

# **Safety in custody statistics 2008/2009**

Ministry of Justice  
Statistics bulletin

Published 11 February 2010

## Introduction

This publication contains statistics relating to deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody in England and Wales. It has been produced by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). NOMS monitors deaths, self-harm and assaults in prisons and has a range of related measures to help monitor overall safety.

Although this publication concerns statistics, the incidents described in this report are, by their nature, tragic and distressing to the prisoners, their families and the staff who look after them. The National Offender Management Service remains committed to reducing deaths, managing self-harm and reducing violence in prison custody.

When considering particular statistics readers should note the following:

- In order to evaluate trends over time of deaths, self-harm and assault incidents, 3-year rolling average annual rates are used. Units of 100,000 are used for comparability with population death rates but units of 1,000 are also provided as the total prison population is less than 100,000.
- Incidence of death, self-harm or assault is unevenly distributed around the prison estate. This bulletin presents the figures broken down by key factors including age, gender and time in custody. These, and random variation, explain many of the differences between prisons and particular risk groups.
- In prisons, as in the community, self-harm is often covert and assaults may go unreported. In prison custody, however, such incidents are more likely to be detected and counted. Recording of self-harm and assault incidents in prison custody has improved over the years but it remains the case that they cannot be counted with absolute accuracy.

This is the first publication of this type and there will be room for improvement. We welcome your comments (see Contact points for further information on page 18 of this publication).

## Summary

This publication comments on trends relating to deaths in prison custody up to the end of 2009 and on self-harm and assaults up to the end of 2008. The underlying trends for each are assessed on changes to 3-year rolling average annual rates.

- In 2009, there were 168 deaths in custody of which 60 were self-inflicted. The equivalent figures for 2008 were 165 deaths of which 60 were self-inflicted.
- The 3-year rolling average annual death rate for the 3 years ending 2009 was 2.11 deaths per 1,000 prisoners. This rate is slightly higher than the 2008 figure (2.09 per 1,000 for the 3 years ending 2008), following year on year decreases since 2004 (when the rate was 2.54 per 1,000 for the 3 years ending 2004 – the highest rate during the period 2000 to 2009).
  - The 3-year rolling average annual self-inflicted death rate fell to 0.86 deaths per 1,000 prisoners. This rate represents a gradual decrease from 1.31 per 1,000 prisoners for the 3 years ending 2004 (the highest rate during the period 2000 to 2009).
  - There were no homicides committed in prison custody during 2009.
- The 3-year rolling average annual individual self-harm rate increased slightly from 74 to 76 per 1,000 prisoners for the 3-year periods ending 2006 to 2008.
- The 3-year rolling average assault rate shows a steady increase during the period 2000 to 2008. In 2008, the rate was 191 compared to 157 assault incidents per 1,000 prisoners for the 3 years ending 2002.

**Table 1: Summary statistics**

Table 1: Summary statistics

	England and Wales									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Prison Population<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>64,602</b>	<b>66,301</b>	<b>70,778</b>	<b>73,038</b>	<b>74,657</b>	<b>75,979</b>	<b>78,127</b>	<b>80,216</b>	<b>82,572</b>	<b>83,461</b>
<b>Deaths in prison custody<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>147</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>168</b>
Self-inflicted	81	73	95	95	95	78	67	92	60	60
Natural Causes	62	68	66	86	102	88	83	91	99	105
Other non-natural	1	1	3	1	9	5	3	0	3	3
Homicide	3	0	0	1	2	3	0	2	3	0
<b>Self-harm incidents<sup>3</sup></b>	-	-	-	-	19,550	23,776	23,395	22,875	24,686	-
<b>Assault incidents<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>9,423</b>	<b>10,695</b>	<b>11,515</b>	<b>11,835</b>	<b>12,558</b>	<b>14,406</b>	<b>15,054</b>	<b>15,231</b>	<b>15,847</b>	-
<b>3-year rolling average per 1,000 prisoners<sup>5</sup></b>										
<b>Deaths in prison custody<sup>2</sup></b>	-	-	2.24	2.32	2.54	2.53	2.34	2.18	2.09	2.11
Self-inflicted deaths	-	-	1.23	1.25	1.31	1.20	1.05	1.01	0.91	0.86
Natural cause deaths	-	-	0.97	1.05	1.16	1.23	1.20	1.12	1.13	1.20
<b>Self-harm incidents</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	291.41	299.18	294.53	-
<b>Assault incidents<sup>4</sup></b>	-	-	156.62	162.01	164.31	173.28	183.50	190.72	191.49	-
<b>3-year rolling average per 100,000 prisoners</b>										
<b>Deaths in prison custody<sup>2</sup></b>	-	-	224	232	254	253	234	218	209	211
Self-inflicted deaths	-	-	123	125	131	120	105	101	91	86
Natural cause deaths	-	-	97	105	116	123	120	112	113	120
<b>Self-harm incidents</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	29,141	29,918	29,453	-
<b>Assault incidents<sup>4</sup></b>	-	-	15,662	16,201	16,431	17,328	18,350	19,072	19,149	-

