



# Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to March 2020 Assaults and Self-harm to December 2019

## Main Points

<p><b>Number of deaths decreased from last year</b></p>		<p>In the 12 months to March 2020, there were 286 deaths in prison custody, a decrease of 10% from 317 deaths the previous 12 months. Of these, 80 deaths were self-inflicted, an 8% decrease from the 87 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months.</p>
<p><b>Self-harm incidents continue to rise</b></p>		<p>Self-harm incidents reached a record high of 63,328 incidents in the 12 months to December 2019, up 14% from the previous 12 months. In the most recent quarter there were 16,197 self-harm incidents, down 1% on the previous quarter.</p>
<p><b>The number of individuals self-harming increased</b></p>		<p>The number of individuals self-harming increased by 3% in the 12 months to December 2019, to 12,977, and the number of self-harm incidents per individual increased by 11% from 4.4 to 4.9.</p>
<p><b>Assaults decreased from the previous 12-month period</b></p>		<p>There were 32,669 assault incidents in the 12 months to December 2019, down 4% from the 12 months to December 2018. In the most recent quarter, assaults decreased by 7% to 7,611 incidents.</p>
<p><b>Assaults on staff decreased from the previous 12 months</b></p>		<p>There were 9,995 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2019, a 2% decrease from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff decreased by 3% to 2,377 incidents.</p>
<p><b>The number of serious assaults on staff decreased</b> <b>12% of all assault incidents were serious</b></p>		<p>In the 12 months to December 2019, there were 3,813 serious assault incidents, a decrease of 3% from the previous 12 months. Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 2% to 2,921 in the 12 months to December 2019. Similarly, serious assaults on staff decreased by 4% to 952.</p>

*Safety in custody statistics cover deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody and HMPPS Immigration Removal Centres in England and Wales, with figures in the summary tables in the quarterly publications presented on a 12-month rolling basis over an 11-year time series. Supplementary annual tables, providing more in-depth statistics on a calendar year basis, underlying data files with pivot tables providing lower level granularity, and a guidance technical document are also available alongside this bulletin, at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics)<sup>1</sup>*

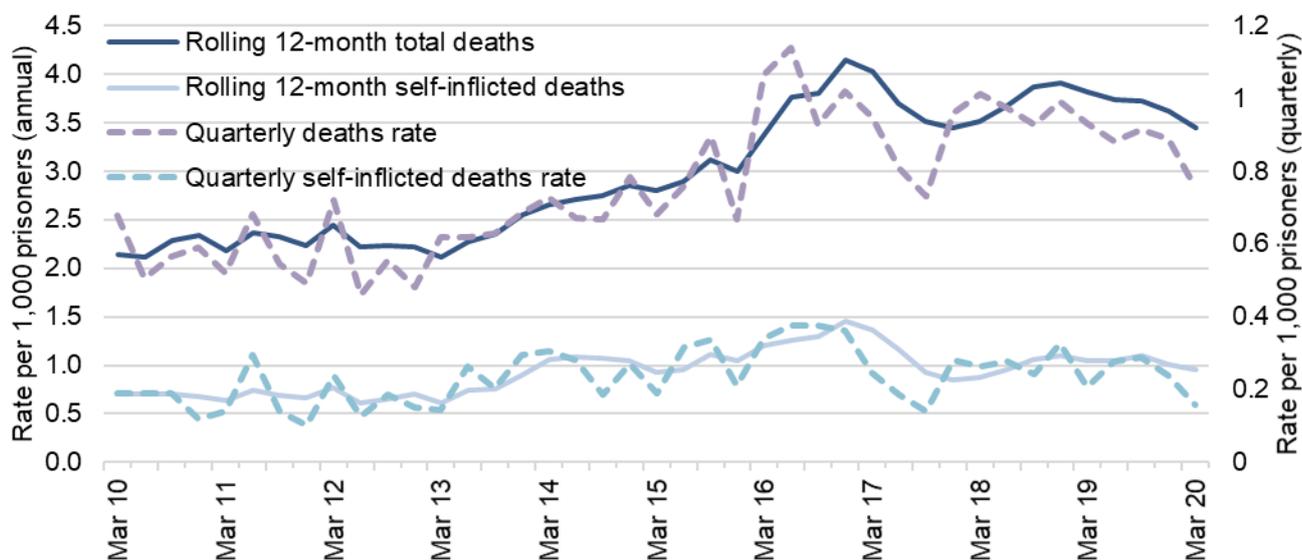
<sup>1</sup> Data on deaths is published three months ahead of self-harm and assaults. Therefore, the deaths annual publication and tables are published alongside the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September publication.

