Justice.

Ministry of Justice (2007). *Population in custody: April 2007 England and Wales*. London, Ministry of Justice.

Moran, P., Leese, M., Lee, T., Walters, P. and Thornicroft, G. (2003). Standardised Assessment of Personality – Abbreviated Scale (SAPAS): preliminary validation of a brief screen for personality disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 183, 228-232.

Niven, S. and Olagundoye, J. (2002). *Jobs and homes: A survey of prisoners nearing release*. Home Office Research Findings 173. London: Home Office.

Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005). *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison in 2003*. Home Office Research Findings 248. London: Home Office.

Office for National Statistics (2007). *Social Trends: No. 37*. London: ONS.

Roe, S. and Man, L. (2006c). *Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2005/06 British Crime Survey*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 15/06. London; Home Office.

Singleton, N., Meltzer, H., Gatward, R., Coid, J. and Deasy, D. (1998). *Psychiatric morbidity among prisoners in England and Wales*. London: Office for National Statistics.

Social Exclusion Unit (2002). *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Appendix: Sampling and interviewing procedures

This report describes a core representative sample of 1,457 newly sentenced prisoners. A booster sample of nearly 2,500 prisoners sentenced to between 18 months and four years has also been recruited, because approximately two-thirds of prisoners from the core sample were sentenced to a year or less, and these prisoners have limited opportunity to attend in-custody interventions.

LIDS was used to select eligible prisoners for the core sample, using a census approach. Reception interviews were conducted between two to four weeks after reception into custody (to allow prisoners time to adjust to prison life). Since LIDS only includes the date of reception into the current establishment (rather than reception at any prison), the date of conviction was used to calculate time served. LIDS outputs were e-mailed to Ipsos MORI over the encrypted Criminal Justice Secure e-Mail service (CJSM), or in some cases were faxed. Checks were carried out by Ipsos MORI to filter out prisoners who had spent a significant amount of their sentence elsewhere.

Initially, prisoners convicted over a month before reception were excluded. However, this strategy yielded very few longer-sentenced prisoners (who tend to spend longer in custody before they are convicted and sentenced). Adjustments were made so that prisoners serving sentences between 18 months and four years were sampled if the date of conviction was less than three months before date of reception. Sampling lists also prioritised longer-sentenced prisoners.

This helped the recruitment of longer sentenced prisoners, but they were still under-represented towards the end of the fieldwork period. To overcome the difficulty, 105 prisoners recruited to the study booster sample were counted as part of the core sample. The booster sample, for prisoners serving 18 months to four years, were required to be in custody for no more than six months at their date of interview (determined from centralised Inmate Information System (IIS) data). It was concluded subsequently that it would not be feasible for future studies of new receptions to use random probability sampling procedures, unless focused on longer-sentenced prisoners only.

As a back up to sampling procedures, a number of screener questions were incorporated at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure prisoners met eligibility requirements. Where non-sampled prisoners were brought forward for interview, these were allowed to go ahead. A total of 188 prisoners were recruited to the study in this way. Subsequent checks of the IIS were conducted to ensure eligibility criteria had been met. Of the 2,675 prisoners sampled with LIDS, 1,189 interviews were achieved. Taking account of prisoners being discharged or moving establishments before an interview could be arranged (interviews were conducted within a two-week period), 1,980 eligible prisoners were available for interview, giving an adjusted response rate of 60%.

A total of 57 prisoner refusals were recorded by interviewers (where an interviewer met with a prisoner who subsequently refused to be interviewed). No contact was recorded for 74 cases, for reasons including the prisoner being transferred, access being denied to the prisoner, and early release.

Interviews

Governors of every prison in the estate were introduced to SPCR in a letter from the Director General of the Prison Service. Governors were asked to nominate a liaison officer to act as a main point of contact to set up arrangements for interviews. Prison contacts escorted interviewers to interview rooms. Where necessary, interviewers were provided with a letter of introduction from RDS NOMS, confirming the interviewer's purpose at the prison, security clearance and permission to carry a laptop computer. The prison contact also arranged for selected prisoners to report to the interview room at their assigned times. Refreshments (a soft drink and chocolate) were provided as an incentive to take part in the survey. In prisons where interviewers were not allowed to bring in any refreshments, they were bought by interviewers from prison vending machines (e.g. in visits areas). Category-A prisons did not allow provision of refreshments.

Necessarily, the study took account of a number of practical difficulties experienced at the prisons. In particular, the number of interview rooms available and staff availability to schedule arrangements and bring prisoners to interview rooms varied greatly. Some prisons were able to accommodate interviews over a sustained period, while others preferred short periods of intensive fieldwork. An average of three interviews per interviewer day was achieved.

Reception questionnaire

The aim of the reception interview was to identify prisoners' problems before they entered custody, which could be measured at subsequent follow-ups to assess changes over time. Therefore, a structured questionnaire was designed to collect information on the following areas:

- details of current sentence;
- contact with the Criminal Justice System;
- self-assessed prisoner needs for help;
- accommodation and relations;
- employment;
- smoking and alcohol;
- drug use and drug treatment;
- health;
- previous offending;
- family and other background;

- education; and
- attitudes and motivation.

The reception questionnaire was designed by RDS NOMS in the Ministry of Justice, in consultation with stakeholders from the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and the Department of Health. All interviews were conducted face to face in prisons using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Interviews lasted around 45 minutes. Before the start of the interview, every respondent was asked to sign a consent form.

There are limitations to the information presented in this report, since it nearly all derives from prisoners' self-reports. This may have introduced bias due to problems of recall or intentional under or over reporting. However, it was not feasible to use alternative data sources for the problems and behaviours of interest (Anderson and Arch, 2004), and the study did not validate self-reported drug use with biological measures (because of variations in time in custody before the reception interview).

Ministry of Justice Research Series 11/08

The problems and needs of newly sentenced prisoners: results from a national survey

This is the first report from a national longitudinal survey of newly sentenced prisoners. The survey aims to measure how prisoners' problems are addressed during and after custody and the combined effect of any support or interventions on offending and other outcomes. This report describes the problems and needs of 1,457 prisoners before the start of their sentence. These included unemployment, lack of qualifications, unstable accommodation, drug misuse, heavy drinking and poor psychological health. Prisoners' problems were more severe if they were adult (aged 21 and over), female or sentenced to less than 12 months. Prisoners tended to prioritise employment and skills deficits over health and family problems in terms of the help they wanted during the course of their sentence.

ISBN 978 1 84099 156 7

© Crown copyright
Produced by the Ministry of Justice

Alternative format versions of this report are available on request.

E-mail: research@justice.gsi.gov.uk

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research.htm>