(1) Population statistics are derived from the Ministry of Justice- Offender Management Caseload Statistics. The prison population figure shown for 2009 is provisional.

(2) Deaths in prison custody statistics are derived from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) deaths in the custody database which contains details of all deaths in prison custody for England and Wales from 1978.

(3) Self-harm statistics are derived from the NOMS incident reporting system. A new system for monitoring self-harm was introduced in December 2002 and as a result recording improved throughout 2003. Statistics collected before 2004 are not comparable with more recent figures. Due to the large number of incidents to process the final figures for 2009 will not be available until later in 2010.

(4) Assault statistics are also derived from the NOMS incident reporting system. As with self-harm, the final assault figures for 2009 will not be ready until later in 2010.

## Deaths in prison custody

A self-inflicted death is defined as any death of a person who has apparently taken his or her own life irrespective of intent. Death by natural causes is defined as any death of a person as a result of naturally occurring disease process. A homicide is defined as any death of a person at the hands of another, including murder and manslaughter. Other deaths are classified as non-natural when they cannot easily be classified as natural causes, self-inflicted or homicide. These include accidents arising from external causes, accidental overdose/ poisoning and deaths where taking a drug contributed to a death but not in fatal amounts. This category may also include a small number of otherwise difficult to classify deaths.

In 2009 there were 60 self-inflicted deaths. There were 57 deaths of male prisoners and 3 deaths of female prisoners.

The rolling average annual rate for the 3 years ending 2009 was 0.86 self-inflicted deaths per 1,000 prisoners, continuing the overall decreasing trend from 1.31 per 1,000 in the three years ending 2004. Figures for male and female prisoners showed similar decreases – down from 1.21 to 0.86 for males, and down from 2.73 to 0.91 for females over the same period.

**Table 2: Self-inflicted deaths in prison custody by gender**

	England and Wales									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Prison Population<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>64,602</b>	<b>66,301</b>	<b>70,778</b>	<b>73,038</b>	<b>74,657</b>	<b>75,979</b>	<b>78,127</b>	<b>80,216</b>	<b>82,572</b>	<b>83,461</b>
Male	61,252	62,561	66,479	68,613	70,209	71,512	73,680	75,842	78,158	79,060
Female	3,350	3,740	4,299	4,425	4,448	4,467	4,447	4,374	4,414	4,401
<b>Self-inflicted deaths<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>81</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>
Male	73	67	86	81	82	74	64	84	59	57
Female	8	6	9	14	13	4	3	8	1	3
<b>3-year rolling average annual rates per 1,000 prisoners</b>										
<b>Self-inflicted deaths</b>	-	-	<b>1.23</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>1.20</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>0.86</b>
Male	-	-	1.19	1.18	1.21	1.13	1.02	1.00	0.91	0.86
Female	-	-	2.03	2.29	2.73	2.33	1.50	1.13	0.91	0.91
<b>3-year rolling average annual rates per 100,000 prisoners</b>										
<b>Self-inflicted deaths</b>	-	-	<b>123</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>86</b>
Male	-	-	119	118	121	113	102	100	91	86
Female	-	-	203	229	273	233	150	113	91	91

(1) Population statistics are derived from the Ministry of Justice- Offender Management Caseload Statistics. The prison population figure shown for 2009 is provisional.