# 1 Deaths: 12 months ending March 2020

## Number of deaths continues to fall

In the 12 months to March 2020, there were 286 deaths in prison custody, a decrease of 10% from 317 deaths the previous 12 months. Of these, 80 deaths were self-inflicted, a decrease of 8% from 87 the previous 12 months.

**Figure 1: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of deaths per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending March 2010 to 12 months ending March 2020, with quarterly rates**



In the 12 months to March 2020, there were 286 deaths in prison custody (a rate of 3.4 per 1,000 prisoners), a decrease from 317 deaths in the previous 12 months (a rate of 3.8 per 1,000 prisoners). The most recent quarter saw the number of deaths decrease to 63, down from 74 in the three months to December 2019. Quarterly death figures should be considered with caution due to greater volatility and the potential for seasonal effects. Long-term trends and more detail are presented in annual tables<sup>2</sup>.

There were 80 apparent self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to March 2020 (a rate of 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners), a decrease of 8% from 87 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months. Also, there were 160 deaths due to natural causes (a rate of 1.9 per 1,000 prisoners), a 5% decrease from 169 deaths the previous 12 months.

There were 43 deaths recorded as 'Other' in the 12 months to March 2020, 39 of which are 'awaiting further information' prior to being classified. In some cases, the results of the toxicology and post-mortem tests are inconclusive, meaning classification cannot be arrived at until inquest (which can be a considerable time after the death). As a result, the number of deaths in the individual categories is not directly comparable with earlier years: it is likely that numbers in some categories will be revised upwards once classifications have been finalised.

<sup>2</sup> Data on deaths are published three months ahead of Assaults and self-harm, therefore, the Deaths in prison custody 2019 annual publication is published in the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September 2019 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/861738/deaths-prison-custody-1978-2019.xlsx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861738/deaths-prison-custody-1978-2019.xlsx)

## Self-harm: 12 months to December 2019

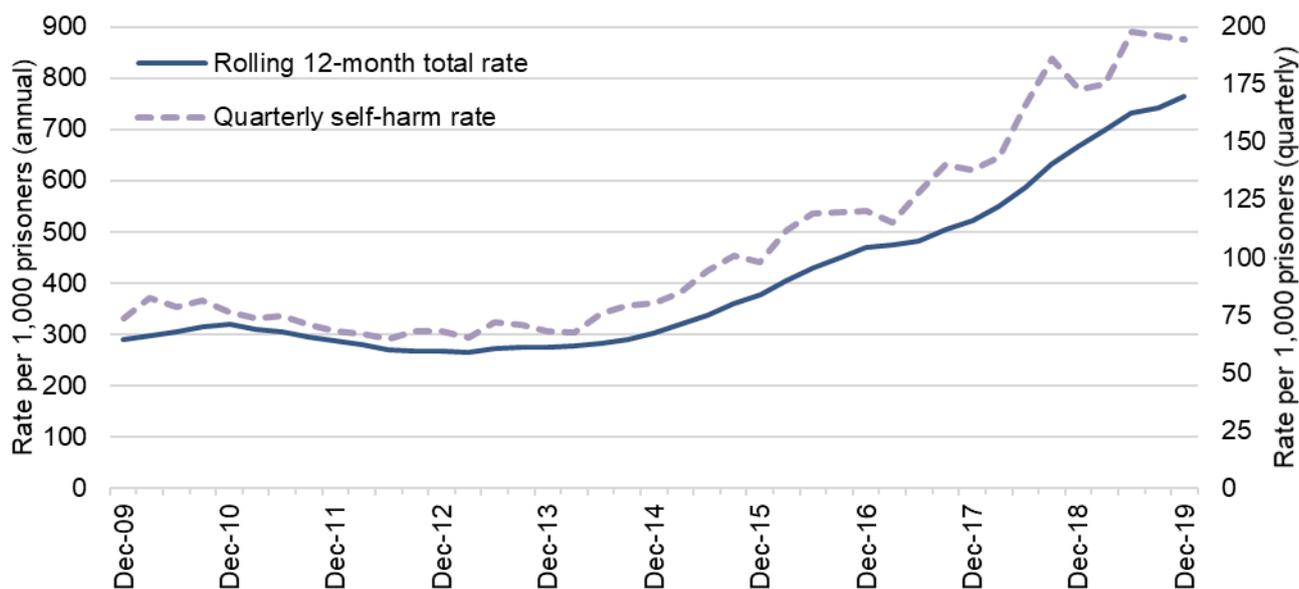
### Self-harm incidents continue to rise.

