

Young People In Custody Health Survey

2015

Key Findings for Young Females

Number of young females surveyed: 19 (8%)

Social Determinants

- Mean age of 16.3 years, significantly younger than males in custody (17.3 years).
- 32% of young females had been placed in care before the age of 16 years (20% males).
- 74% have had a parent in prison (51% males).
- 32% were attending school prior to custody (26% males).
- 11% were working in paid employment in the 30 days prior to custody (27% males).
- 58% had been bullied, a significantly higher proportion than that among males (33%).
- 37% had bullied others (52% males).
- 21% reported being unsettled or having no fixed place of abode in the four weeks prior to custody (12% males).
- 58% had moved two or more times in the six months prior to custody, with males significantly less likely to have done so (22%).
- 55% met criteria for a substance use disorder (i.e. either abuse or dependence) (67% males): 18% for an alcohol use disorder (35% males) and 36% for a drug use disorder (59% males).
- 73% met criteria for an attention/behavioural disorder (58% males).
- 27% met criteria for an anxiety disorder (24% males) and 9% (12% males) for a mood disorder.
- 73% met criteria for two or more psychological disorders (62% males).
- 50% had engaged in past self-harm (12% males) and 26% since they had been in custody (9% males).
- 20% had thought about suicide in the past (15% males), although no young females had ever attempted suicide (13% males).
- Since coming into custody, 11% had thought about suicide (9% males); however, there were no reports of having attempted suicide during this time (2% males).

Mental Health

- 47% had been exposed to a past traumatic event (48% males).
- 64% had experienced childhood abuse/neglect (68% males).
- 45% had experienced severe abuse/neglect (27% males).
- 23% had an intelligence quotient (IQ) in the "Extremely Low" (intellectual disability) range (under 70) (16% males).
- 62% scored in the "Borderline" range (70 to 79) (37% males).
- 82% met criteria for a psychological disorder (83% males) in the preceding 12 months.

Language and Reading

- 60% had Severe Difficulties (scoring 70 or below) in core language skills (47% males).
- 92% had Severe Difficulties (scoring 70 or below) in reading comprehension (77% males).

Offending Behaviour

- 89% had been in custody prior to the current custodial period (83% males).
- The average age of first time in custody was 15.0 years (15.1 years males).
- Females had previously spent an average of 7.1 times in custody (5.1 times males).

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Physical Health

- 28% were overweight (28% males) and 17% obese (19% males).
- 26% have ever had asthma (28% males).
- 53% have had a head injury resulting in unconsciousness, a significantly higher proportion than that among males (23%).
- Diet improved while in custody. Eating fresh fruit three or more times a week increased from 32% (41% males) in the community to 95% (90% males) in custody. Eating fresh vegetables three or more times a week increased from 42% (48% males) in the community to 84% (85% males) in custody.
- 32% had ever been pregnant: first becoming pregnant at an average age of 14.2 years.
- 55% were currently taking prescribed medications (56% males).

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

- 89% had ever smoked cigarettes (92% males), with a mean age of initiation of 12.5 years (12.2 years males).
- Of those who had ever smoked, 82% had smoked cigarettes every day/almost every day in the 12 months prior to custody (82% males) and 53% indicated they would smoke on release from custody (42% males).
- 89% had ever been drunk (90% males), with an average age first drunk of 13.5 years (13.6 years males).

- Of young females who reported drinking in the 12 months prior to custody, 50% reported being drunk at least weekly during this period (41% males).
- Of females who reported drinking in the 12 months prior to custody, 63% identified that their alcohol consumption had caused them problems during this period (51% males).
- Of those who had consumed alcohol in the 12 months prior to custody, 100% of those aged 18 years or older (86% males), and 100% of those under 18 (98% males), were drinking at hazardous and harmful (i.e. "risky") levels.
- 84% had ever engaged in illicit drug use* (93% males), with cannabis (84%) the most commonly used drug, followed by crystal methamphetamine (53%) and ecstasy (26%).
- 79% reported illicit drug use at least weekly in the year prior to custody (82% males).
- 81% reported committing crime to obtain alcohol and/or drugs (64% males).
- 69% were intoxicated (on alcohol, drugs or both) at the time of their offence (78% males).

** Illicit drug use was defined as either use of illicit drugs (i.e. heroin, cannabis, methamphetamine, amphetamine, cocaine, ecstasy, gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), hallucinogens), non-medical use of over the counter and prescription pharmaceutical drugs, misuse of licit substances (e.g. volatile substances), or use of "synthetic" drugs.*