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## The prison population in 2002: a statistical review

Rachel Councill

Prison statistics are published annually. These findings are a summary of the Home Office report Prison statistics England and Wales, 2002.

### Key points

- The average population in custody during 2002 was 70,860, an increase of 7% on 2001, and a 55% increase compared to 1992.
- Between 2001 and 2002, the remand population in custody increased more than the sentenced population. The annual average remand population increased by 14% compared to an increase of 6% in the annual average sentenced population.
- Also, between 2001 and 2002, the number of female prisoners in custody increased from an average of 3,740 to an average of 4,300 (an increase of 15% compared with a 6% increase for male prisoners in custody).
- Over the ten years to 2002, the male sentenced prison population increased by 57%. There were above average increases for males held after conviction for drug offences (increase of 201%) and rape (increase of 84%). Over the same period, the female sentenced prison population increased by 184%, from 1,180 in 1992 to 3,340 in 2002. There were above average increases for females held after conviction for robbery (an increase of 453%), drugs offences (up 414%) and burglary (up 350%).
- There were 5,150 prisoners serving life sentences on 30 June 2002. 70% of these were convicted murderers.
- Ethnic minority groups made up 22% of the male prison population and 29% of the female population.
- 10% of the male prison population and 20% of the female prison population were known to be foreign nationals.
- 59% of prisoners discharged from prison in 1999 were reconvicted of a standard list offence within two years of release.

The average population in custody during 2002 was higher at 70,860 than in any previous year. This was an increase of:

- 7% on the average for 2001
- 16% on the average for 1997
- 55% compared to 1992.

The prison population increased steadily throughout 2002 and peaked in October, at

72,990, which exceeded the peak seen in 2001 (68,450). Prisoners were held in police cells under Operation Safeguard between July and mid-December 2002; a month-end average of 199 prisoners being held for these five months, or an average of 83 over the calendar year as a whole. The average number held in prisons was 70,780 during 2002.

### Court sentencing trends

The main factors influencing the prison population are:

- the custody rate at the courts
- the average sentence lengths given
- the number of cases passing through the courts.

The Crown Court has the greatest impact on the prison population because it imposes longer sentences. Magistrates' courts also make a contribution, particularly on receptions where more than half come from magistrates' courts

The custody rate is the proportion of those found guilty at court who are given a custodial sentence. Between 1992 and 2002 the custody rate at the Crown Court rose from 45% to 63%. The average sentence length for adults also increased, from 21 months to 28 months. However, there was a decrease in the number of adults sentenced at the Crown Court between 1992 and 2002, down from 60,900 to 56,600, a fall of 7%.

At magistrates' courts, the custody rate for indictable offences more than tripled from 5% in 1992 to 17% in 2002. Average sentence lengths for adults at magistrates' courts fell from 2.7 to 2.5 months. Between 1992 and 2002, the total number of adults sentenced for indictable offences increased by almost 11%, from 157,700 to 176,700.

For full information on court sentencing trends up to 2001 see Home Office, 2002. Figures for 2002 quoted here are provisional. 2002 statistics are expected to be published in December.

### Components of the population in custody

Among the population in custody in 2002, there was an average of 57,220 prisoners under sentence (81% of the total). These included:

- 45,600 sentenced adult males
- 8,320 sentenced male young offenders (generally aged under 21)
- 3,300 sentenced females.

The population held on remand consisted on average of 12,790 prisoners (18% of the total), with 11,850 males and

940 females. The population in custody also included 850 non-criminal prisoners. These were mainly persons held under the Immigration Act 1971 but also included those held for civil offences, such as contempt of court. The total population in custody increased by 4,560 (or 7%) between 2001 and 2002, from 66,300 to 70,860. The sentenced population increased by 6% (3,170), from 54,050 to 57,220. The average remand population, at 12,790, was 14% higher than the average in 2001 (11,240).

### Sentenced prison population

Between 1992 and 2002, the male sentenced prison population increased by 57%. This included three times the number of drug offenders, up from 2,900 in 1992 to 8,720 in 2002 (Figure 1). The rate of increase was also above the average for males sentenced for rape (increase of 84%).

Over the same period, the female sentenced prison population increased by 184%, from 1,180 in 1992 to 3,340 in 2002. There were above average increases for females held after conviction for robbery, where the numbers increased from 60 in 1992 to 310 in 2002, an increase of 453% (Figure 2). There were also increases in the numbers held for drugs offences (up from 260 to 1,330 or 414%) and burglary (up from 50 to 230 or 350%).