In the 12 months to December 2019, there were 63,328 incidents, up 14% from the previous 12 months, and a new record high. On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents decreased by 1% from the previous quarter, to 16,197.

### The number of individuals self-harming increased.

The number of individuals self-harming increased by 3% in the 12 months to December 2019, to 12,977, and the number of self-harm incidents per individual increased by 11% from 4.4 to 4.9.

**Figure 2: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending December 2009 to 12 months ending December 2019, with quarterly rates**

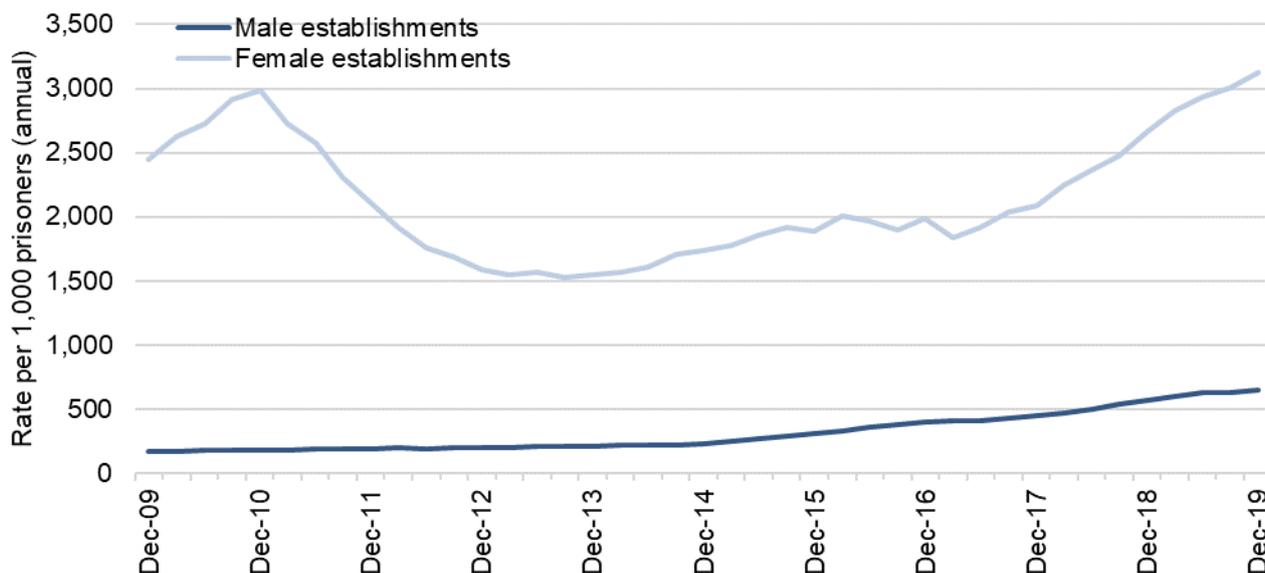


In the 12 months to December 2019, there were 63,328 reported incidents of self-harm (a rate of 764 per 1,000 prisoners), up 14% from the previous 12 months, and the highest recorded figure. On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2019 decreased by 1% from the previous quarter (from 16,329 to 16,197 incidents).

The number of individuals self-harming increased by 3% in the latest 12 months, to the highest recorded figure of 12,977 individuals (a rate of 156 individuals per 1,000 prisoners). The number of incidents per self-harming individual increased by 11%, from 4.4 in the previous 12 months to 4.9 in the latest 12 months, although a small number of prolific self-harmers have a disproportionate impact on this figure. Just over a half (53%) of prisoners who self-harmed in 2019 did so more than once.

The number of self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased by 8% to 3,481 in the 12 months to December 2019, however it decreased by 5% in the latest quarter (848 incidents). The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance decreased in the previous 12 months, from 5.8% to 5.5%.