(2) Deaths in prison custody figures include deaths of prisoners while released on temporary license (ROTL) for medical reasons but exclude other types of ROTL (see Data Sources and Quality). Approximately one third of the deaths in prison custody shown here actually occur in hospitals or hospices.

Table 3 shows the numbers of self-inflicted deaths by time in prison custody and time in current prison. In 2009, 18 out of 60 self-inflicted deaths occurred within one month of arriving in prison custody and 25 out of 60 deaths occurred within one month of arriving in the current prison.

**Table 3: Self-inflicted deaths in prison custody by time in custody and current prison**

Table 3: Self-inflicted deaths in prison custody by time in custody and current prison

	England and Wales									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Time in custody<sup>1</sup></b>										
On day of arrival	2	2	0	1	3	0	2	1	3	0
1 to 2 days <sup>3</sup>	12	3	9	9	10	11	3	4	4	8
3 days to one week	7	4	14	10	10	2	2	6	3	4
1 week to 1 month	14	18	23	11	16	15	6	10	5	6
1 month to 3 months	14	15	10	18	17	9	10	11	8	8
3 months to 6 months	12	8	11	12	6	12	8	15	8	10
6 months to 1 year	8	7	2	7	15	10	11	10	9	6
Over one year	12	16	26	27	18	19	25	35	20	18
<b>Total self-inflicted deaths</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Time in current prison</b>										
On day of arrival	2	2	1	2	4	0	2	1	3	0
1 to 2 days <sup>3</sup>	16	4	12	13	13	13	3	5	5	9
3 days to one week	7	8	17	12	13	2	3	11	3	10
1 week to 1 month	14	22	23	16	23	18	12	17	10	6
1 month to 3 months	20	15	19	18	18	11	20	23	14	16
3 months to 6 months	11	8	12	16	9	18	12	15	12	13
6 months to 1 year	7	9	8	6	12	6	7	9	8	4
Over one year	4	5	3	12	3	10	8	11	5	2
<b>Total self-inflicted deaths</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>

(1) Time in custody refers to time spent on current offence/prison number. Some prisoners may have previously spent time in prison custody for a different offence with a different prison number but this is not included.

(2) Prisoners who die on the date of arrival will typically have been in the prison for less than 12 hours. The one to two days category includes any death after midnight on the date of arrival and before midnight on the second complete day in the prison. Care needs to be taken when interpreting numbers of deaths in the early days of custody as the actual number of deaths in precise 24 hours time slots is not known accurately due to uncertainty about the exact time of incident/death.

## Self-harm

Self-harm in prison custody is defined as, “any act where a prisoner deliberately harms themselves irrespective of the method, intent or severity of any injury.” In the community, self-harm is common but often covert. In prisons, such incidents are more likely to be detected and counted. The system for recording these incidents was implemented in December 2002 and relatively complete data is available from 2004 onwards.

Key self-harm statistics are summarised in Table 4. Although the number of self-harm incidents is provided, this particular measure, in isolation, is not a good indicator of underlying trend as a small number of individuals account for a large proportion of self-harm incidents.

- In 2008, a total of 6,361 individual prisoners were recorded as having self-harmed.
- The 3-year rolling average annual rate shows a small increase from 74 to 76 individuals self-harming per 1,000 prisoners for the 3-year period years ending 2006 to 2008.
- The 3-year rolling average annual rate of female prisoners who self-harm per 1,000 prisoners was consistently 5 times the rate of male prisoners for the 3-year periods ending 2006 to 2008. In the 3 years ending 2008, the female rate was 326 and the male rate was 62 per 1,000 prisoners.
- Female prisoners who self-harm do so more frequently than male prisoners. In 2008, an average of 9 incidents for each female prisoner self-harming compared to 2 incidents for each male self-harming.