Since 1992, longer sentence prisoners (sentences of four years or more, see Figure 3) have tended to increase as a proportion of all sentenced prisoners. By 2002, 48% of sentenced prisoners were serving four years or more, compared with 42% in 1992. Between 1992 and 2002, the proportion of sentenced prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months decreased slightly, whilst the proportion of sentenced prisoners serving sentences of 12 months to less than four years reduced from 42% to 38%.

There were 5,150 inmates serving life sentences in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 2002, an increase of 72% compared to the population in 1992. 70% of life sentence prisoners were convicted murderers. The next largest group was 13% serving sentences for manslaughter and other offences of violence against the person. A further 10% were serving sentences for rape or other sexual offences.

Figure 1 Male prison population under an immediate sentence 1992 and 2002

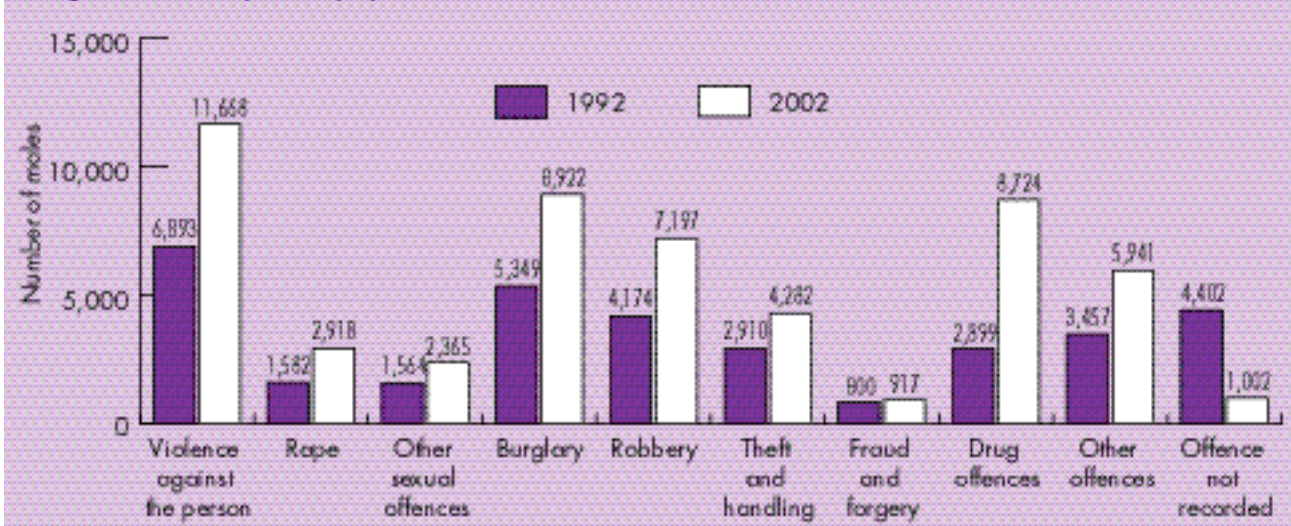


Figure 2 Female prison population under an immediate sentence 1992 and 2002

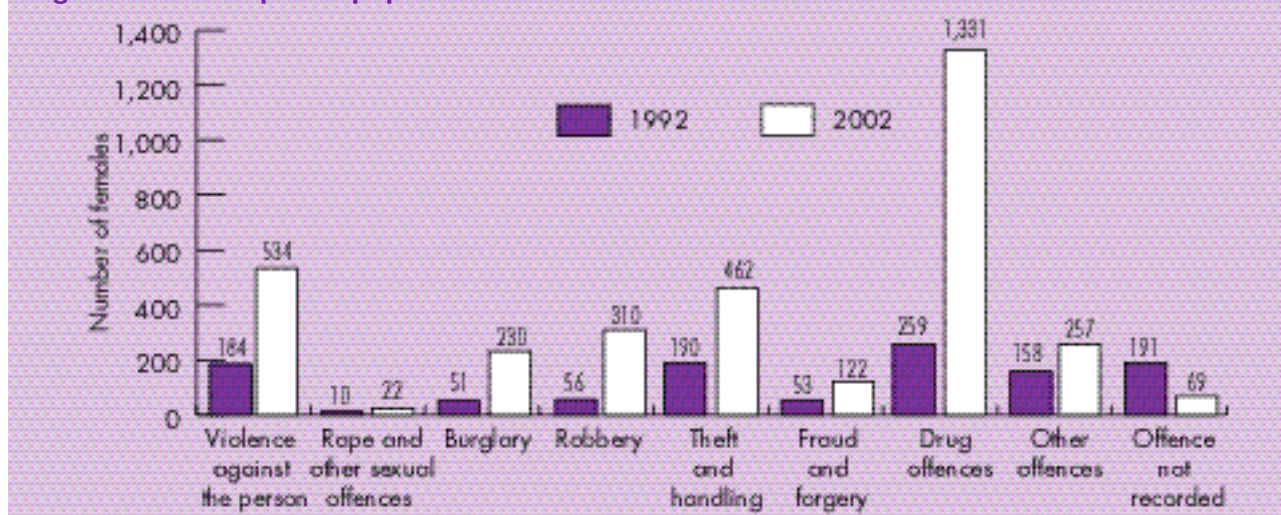
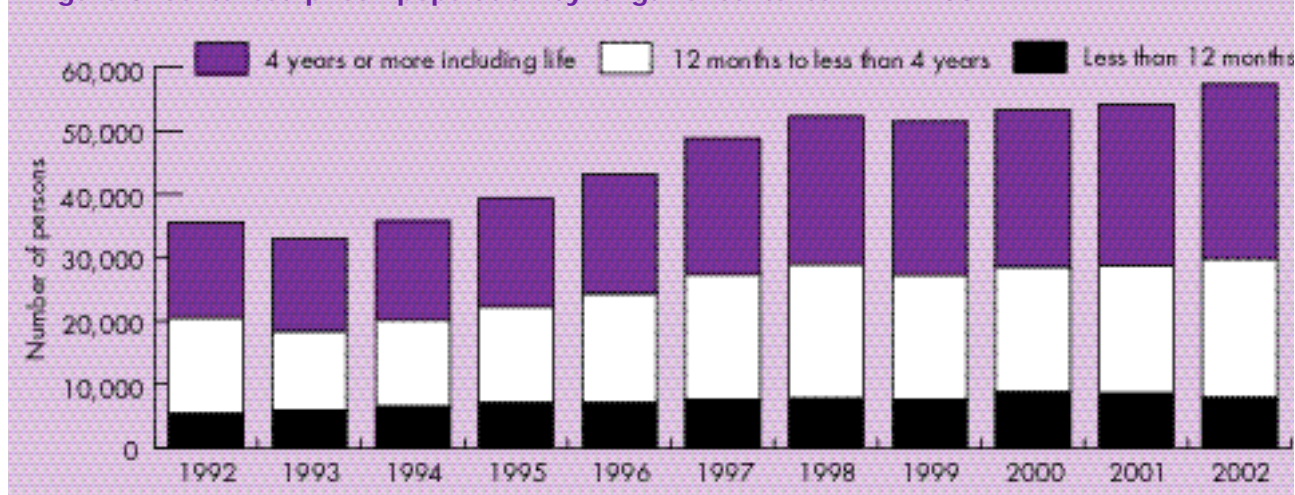


Figure 3 Sentenced prison population by length of sentence 1992-2002



### International comparisons

In England and Wales, there were 137 people in custody for every 100,000 members of the general population in 2002. This is the highest among western European countries, followed by Portugal (132 per 100,000 population) and Scotland (126). The US (702) and Russia (602) had the highest rates amongst those reported. Since prison population rates (per 100,000 of the national population) are based on estimates of the national population they should not be regarded as precise.

### Ethnicity, nationality and religion

#### Ethnic minority groups

At the end of June 2002, 16,170 prisoners held in Prison Service establishments were known to belong to ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority groups made up 22% of the male prison population and 29% of the female population. This is a small increase compared to 2001, when 21% and 26% respectively were from ethnic minority groups. The ethnic minority prison population has increased by 124% since 1992, with the population of 'Chinese and other' prisoners increasing the most since 1992 (up 183%); white and South Asian prisoners increased the least (46% and 58% respectively). The increase in the ethnic minority population is linked to the increase in the population of foreign nationals.

#### Nationality

At the end of June 2002, 11% of the prison population were known to be foreign nationals, 10% of the male population and 20% of the female population. The population of foreign nationals has increased by 120% since 1993 (the first year for which data is available), compared to a 55% increase in British nationals. Much of the increase in foreign nationals has been since 2000.