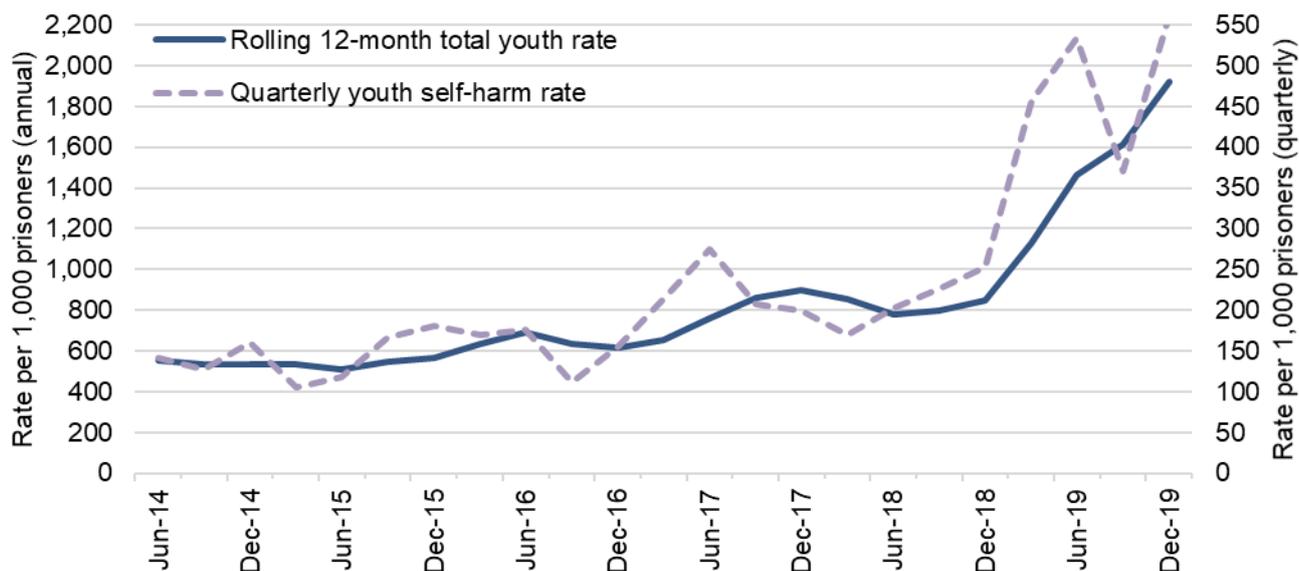
**Figure 3: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2009 to 12 months ending December 2019**



Self-harm trends differ considerably by gender, with a rate of 650 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in male establishments in the 12 months to December 2019 (with incidents up 13% from the previous 12 months) compared to a rate of 3,130 per 1,000 prisoners in female establishments (an increase of 16% in the number of incidents from the previous 12 months). In the 12 months to December 2019, the number of self-harm incidents per self-harming male increased from 4.0 in the previous 12 months to 4.4, while self-harm prolificacy among females increased from 8.3 in the previous 12 months to 9.3 incidents per self-harming individual.

Self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance have increased in male establishments by 7%, from 2,985 in the 12 months to December 2018 to 3,205 in the 12 months to December 2019, and increased by 20% to 276 in female establishments in the latest 12 months. Self-harmers in female establishments were more than twice as prolific as those in male establishments in the latest 12 months (9.3 incidents per self-harming individual, compared to 4.4 in male establishments), although the proportion of incidents that required hospitalisation was almost three times higher in male establishments (6.2% compared to 2.3% in female establishments).

**Figure 4: 12 month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners by youth offenders, 12 months ending June 2014 to 12 months ending December 2019, with quarterly rates**



In youth estate<sup>3</sup>, there was a 110% increase in self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months (from 584 in the previous 12 months to 1,229 in the most recent 12 months) and an 126% increase in the self-harm rate per 1,000 prisoners in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months (from 848 in the previous 12 months to 1,920 in the most recent 12 months).

In the latest quarter there were 335 self-harm incidents, a 44% increase from 233 incidents in the previous quarter, and a 99% increase from the same quarter the previous year (October to December 2018).

Self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance have decreased in youth estates from 4.1% in the previous 12 months to 3.7% in the 12 months to December 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Youth estates include all 15 to 18-year olds in Young Offender Institutes, and all 15 to 17-year olds in Youth Prisons.

## Key findings from annual self-harm tables

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**The most common method for self-harm in prison was cutting/scratching, 51% of females and 68% of males self-harmed by cutting.**

There was an increase in cutting/scratching of 10% for females and 14% for males in 2019. Hanging decreased by 1% for males, but increased by 20% for females in the most recent year. Self-strangulation increased by 22% for males and 32% for females in the most recent year.

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**The most common location for self-harm in prison was in cells and common areas**

For females, 83% of self-harm incidents were in cells and common areas in 2019, compared to 69% of self-harm incidents by males. In comparison, males were more likely than females to self-harm in segregation units (10% of incidents by males compared to 3% of incidents by females) and in vulnerable prisoners units (10% of incidents by males compared to 1% of incidents by females) in 2019.

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**The highest percentage of individuals self-harming were aged between 30 and 39 years.**

For females, 38% of individuals who self-harmed in 2019 were aged between 30 and 39 years, compared to 34% of males. For males, 26% of individuals who self-harmed were aged 24 or under, compared to 21% of females.