**Table 4: Self-harm summary statistics**

	England and Wales				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Prison Population</b>	<b>74,657</b>	<b>75,979</b>	<b>78,127</b>	<b>80,216</b>	<b>82,572</b>
Male	70,209	71,512	73,680	75,842	78,158
Female	4,448	4,467	4,447	4,374	4,414
<b>Self-harm incidents<sup>1,2</sup></b>	<b>19,550</b>	<b>23,776</b>	<b>23,395</b>	<b>22,875</b>	<b>24,686</b>
Male	9,880	10,603	12,019	11,507	11,748
Female	9,670	13,173	11,376	11,368	12,938
<b>Individuals self-harming<sup>1,3</sup></b>	<b>5,365</b>	<b>5,758</b>	<b>5,904</b>	<b>6,059</b>	<b>6,361</b>
Male	4,026	4,287	4,507	4,643	4,859
Female	1,339	1,471	1,397	1,416	1,502
<b>3-year rolling average annual rate for individuals self-harming per 1,000 prisoners</b>					
<b>Individuals self-harming</b>	-	-	<b>74.41</b>	<b>75.63</b>	<b>76.05</b>
Male	-	-	59.49	60.78	61.52
Female	-	-	314.83	322.39	326.05
<b>3-year rolling average annual rate for individuals self-harming per 100,000 prisoners</b>					
<b>Individuals self-harming</b>	-	-	<b>7,441</b>	<b>7,563</b>	<b>7,605</b>
Male	-	-	5,949	6,078	6,152
Female	-	-	31,483	32,239	32,605

(1) A new system for monitoring self harm was introduced in December 2002 and as a result recording of self harm improved throughout 2003. Numbers before 2004 have therefore not been included as they are not directly comparable with later figures.

(2) In prisons, as in the community, it is not possible to count self harm incidents with absolute accuracy. In prison custody, however, such incidents are more likely to be detected and counted. Care needs to be taken when comparing figures shown here with other sources where data may be less complete.

(3) The numbers of different individuals are based on prison number and main age bands. An individual who was in prison custody on two occasions during a year but with two different numbers or age bands would be counted twice if he/she had self harmed at least once on each occasion.



In 2008, there were 1,628 individuals who self-harmed aged 20 or under. This represents 26% of all individuals who self-harmed during that year (see table 5). Analysis of the data by gender shows a similar distribution with those aged 20 or under accounting for 26% of all males self-harming and 25% of all females self-harming.

**Table 5: Individuals self-harming by age group**

	England and Wales				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Total individuals</b>	<b>5,365</b>	<b>5,758</b>	<b>5,904</b>	<b>6,059</b>	<b>6,361</b>
15 - 17 years	318	437	385	350	432
18 - 20 years	975	1,058	1,133	1,143	1,196
21 - 24 years	1,076	1,093	1,123	1,206	1,214
25 - 29 years	1,068	1,058	1,118	1,153	1,197
30 - 39 years	1,398	1,484	1,434	1,508	1,507
40 - 49 years	419	517	582	572	685
50 - 59 years	92	94	111	93	108
60 years and over	19	17	18	34	22
<b>Males</b>	<b>4,026</b>	<b>4,287</b>	<b>4,507</b>	<b>4,643</b>	<b>4,859</b>
15 - 17 years	240	345	312	277	337
18 - 20 years	736	755	843	881	920
21 - 24 years	770	808	845	920	896
25 - 29 years	781	775	840	868	929
30 - 39 years	1,090	1,150	1,122	1,174	1,136
40 - 49 years	315	365	432	429	544
50 - 59 years	77	75	97	64	79
60 years and over	17	14	16	30	18
<b>Females</b>	<b>1,339</b>	<b>1,471</b>	<b>1,397</b>	<b>1,416</b>	<b>1,502</b>
15 - 17 years	78	92	73	73	95
18 - 20 years	239	303	290	262	276
21 - 24 years	306	285	278	286	318
25 - 29 years	287	283	278	285	268
30 - 39 years	308	334	312	334	371
40 - 49 years	104	152	150	143	141
50 - 59 years	15	19	14	29	29
60 years and over	2	3	2	4	4

(1) In prisons, as in the community, it is not possible to identify every self-harmer with absolute accuracy. In prison custody, however, such individuals are more likely to be detected and counted. Care needs to be taken when comparing figures shown here with other sources where data may be less complete.

