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National statistics

Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to March 2024 Assaults and Self-harm to December 2023

Published 25 April 2024

Applies to England and Wales

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-december-2023/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-march-2024-assaults-and-self-harm-to-december-2023>

Number of deaths decreased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 291 deaths in prison custody, a **decrease** of 10% from 322 deaths in the previous 12 months. Of these, 85 deaths were self-inflicted, the same number of deaths as in the previous 12 months.

In the most recent quarter, there were 70 deaths, an 18% **decrease** from 85 deaths in the previous quarter.

The rate of self-harm incidents increased in both male and female establishments from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to December 2023, the rate of self-harm was 829 incidents per 1,000 prisoners (70,875 incidents), **up** 20% from the 12 months to December 2022, comprising of a 24% **increase** in male establishments and a 11% **increase** in female establishments.

In the most recent quarter, self-harm incidents were **down** 4% to 17,918, and the rate was **down** 5% (a 5% **decrease** in both male and female establishments).

The number of individuals who self-harmed increased

There were 12,914 individuals who self-harmed in the 12 months to December 2023, **up** 18% from the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual **increased** from 5.1 in the 12 months to December 2022 to 5.5 in the 12 months to December 2023.

The rate of assaults increased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to December 2023, the rate of assaults was 315 assaults per 1,000 prisoners (26,912 assaults), **up** 20% from the 12 months to December 2022. In the most recent quarter, assaults were **down** 3% to 7,086 incidents and the assault rate was **down** 3% to 81 assaults per 1,000 prisoners.

The rate of assaults on staff increased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to December 2023, the rate of assaults on staff was 108 assaults per 1,000 prisoners (9,204 assaults on staff), **up** 20% from the 12 months to December 2022. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff **remained almost unchanged** at 2,517 incidents.

The number of serious assaults increased

In the 12 months to December 2023, the rate of serious assaults was 35 serious assaults per 1,000 prisoners (3,025 serious assaults), **up** 17% from

11 % of all assaults were serious

the 12 months to December 2022. The rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults **increased** by 19% to 26 per 1,000 prisoners (2,212 incidents), and the rate of serious assaults on staff **increased** by 13% to 10 per 1,000 prisoners (852 incidents) in the 12 months to December 2023.

If you are a journalist covering a suicide-related issue, please follow the Samaritans' [Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Media_Guidelines_FINAL.pdf) (https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Media_Guidelines_FINAL.pdf) because of the potentially damaging consequences of irresponsible reporting.

If you are struggling to cope, please call Samaritans for free on 116 123 (UK and the Republic of Ireland) or contact other sources of support, such as those listed on the NHS help for suicidal thoughts webpage. Support is available around the clock, every day of the year, providing a safe place for you, whoever you are and however you are feeling.

Statistician's comment

In the 12 months to March 2024, we have seen a decrease in the number of deaths (10% decrease). In the 12 months to December 2023, we have seen a 28% increase in both the number of assault and self-harm incidents compared with the previous year. Self-harm is now higher than pre-pandemic levels and the highest level in the time series^[footnote 1]. Incidents of self-harm and assaults have increased in both male and female establishments over the past 12 months, with assaults in female establishments and self-harm in both male and female establishments reaching their highest level in the time series. Comparisons of these statistics with earlier periods will reflect the impact of Covid-19 restrictions as well as underlying trends.

The number of deaths has decreased to 291 in the 12 months to March 2024. There were 70 deaths in the latest quarter, down from 85 the previous quarter. There were 85 self-inflicted deaths in the latest year, the same number as seen in the previous year.

There was a 20% increase in the rate^[footnote 2] ^[footnote 3], of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners in the 12 months to December 2023, with the rate now peaking at 829 incidents per 1,000 prisoners. However, there continue to be notable differences in self-harm trends by gender. There was a larger increase in rate of self-harm incidents in male establishments (up 24% to 628 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in female establishments (up 11% to 5,624 per 1,000 prisoners), but the rate in female establishments reached a new peak. The rate is almost nine times higher in female establishments than male establishments. There was an increase in the number of females self-harming (up 10% to 1,206

individuals), as well as an increase in the average number of incidents among those who self-harmed in female establishments, from 14.7 to 16.0. There was a larger increase in the number of males self-harming (up 19% to 11,708), alongside an increase in the average number of incidents among those who self-harmed in male establishments from 4.0 to 4.4.