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**Just over a half (53%) of prisoners who self-harmed in 2019 did so more than once.**

48% of self-harming males and 40% of self-harming females only self-harmed once in 2019, whereas 3% of self-harming males and 9% of self-harming females self-harmed more than 20 times throughout the year.

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## 2 Assaults: 12 months to December 2019

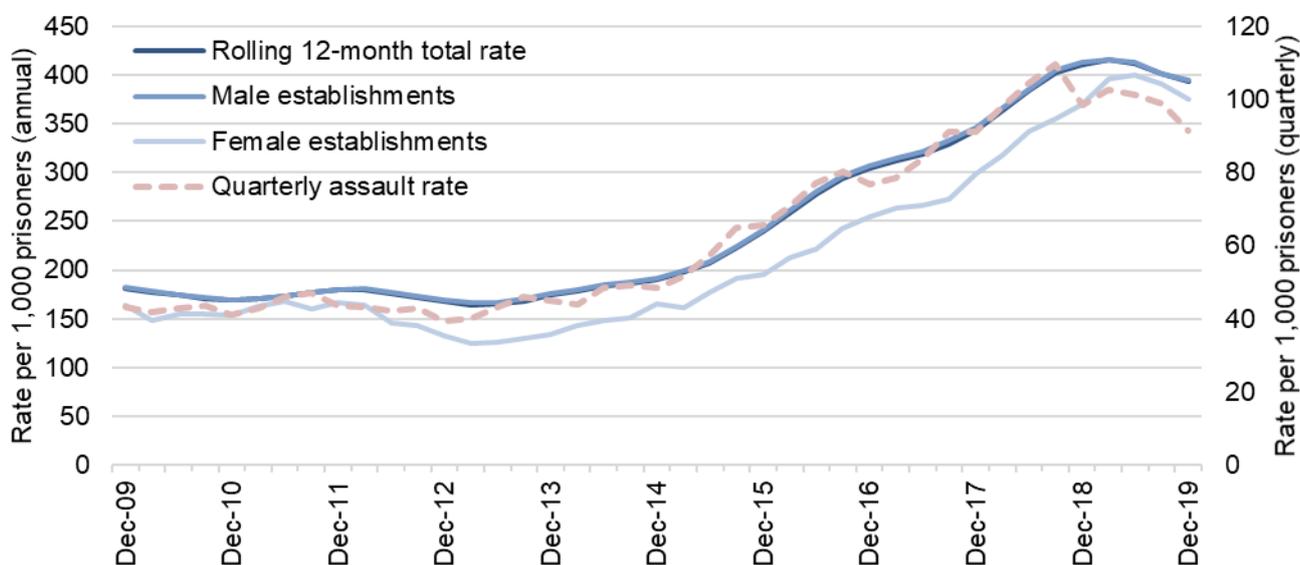
### Assaults and serious assaults decreased from the previous 12-month period.

In the 12 months to December 2019, there were 32,669 assault incidents, a 4% decrease from the previous 12 months. Of these 3,813 were serious assaults, down by 3%. Assaults decreased by 7% in the latest quarter to 7,611 incidents, and the number of serious assaults decreased by 9% to 881 incidents.

### Assaults on staff decreased from the previous 12-month period.

There were 9,995 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2019, a 2% decrease from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff decreased by 3% to 2,377 incidents.

**Figure 5: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total assaults by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2009 to 12 months ending December 2019, with quarterly rates**