(2) The numbers of different individuals are based on prison number and main age bands. An individual who was in prison custody on two occasions during a year but with two different numbers or age bands would be counted twice if he/she had self harmed at least once on each occasion.

Table 6 shows the numbers of self-harm incidents by time in current prison. In 2008, 6,793 or 28% of self-harm incidents occurred within the first month of arriving in a prison.

**Table 6: Self-harm incidents by time in current prison**

	England and Wales				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Time in current prison</b>					
On day of arrival	426	407	606	587	542
1 to 2 days	696	731	742	758	755
3 days to 1 week	1402	1572	1444	1433	1418
1 week to 1 month	3687	4110	4401	3750	4078
1 month to 3 months	4748	5802	5932	5463	5949
3 months to 6 months	2979	3700	3690	3774	4392
6 months to 1 year	1778	2864	2739	2521	2710
Over 1 year	1798	2681	2422	3000	3625
Missing details	2036	1909	1419	1589	1217
<b>Total self-harm incidents</b>	<b>19550</b>	<b>23776</b>	<b>23395</b>	<b>22875</b>	<b>24686</b>
<b>Time in current prison: males</b>					
On day of arrival	337	300	453	451	425
1 to 2 days	459	452	453	455	433
3 days to 1 week	813	852	814	747	727
1 week to 1 month	1756	1766	2189	1881	1908
1 month to 3 months	2145	2154	2742	2456	2576
3 months to 6 months	1306	1367	1607	1538	1809
6 months to 1 year	861	1176	1236	1287	1327
Over 1 year	930	1190	1318	1550	1629
Missing details	1273	1346	1207	1142	914
<b>Total male self-harm incidents</b>	<b>9880</b>	<b>10603</b>	<b>12019</b>	<b>11507</b>	<b>11748</b>
<b>Time in current prison: females</b>					
On day of arrival	89	107	153	136	117
1 to 2 days	237	279	289	303	322
3 days to 1 week	589	720	630	686	691
1 week to 1 month	1931	2344	2212	1869	2170
1 month to 3 months	2603	3648	3190	3007	3373
3 months to 6 months	1673	2333	2083	2236	2583
6 months to 1 year	917	1688	1503	1234	1383
Over 1 year	868	1491	1104	1450	1996
Missing details	763	563	212	447	303
<b>Total female self-harm incidents</b>	<b>9670</b>	<b>13173</b>	<b>11376</b>	<b>11368</b>	<b>12938</b>

## Assaults

The 3-year rolling average annual assault incident rate has steadily increased from 157 to 191 per 1,000 prisoners over the 3-year periods ending 2002 to 2008. Both male and female assault incident rates have increased during this period – males from 156 to 189 incidents per 1,000 prisoners and females from 170 to 232 incidents per 1,000 prisoners.

In 2008, 1,481 or 9% of 15,847 total assault incidents were serious. 1,438 or 10% of these incidents occurred in male establishments. 43 or 5% of these incidents occurred in female establishments.

In 2008, 3,198 (20%) of total assaults were on staff. 2,846 (19%) of total male assaults were on staff of which 264 (9%) were serious. 352 (39%) of total female assaults were on staff of which 19 (5%) were serious.