#### Religion

The largest group of prison inmates was Anglican. The proportions of the prison population were:

- Anglican (36%)
- Roman Catholics (17%)
- Muslims (8%)
- other Christians (3%)
- Free Church (2%)
- Buddhists (1%).

Sikhs, Hindus and Jews each accounted for less than one per cent of the population. Buddhists were the fastest growing group of the prison population. This group has more than doubled in size over the last nine years, growing by 279% between 1993 and 2002. The second highest rate of growth overall was among prisoners with no religion, who increased by 203% between 1993 and 2002.

## Prison discipline

There were 106,200 proven offences against prison discipline in 2002 – 2,200 less than in 2001. The rate of adjudications fell between 2001 and 2002, down from 163 to 150 per 100 population. The most common offences were disobeying lawful orders, threatening or abusive words or behaviour, and drugs offences.

## Home Detention Curfew and parole

### Home Detention Curfew

In 2002, 55,370 prisoners were eligible to be considered for the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme of which 20,525 were released. This was a release rate of 37%, 12 percentage points higher than the release rate in 2001, reflecting the extensions to the HDC scheme in 2002. 93% of prisoners released onto HDC completed their curfew successfully (only 7% were recalled to prison). The most common reason for recall (54% of all recalls) was failure to comply with the curfew conditions.

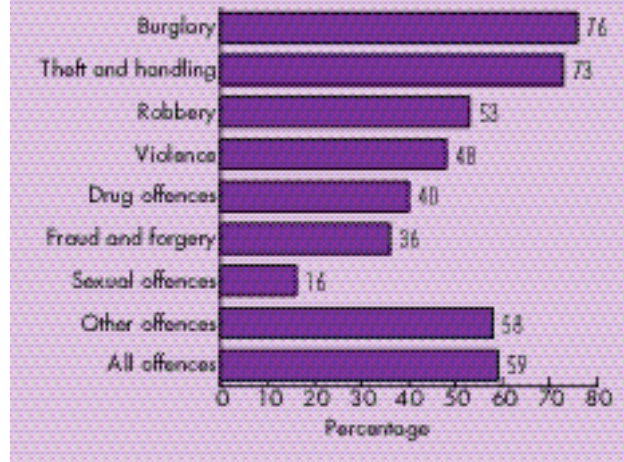
The release rate by type of offence varies markedly from the average rate of 37% – this reflects the varying risks of reoffending across offence types. Comparing the percentage of short-term prisoners discharged in 1999 who were reconvicted within two years with the HDC release rates in 2002 for those offences, the release rate declines as the reconviction rate rises for all offence types except for sexual offences. For example, the highest release rate was for drugs offences, at 62% of those eligible. The reconviction rate for drugs offences was 44%. The corresponding figures for burglary were 24% (the lowest release rate excluding sexual offences) and 77% (the highest reconviction rate).

### Parole

Prisoners serving four years or more are not eligible for HDC but are eligible to be considered for parole.

6,010 determinate sentence prisoners were considered for parole in 2002/03 (9% more than in 2001/02). Of the 6,010 prisoners considered for parole, 3,180 were released (53%). This compares with 51% in 2001/02 and is the highest release rate since 1992. 13% of those on parole were recalled in 2002/03. Under 6% were recalled for committing a further offence.

**Figure 4 Percentage of prisoners reconvicted within two years of discharge in 1999 by original offence**



## Reconvictions

Of prisoners released during 1999 the proportions reconvicted within two years were:

- 55% for adult males
- 74% for young male offenders
- 55% for all females
- 59% for all prisoners.

Figure 4 shows the proportions of prisoners reconvicted within two years for any offence, by the type of offence for which they were originally convicted and sent to prison. Rates of reconviction within two years were generally lowest for those who had served sentences for sexual offences (16%), fraud and forgery (36%) or drug offences (40%).

Generally, prisoners discharged in 1999 and reconvicted within two years were not reconvicted for the same offence. However, some types of reoffenders are much more likely to be reconvicted for the same type of offence. For example, of those reconvicted, 57% of all those originally sentenced for shop theft, 38% for motoring and 28% for drugs offences, were reconvicted for the same offence type at first reconviction.

## Reference

Home Office. (2002). *Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2001*. London: Home Office.

For a more detailed report, see Prison statistics England and Wales, 2002 by Rachel Councill (2003). It is available on the Home Office RDS website <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/>

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