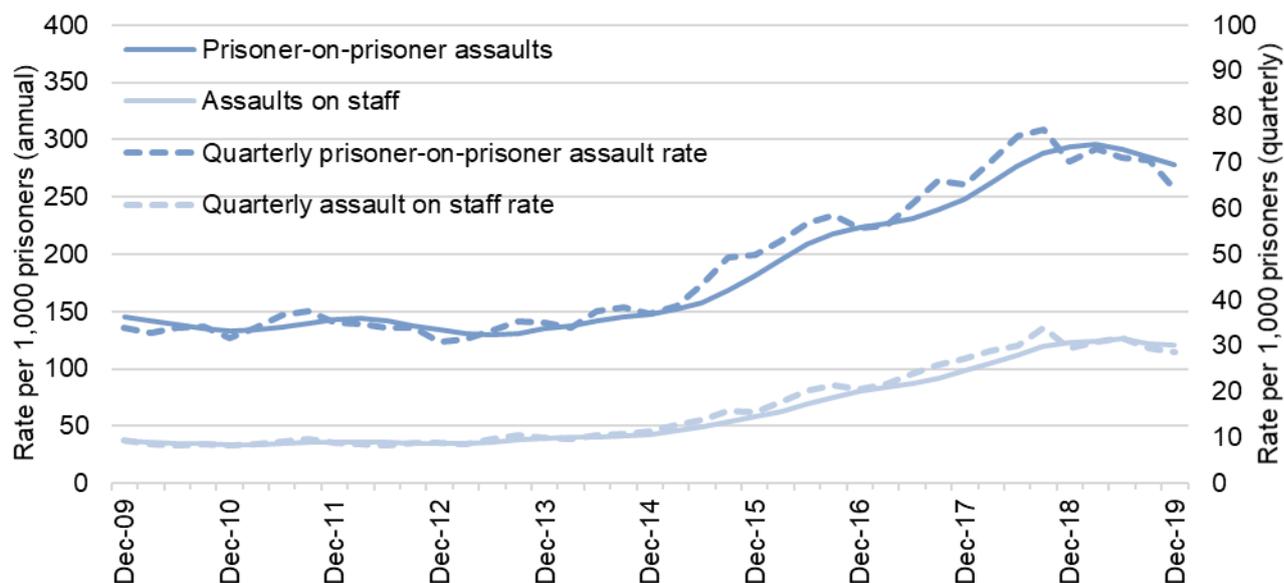


In the 12 months to December 2019, assault incidents decreased by 4% to 32,669, a rate of 394 incidents per 1,000 prisoners. In the latest quarter, there were 7,611 assaults, decrease of 7% from the previous quarter. The quarterly figure reached a peak of 9,111 in the July to September 2018 quarter.

The number of incidents in male establishments decreased by 5% from 32,782 to 31,244 in the 12 months to December 2019. There was no change in the number of incidents in female establishments, from 1,422 to 1,425 incidents in the same period.

In the latest quarter, the number of assaults in male establishments decreased by 8% to 7,285, and the number of assaults in female establishments decreased by 1% to 326. Assault rates were higher in male establishments (395 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than female establishments (376 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) in the latest 12 months.

**Figure 6: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2009 to 12 months ending December 2019, with quarterly rates**



There were 23,113 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults<sup>4</sup> in the 12 months to December 2019 (a rate of 279 per 1,000 prisoners), a decrease of 5%. The latest quarter, there were 5,346 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 9% decrease from 5,866 in the previous quarter.

There were 9,995 assaults on staff<sup>5</sup> in the 12 months to December 2019 (a rate of 121 per 1,000 prisoners). This is a 2% decrease from the 10,203 assaults in the previous 12 months, which was the highest level in the time series. In the latest quarter there was a 3% decrease in assaults on staff (to 2,377 incidents), remaining lower than the peak in the July to September 2018 quarter (2,827 incidents).

The proportion of assaults on staff increased to 31% of all incidents in the 12 months to December 2019, from 30% in the previous 12 months, having steadily increased from 20% in 2011.

In male establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 5% to 22,282 incidents (282 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners), and assaults on staff decreased by 3% to 9,391 incidents (119 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months.

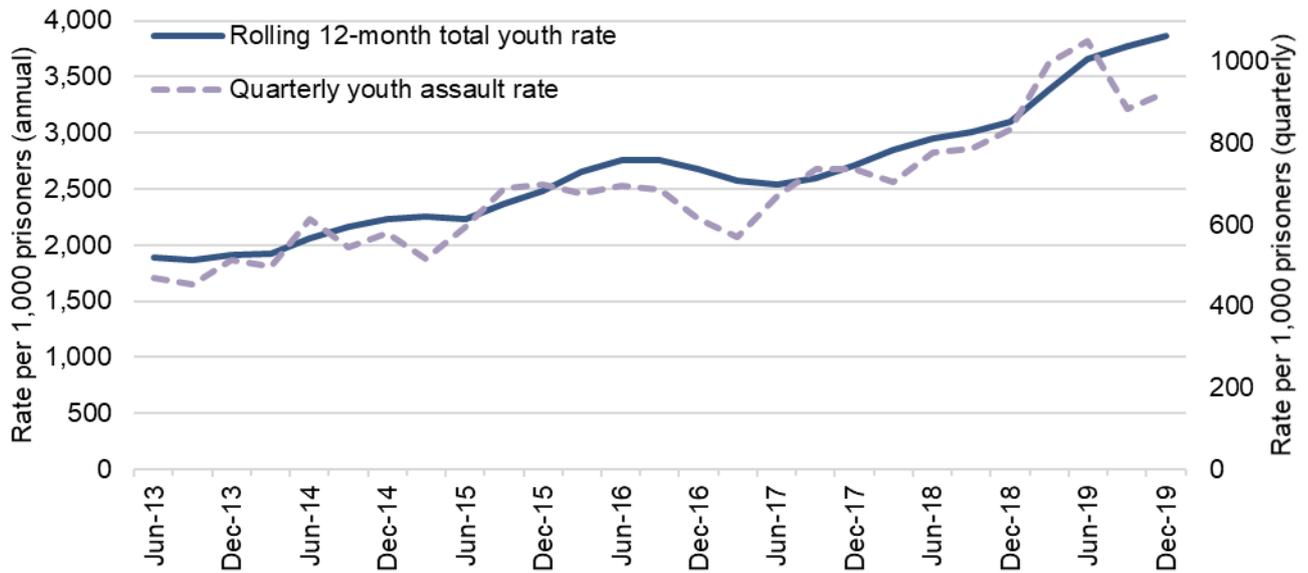
In female establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 6% to 831 incidents (219 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners), and assaults on staff increased by 11% to 604 incidents (159 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months.