The rate of assault incidents per 1,000 prisoners increased 20% in the 12 months to December 2023, and the rate of serious assaults increased 17% over the same period. The rate of assaults was 69% higher in female establishments than in male establishments and saw a greater increase in the latest 12 months. In female establishments the rate increased by 23% to a peak of 518 per 1,000 prisoners, compared to an increase of 20% in male establishments (306 per 1,000 prisoners). However, the proportion of assaults in female establishments that were serious remains lower, at 8% compared with 12% in male establishments, despite the rate of serious assaults increasing by more in female establishments (64% increase to a rate of 39) than male establishments (16% to a rate of 35).

Background

Safety in custody statistics cover deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody 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^[footnote 4]. This release provides statistics on deaths of prisoners to the end of March 2024, and statistics on assaults and self-harm up to the end of December 2023.

The latest 12-month data reflects the first full calendar year since the exit from the National Framework in May 2022, following the period of Covid-19 restrictions being implemented within prisons to limit and control the spread of the virus. These restrictions included the implementation of effective isolation of prisoners to reduce the spread of Covid-19, reverse cohorting of new prisoners into custody, and shielding of vulnerable prisoners. During this period, we saw the progression of establishments to different levels of the National Framework for managing Covid. This affects the comparability of statistics in recent years, due to the differing level of restrictions.

The total prison population fell in the period following the first quarter of 2020, more so for certain population groups, but started to increase again in the second quarter of 2021 and as at 31 March 2024 is now higher than pre-Covid levels^[footnote 5]. As at 31 March 2024, the total prison population was around 4,900 or 6% higher than at the end of March 2020. The female population is almost unchanged (a 0.3% increase), whereas the male population has increased by 6%. There was a large increase in the prison population during 2023, with the population as at 31 March 2024 being around 6,100 or 7%

higher than at the end of December 2022 (7% higher in male establishments and 14% higher in female establishments).

These changes in population should be borne in mind when interpreting changes in the numbers of incidents over the past year. In the context of substantial population change, rates per 1,000 prisoners more accurately describe changes in the likelihood of incidents occurring^[footnote 6]. Data on deaths, self-harm and assaults are routinely presented as rates of incidents per 1,000 prisoners (as well as numbers) for all prisoners and for the male and female estates.

In order to make the best use of capacity across the estate in the light of recent increases in the prison population during 2023, young people have routinely been retained in the Youth Custody Service (YCS) estate until their 19th birthday (rather than transferring to an adult prison on or soon after their 18th birthday, as previously occurred in most cases).

This means the age demographic in the young people's estate, but also in adult prisons, has been slightly different in the most recent few months, compared to previous years.

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 technical guidance document are also available alongside this bulletin, at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>).

Changes for this publication:

Deaths Data Tool

Ethnicity has been removed from the deaths data tool, and will now only be published within the annual deaths tables in January each year. The annual deaths tables were last published in January 2024, and the ethnicity breakdown for that release was only included within the deaths data tool, but the ethnicity table has been added back to those tables again within this release.

Self-harm and Assaults by sentence type

The annual self-harm and assaults tables are included within this release, and include tables showing breakdowns by sentence type for self-harm (table 2.6) and assaults (table 3.5). The figures in these tables were previously based on the sentence type information for each prisoner as at the time the data was extracted, which in some cases was up to a year after the date of the incident. The methodology for the extract has been improved to now pick up the sentence type information for each prisoner as at the time of the incident. This update has been applied from 2022 onwards, so the annual sentence type tables have shown the figures for 2022 on both the old and new methodologies as a comparison to show the impact of this update. In particular, this has resulted in improved reporting of incidents by prisoners on remand, which were underreported under the previous methodology because some remand prisoners would be sentenced between the time of the incident and the time at which the data was extracted.

Deaths: 12 months ending March 2024

Number of deaths decreased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 291 deaths in prison custody, a **decrease** of 10% from 322 deaths in the previous 12 months.