**Table 7: Assault summary statistics**

	England and Wales									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
<b>Prison Population</b>	<b>64,602</b>	<b>66,301</b>	<b>70,778</b>	<b>73,038</b>	<b>74,657</b>	<b>75,979</b>	<b>78,127</b>	<b>80,216</b>	<b>82,572</b>	
Males	61,252	62,561	66,479	68,613	70,209	71,512	73,680	75,842	78,158	
Females	3,350	3,740	4,299	4,425	4,448	4,467	4,447	4,374	4,414	
<b>Assault incidents<sup>1,2</sup></b>	<b>9,423</b>	<b>10,695</b>	<b>11,515</b>	<b>11,835</b>	<b>12,558</b>	<b>14,406</b>	<b>15,054</b>	<b>15,231</b>	<b>15,847</b>	
Male establishments	8,865	10,061	10,773	11,032	11,702	13,317	13,893	14,227	14,942	
Female establishments	558	634	742	803	856	1,089	1,161	1,004	905	
<b>3-year rolling average annual assault incidents per 1,000 prisoners</b>										
<b>Assault incidents</b>	-	-	<b>156.62</b>	<b>162.01</b>	<b>164.31</b>	<b>173.28</b>	<b>183.50</b>	<b>190.72</b>	<b>191.49</b>	
Male establishments	-	-	155.87	161.22	163.17	171.23	180.48	187.46	189.11	
Female establishments	-	-	169.56	174.53	182.17	205.90	232.44	244.80	231.88	
<b>3-year rolling average annual assault incidents per 100,000 prisoners</b>										
<b>Assault incidents</b>	-	-	<b>15,662</b>	<b>16,201</b>	<b>16,431</b>	<b>17,328</b>	<b>18,350</b>	<b>19,072</b>	<b>19,149</b>	
Male establishments	-	-	15,587	16,122	16,317	17,123	18,048	18,746	18,911	
Female establishments	-	-	16,956	17,453	18,217	20,590	23,244	24,480	23,188	
<b>Serious Assaults</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>1,156</b>	<b>1,217</b>	<b>1,371</b>	<b>1,403</b>	<b>1,484</b>	<b>1,481</b>	
Male establishments	745	755	914	1,091	1,134	1,305	1,344	1,434	1,438	
Female establishments	47	40	39	65	83	66	59	50	43	
<b>Assaults on staff</b>	<b>2,189</b>	<b>2,694</b>	<b>2,843</b>	<b>2,884</b>	<b>3,194</b>	<b>3,500</b>	<b>3,529</b>	<b>3,267</b>	<b>3,198</b>	
Male establishments	1,941	2,406	2,545	2,585	2,887	3,065	3,006	2,857	2,846	
Female establishments	248	288	298	299	307	435	523	410	352	
<b>Serious assaults on staff</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>283</b>	
Male establishments	160	169	188	246	246	278	255	265	264	
Female establishments	12	12	8	20	26	22	25	19	19	

(1) Reported incidents before 2000 are not directly comparable with later figures and have therefore been excluded. Although figures for 2000 to 2002 have been included they are under-reported by modern standards. It is now expected that all assaults, including fights, should be reported whether or not there was an injury. As this was not the case in the past care needs to be taken when interpreting changes over the years.

(2) In prisons, as in the community, it is not possible to count assault incidents with absolute accuracy. In prison custody, however, such incidents are more likely to be detected and counted. Care needs to be taken when comparing figures shown here with other sources where data may be less complete.

Table 8 divides the data into prisoner assailants, fighters and victims. The prisoner assailants and prisoner victims categories arise from Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) assault incidents where there is a clear victim. The prisoner fighter category arises from assault incidents where there is no clear victim. The roles are determined by local investigation of the incident.

Younger prisoners have consistently higher incident rates for assault than older prisoners. Analysing the data by prisoner role, in 2008 those aged 15 to 20 years old accounted for 51% of total prisoner assailants, 68% of total prisoner fighters, and 43% of total prisoner victims. These percentages decrease with each successive 10-year age bracket.