The proportion of assaults on staff in female establishments (42%) was higher than the proportion in male establishments (30%) in the 12 months to December 2019. Assault rates on staff have historically been higher in female establishments, and saw a larger increase in female establishments than male establishments in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months.

<sup>4</sup> This figure includes any prisoner-on-prisoner assaults where there may also have been an assault on staff.

<sup>5</sup> There was a change in how staff assaults have been recorded from April 2017, this has simplified how incidents involving staff are identified, however it is possible this has increased the recording of incidents. Please see the Guide to Safety in Custody statistics for further information

**Figure 7: 12 month rolling rate of assault incidents per 1,000 prisoners by youth offenders, 12 months ending June 2013 to 12 months ending December 2019, with quarterly rates**



In youth estates, there was a 16% increase in assaults in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months (from 2,136 in the previous 12 months to 2,472 in the most recent 12 months) and a 25% increase in the assault rate per 1,000 prisoners in the 12 months to December 2019 compared to the previous 12 months (from 3,101 in the previous 12 months to 3,862 in the most recent 12 months).

In the latest quarter there were 550 assault incidents, a 1% decrease from 554 incidents in the previous quarter, and a 1% decrease from the same quarter the previous year (October to December 2018).

Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased by 6% in the youth estate, from 1,645 in the previous 12 months to 1,746 in the 12 months to December 2019. Prisoner on staff assaults increased by 46%, from 567 in the previous 12 months to 825 in the 12 months to December 2019.