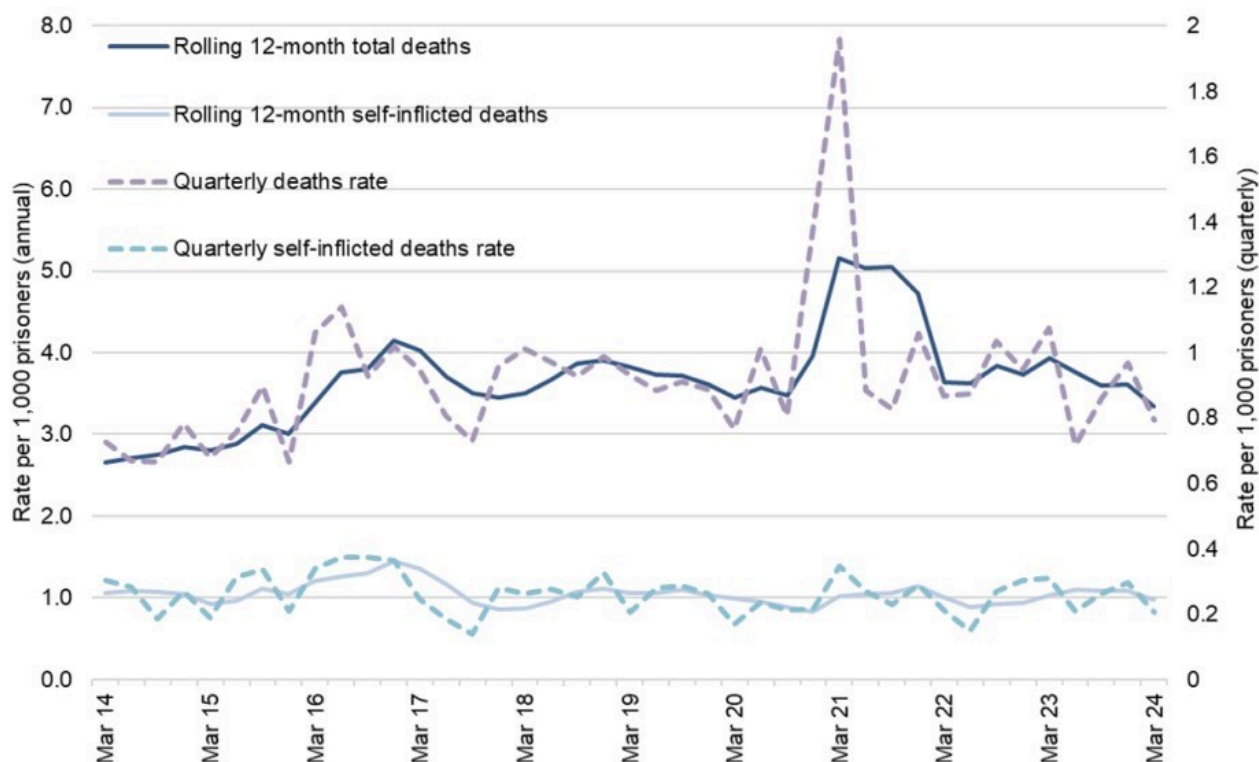
In the most recent quarter there were 70 deaths, an 18% **decrease** from 85 deaths in the previous quarter.

Number of self-inflicted deaths stayed level with the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 85 self-inflicted deaths, **staying level** with the previous 12 months.

There were 18 self-inflicted deaths in the most recent quarter, a 31% **decrease** from 26 in the previous quarter.

Figure 1: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of deaths per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending March 2014 to 12 months ending March 2024, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 291 deaths in prison custody (a rate of 3.3 per 1,000 prisoners), a 10% decrease from 322 deaths in the previous 12 months (a rate of 3.9 per 1,000 prisoners). Long-term trends and more detail are presented in the annual tables [\[footnote 7\]](#).

Over the same period, there were 171 deaths due to natural causes (a rate of 2.0 per 1,000 prisoners), a 17% decrease from 207 deaths (a rate of 2.5 per 1,000 prisoners) in the previous 12 months. The current rate is a return to pre-COVID levels, where a rate of 2.1 was last reported in the 12 months to March 2020.

There were 85 apparent self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to March 2024 (a rate of 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners), the same as seen in the previous 12 months. The rate of self-inflicted deaths has remained broadly stable at around 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners since the 12 months to March 2018.

There were 34 deaths recorded as 'Other' in the 12 months to March 2024, 29 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 Coroner's inquest takes place (which can be a considerable time after the death). As a result, the number and rate of deaths in the individual categories are not directly comparable with earlier years: it is likely that numbers in some categories will be revised upwards once classifications have been finalised.

In the most recent quarter there were 70 deaths, an 18% decrease from 85 deaths in the previous quarter. There were 18 self-inflicted deaths in the latest quarter, a 31% decrease from 26 in the previous quarter. However, quarterly death figures should be considered with caution due to greater volatility and the potential for seasonal effects^[footnote 8].

