

YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRISON

The numbers of young people in prison (those aged under 21) has increased greatly in the last five years.

OFTEN PEOPLE ARE NOT IN PRISON LONG ENOUGH TO DISCOVER ANYTHING WORTHWHILE BEYOND A NEW SET OF CRIMINAL ALLIANCES.

*Erwin James
Prisoner and newspaper columnist*

High numbers

The number of young people in prison has increased by 66% over the last five years. There are now over 11,000 young people in prison.

The majority of young sentenced prisoners have been convicted of non violent offences. In April 2002 only 15% of young male offenders were in prison for either sexual offences, or offences involving violence against the person.

High reconviction rates

Reconviction rates are extremely high for young prisoners. Over eighty per cent of young male prisoners under 21 discharged from prison in 1997 were reconvicted within two years, compared with 58% of adult males. Part of the reason for this is because they have learnt, in prison, how to commit more crime.

Mental and physical illness

Young people in prison are likely to have a history of physical and psychological ill-health. Over 50% of young males remanded into custody and over 30% of sentenced young males have a diagnosable mental disorder. 40% of young prisoners reported having a long-standing physical illness – almost double the figure for the general population.

A life in care

Young people in prison generally have a history of institutionalised care. 40% of young men and 27% of young women in prison had been in care during their childhood, compared with only 2% of the general population.

A lack of roots

According to one report, 25% of young male prisoners were homeless or had been living in temporary accommodation before their reception into prison.

Many young prisoners are parents.

Nearly one quarter of young male prisoners are fathers, or expectant fathers. Nearly 40% of young female prisoners are mothers.