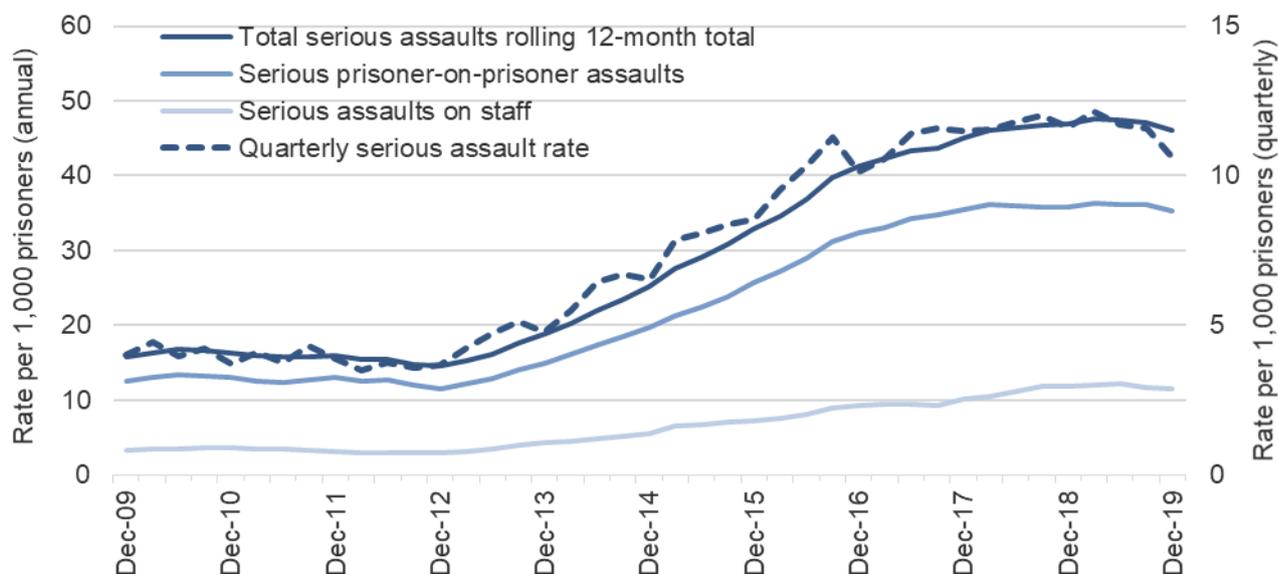
## Serious assaults

**Of the 32,669 assault incidents, 3,813 (12%) were serious.**

In the 12 months to December 2019, there were 3,813 serious assault incidents, a 3% decrease from the previous 12 months. Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 2% to 2,921 in the 12 months to December 2019, whereas serious assaults on staff decreased by 4% to 952.

Serious assaults are those which fall into one or more of the following categories: a sexual assault; requires detention in outside hospital as an in-patient; requires medical treatment for concussion or internal injuries; or incurs any of the following injuries: a fracture, scald or burn, stabbing, crushing, extensive or multiple bruising, black eye, broken nose, lost or broken tooth, cuts requiring suturing, bites, temporary or permanent blindness.

**Figure 8: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total serious assaults, serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, and serious assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2009 to 12 months ending December 2019**



In the 12 months to December 2019, there were 3,813 serious assaults (a rate of 46 per 1,000 prisoners), a 3% decrease from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 881 serious assaults, a 9% decrease from the previous quarter. In the latest 12 months, 12% of assaults were serious assaults, a slight increase from 11% in the previous 12 months.

There were 2,921 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (a rate of 35 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2019, a decrease of 2% from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, the number of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 13% (to 655 incidents).

There were 952 serious assaults on staff (a rate of 11 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2019, a decrease of 4% from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, the number of serious prisoner-on-staff assaults increased by 7% (to 240 incidents).

In youth estates, there was a 57% increase in serious assaults, from 84 in the previous 12 months to 132 in the 12 months to December 2019 (the highest in the time series). There was also a 105% increase in serious assaults on staff, from 38 in the previous 12 months to 78 (the highest in the timeseries) in the 12 months to December 2019. There was a 30% increase in serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, from 50 in the previous 12 months to 65.

## Key findings from annual assaults tables

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**Prisoners aged 30-39 years had the highest proportion of assailants (24%), fighters (21%) and victims (28%) in 2019.**

Assailants (44%) and fighters (51%) were more likely to be aged 24 or under than victims (36%) in 2019.

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**There were 393 sexual assaults in custody in 2019, a 15% decrease from 462 sexual assaults in custody in 2018**

For females, there was a 12% increase in sexual assaults in custody, from 26 in 2018 to 29 in 2019. For males, there was a 17% decrease, from 436 in 2018 to 364 in 2019.

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**There were 7,471 assaults involving weapons in 2019, 23% of total assaults.**

Of those assaults that involved a weapon, 28% involved spitting (up from 26% in 2018), and 16% involved a blunt instrument (the same percentage as in 2018).

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**There were 3,634 serious injuries as a result of assaults in prison in 2019, a 3% decrease from 3,750 serious injuries in 2018.**

Of those serious injuries, 24% were cuts requiring sutures in 2019 (the same percentage as in 2018), 16% resulted in a black eye (down from 19% in 2018), 14% resulted in a fracture (the same percentage as in 2018), and 14% resulted in extensive or multiple bruising (up from 13% in 2018).

There were also 17,594 minor injuries as a result of assaults in prison in 2019, a 5% decrease from 18,464 minor injuries in 2018.

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## Further Information

### Accompanying files

As well as this bulletin, the following products are published as part of this release:

- A technical guide providing further information on how the data are collected and processed, as well as information on the revisions policy and legislation relevant to sentencing trends and background on the functioning of the criminal justice system.
- A set of summary tables for the latest quarter, and annual tables up to the latest calendar year.
- Underlying data files with pivot tables, giving lower level granularity.

### National Statistics status

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.



All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's (UKSA) regulatory arm. The UKSA considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is the Ministry of Justice's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected for National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the UKSA promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Our statisticians regularly review the content of publications. Development of new and improved statistical outputs is usually dependent on reallocating existing resources. As part of our continual review and prioritisation, we welcome user feedback on existing outputs including content, breadth, frequency and methodology. Please send any comments you have on this publication including suggestions for further developments or reductions in content.

### Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Email: [newsdesk@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

**Lucy Cuppleditch**

Prison and Probation Analytical Services

Ministry of Justice

102 Petty France

London

SW1H 9AJ

Email: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

### Next update: July 2020

URL: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics)

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