**Table 8: Assault incidents by role and age**

	England and Wales									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
<b>Prisoner assailants</b>	<b>4,913</b>	<b>5,270</b>	<b>5,140</b>	<b>5,061</b>	<b>5,236</b>	<b>6,548</b>	<b>6,964</b>	<b>6,655</b>	<b>7,123</b>	
15-17	986	1,198	1,089	820	901	1,444	1,644	1,510	1,869	
18-20	1,584	1,533	1,400	1,320	1,286	1,602	1,797	1,668	1,755	
21-25	919	999	1,059	1,193	1,216	1,371	1,311	1,325	1,359	
26-29	535	567	523	577	689	692	738	784	780	
30-39	707	785	845	903	883	1,061	1,025	902	907	
40-49	157	135	182	194	208	310	327	372	359	
50-59	19	42	30	37	32	44	89	69	72	
60 and over	4	9	10	14	16	22	26	23	21	
Unknown	2	2	2	3	5	2	7	2	1	
<b>Prisoner fighters</b>	<b>6,100</b>	<b>6,973</b>	<b>7,539</b>	<b>7,706</b>	<b>7,653</b>	<b>9,554</b>	<b>10,450</b>	<b>11,387</b>	<b>11,563</b>	
15-17	1,882	2,458	2,317	2,212	2,048	3,264	3,654	4,046	4,248	
18-20	2,332	2,418	2,833	2,628	2,454	3,065	3,184	3,564	3,616	
21-25	848	905	1,062	1,298	1,395	1,389	1,524	1,590	1,585	
26-29	408	455	500	550	645	691	778	831	776	
30-39	518	615	685	815	885	924	997	989	979	
40-49	94	104	119	179	207	190	270	317	302	
50-59	11	16	21	17	15	24	35	40	36	
60 and over	7	2	2	7	4	7	8	10	21	
<b>Prisoner victims</b>	<b>3,937</b>	<b>3,915</b>	<b>4,281</b>	<b>4,151</b>	<b>4,261</b>	<b>5,301</b>	<b>5,633</b>	<b>5,783</b>	<b>6,380</b>	
15-17	709	762	704	518	518	926	967	999	1,242	
18-20	1,208	1,082	1,042	957	936	1,199	1,235	1,248	1,475	
21-25	706	796	900	942	964	1,056	1,168	1,226	1,257	
26-29	461	412	546	567	596	693	715	739	785	
30-39	626	659	826	878	902	1,038	1,070	1,084	1,067	
40-49	165	156	189	217	252	316	364	392	450	
50-59	53	34	55	55	75	55	85	73	78	
60 and over	9	14	19	17	18	18	29	22	26	

(1) Reported incidents before 2000 and prisoner involvements arising from them are not directly comparable with later figures and have therefore been excluded. Although figures for 2000 to 2002 have been included they are under-reported by modern standards. It is now expected that all assaults, including fights, should be reported whether or not there was an injury. Fights were less frequently reported in the past and therefore care needs to be taken when interpreting changes over the years.

# Data Sources and Quality

## Deaths in prison custody information

The data presented in this publication is drawn from the NOMS Deaths in Prison Custody database and administrative IT systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system. While the figures shown have been checked as far as practicable, they should be regarded as approximate and not necessarily accurate to the last whole number.

Deaths in prison custody should more correctly be described as deaths arising from incidents during custody or, on rare occasions, immediately prior to custody as actual deaths may occur some time after the initial incident. The longest known elapsed period is that of a prisoner who died 157 days after attempting suicide.

Data includes deaths of prisoners while Released On Temporary License (ROTL) for medical reasons but excludes deaths of any prisoners released on other types of temporary license for the following reasons:

- The incident leading to a death does not occur within the direct control of the state (for example, an overdose or fatal road traffic accident)
- ROTL deaths cannot be counted accurately as they are not always reported to NOMS.

The Prison and Probation Ombudsman has the discretion to investigate such deaths.

The actual cause of death whether suicide, murder or self-inflicted as determined at inquest, may be unknown for several years. This means that published numbers of deaths by apparent cause can change over time. In a small proportion of cases the cause may never be known.

Information on deaths in prison custody comes from a range of sources:

- Historical archives
- Prisoner records
- Incident Operations Unit
- NOMS strategic IT systems including IRS, IIS and NOMIS
- Prisons
- Prison and Probation Ombudsman investigations
- Coroners

The NOMS central database stores data on deaths in prison custody from 1978. Not every piece of information is available from 1978 as information such as ethnicity, nationality, date prisoner arrived in prison etc. has been added to the database at different times.

