

2009 YOUNG PEOPLE IN CUSTODY HEALTH SURVEY FACT SHEET

Key Findings for All Young People

No. of young people surveyed: 361

Sample: 88% male with an average age of 17 years

Social determinants:

- 27% of young people had been placed in care before the age of 16 years.
- 45% have had a parent in prison.
- 38% were attending school prior to custody.
- 26% were working in the six months prior to custody.
- 27% had been bullied and 52% had bullied others.
- 6% of young people reported being unsettled or having no fixed place of abode (6 months prior to custody), with young women representing 18 per cent.
- More than one-quarter (27 per cent) had moved two or more times in the six months prior to custody, and this was more for Aboriginal young people at nearly a third (32 per cent).
- Young women were more likely than young men to have moved four or more times in the 6 months prior to custody.
- Aboriginal young people more likely to have moved four or more times in the 6 months prior to custody.

Mental health:

- 60% had a history of child abuse or trauma.
- 14% had a possible intellectual disability (IQ 69 and under).
- 32% scored in the borderline intellectual disability range (IQ 70 to 79).
- 87% were found to have any psychological disorder, with conduct disorder (59%), substance use (49%), alcohol abuse (44%) or ADHD (30%) the most common.
- 16% had thought about suicide and 10% had ever attempted suicide.
- 21% had thought about self-harm and 16% had ever self-harmed.

Offending behaviour:

- 79% had reported previous time in custody.
- The average age of first time in custody was 14.3 years.
- On average, young people had previously spent 5 times in custody.

Physical health:

- 42% were overweight or obese.
- 18% had a mild to moderate hearing loss.
- 23% have had ever asthma.
- 32% have had a head injury resulting in unconsciousness.
- Poor nutrition is a common risk factor and diet improved while in custody - eating fresh fruit three or more times a week increased from 43% in the community to 90% since in custody; and eating vegetables three or more times a week increased from 57% in community to 77% since in custody.
- 37% of young people reported currently taking prescribed medications. The most common medication was for mental illness.
- There was a low prevalence of bloodborne viruses and sexually transmissible infections, with no young people found with HIV, gonorrhoea or syphilis. 4 young people were found to have antibodies to Hepatitis C, 6 had Hepatitis B and 6 had chlamydia.

Smoking, alcohol and drugs:

- 94% had ever smoked cigarettes with a mean age of starting smoking at 12 years.
- 46% indicated they currently smoked cigarettes or would smoke on release from custody.
- 93% had ever been drunk with an average age first drunk of 13 years.
- 66% reported being drunk at least weekly the year prior to custody.
- 61% of young people identified that their alcohol consumption had caused them problems in the past year (with school, friends, health, police, parents).
- 78% were found to be risky drinkers.
- 89% had tried illicit drugs, with cannabis (87%) the most common used, followed by ecstasy (41%), and Meth/amphetamines (29%).
- 65% had used an illicit drug at least weekly in the year prior to custody.
- 65% reported committing crime to obtain alcohol or drugs.
- 20% were intoxicated (on alcohol, drugs or both) at the time of their offence.

The report is available on the Juvenile Justice website. Visit:

<http://www.djj.nsw.gov.au/publications.htm#healthsurveys>