The NOMS system of classifying deaths has evolved specifically to help place reliable numbers of deaths in prison custody in the public domain without undue delay.

Comparison of NOMS classification of deaths with other systems:

- NHS: International Classification of Diseases ICD versions 9/10
- Prison and Probation Ombudsman: Self-inflicted, Natural causes, Substance abuse, Homicide, Accidental
- Police: Inquest verdicts (for example, Suicide, Open verdict, Non-dependent drug abuse, Natural causes, Sudden deaths, Inquest pending , Inquest not held)

Similar variations occur with other prison systems. As a result, when comparing published deaths in prison custody for England and Wales, it is important to consider whether or not the definitions used are comparable.

A number of other organisations use a category, “drug-related death.” While NOMS monitors drug related deaths, it does not use this category because there are relatively few drug-related deaths in prison custody.

Comparison of NOMS Classification of Deaths system with ICD Codes

The main international system for death classification is part of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) currently on version 10. The NOMS classifications can be matched to these. Researchers wishing to compare deaths in prison custody for England and Wales with those from other sources should be aware of the following:

## ICD9 comparison

- The apparent self-inflicted deaths category is a close match to E950-959, E980-E989 excluding E988.8
- Apparent homicide is a close match to: E960-E969, E979, E999.
- Apparent other non-natural is a close match E800-E869, E880-E929 and, if any occurred, legal intervention (E970-E978) and operations of war (E990-E998). This category also includes some otherwise difficult to classify deaths.

## ICD 10 comparison

- The apparent self-inflicted deaths category is a close match and ICD10: Intentional Self-harm(X60-X84) and ICD10: Event of Undetermined Intent (Y10-Y34).
- Apparent homicide is a close match to ICD10:Assault (X85-Y09)
- Apparent other non-natural is a close match to ICD10 Accident (V01-X59.) This category also includes some otherwise difficult to classify deaths.

## **Self-harm information**

Detailed information on each self-harm incident in prison custody comes from the NOMS incident reporting system (IRS) and more recently NOMIS (the new prison IT system). Such information began to be collected in the early 1990s. The focus then was on reporting serious incidents but the range of data has expanded to include all self-harm incidents whether or not an injury was sustained.

The current self-harm monitoring system started in December 2002 but because recording of self-harm improved throughout 2003 the data used in this report is 2004 to 2008.

In prisons, as in the community, it is not possible to count self-harm incidents with absolute accuracy. In prison custody, however, such incidents are more likely to be detected and counted. Care needs to be taken when comparing NOMS self-harm statistics with other sources where data may be less complete.



## **Assaults information**

An assault is classified as serious if:

- it is a sexual assault
- it results in detention in outside hospital as an in-patient
- it requires medical treatment for concussion or internal injuries
- the injury is a fracture, scald or burn, stabbing, crushing, extensive or multiple bruising, black eye, broken nose, lost or broken tooth, cuts requiring suturing, bites or temporary or permanent blindness.

When an assault results in one of these types of injury it is classified as serious even if the actual damage was superficial.

Information on assaults comes from the NOMS incident reporting system, IIS and NOMIS. Detailed recording of information on each assault incident began in the mid 1990s. The early focus was on serious incidents. Fights between prisoners (assault incidents where there was no clear assailant and victim), were reported less often.

All assault incidents, including fights, are now reported irrespective of whether an injury was sustained. Due to changes in categorisation of data, information prior to 2000 is not directly comparable with that collected later.

## Contact points for further information

The current edition of this publication and more detailed spreadsheets are available for download at [www.justice.gov.uk/publications/safer-custody.htm](http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/safer-custody.htm)

The previous news release on deaths 1996 – 2009 dated 1 January 2010 can be found at [www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease010110a.htm](http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease010110a.htm)

Future reports will be published on an annual basis.

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

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

Performance Management Group  
Ministry of Justice  
3rd Floor Abell House  
John Islip Street  
London  
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Tel: 020 3334 5127

General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be emailed to: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