Self-harm: 12 months to September 2023

The rate of self-harm incidents increased in both the male and female estate from the previous 12-month period

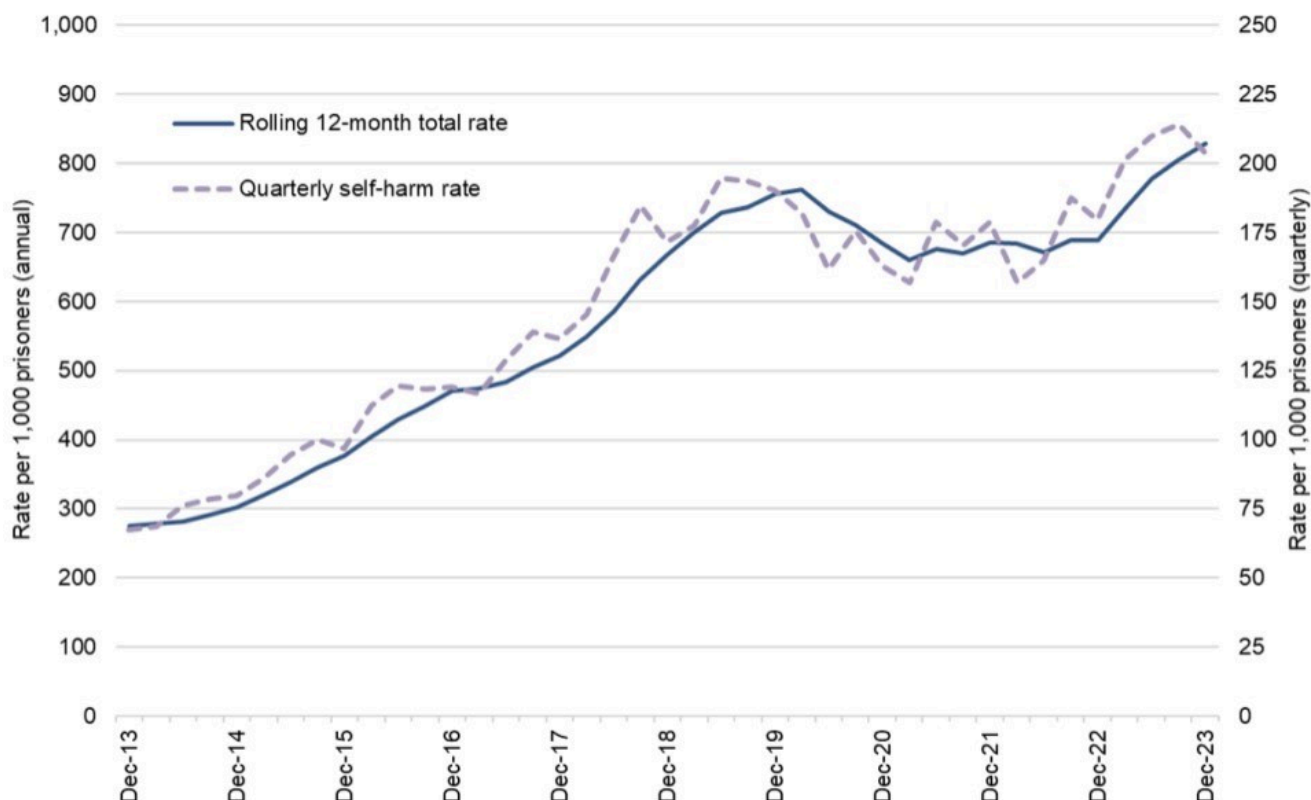
There were 70,875 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2023, a 28% **increase** from the previous 12 months (a 31% **increase** in male establishments and a 19% **increase** in female establishments). Over the same period the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners **increased** by 24% in male establishments and by 11% in female establishments.

In the most recent quarter, there were 17,918 self-harm incidents, **down** 4% on the previous quarter (a 4% **decrease** in male establishments and a 3% **decrease** in female establishments). Over the same period the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners **decreased** 5% in both male and female establishments.

The number of individuals who self-harmed increased 18% in the latest year.

There were 12,914 individuals who self-harmed in the 12 months to December 2023, an 18% **increase** from 10,922 in the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual **increased** from 5.1 in the 12 months to December 2022 to 5.5 in the 12 months to December 2023.

Figure 2: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending December 2013 to 12 months ending December 2023, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to December 2023, there were 70,875 reported incidents of self-harm (a rate of 829 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 28% from 55,431 in the previous 12 months. The rate of incidents in the latest 12 months increased 20% from the previous 12 months to the highest level in the time series [\[footnote 9\]](#).

On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2023 decreased by 4% from the previous quarter, falling from 18,686 to 17,918 incidents. Additionally, the rate of incidents of self-harm in the three months to December 2023 decreased by 5% from the previous quarter, falling from 214 to 204 incidents per 1,000 prisoners.

The number of individuals who self-harmed increased by 18% to 12,914 in the latest 12 months (a rate of 151 individuals per 1,000 prisoners), from 10,922 in the previous 12 months. The rate, or proportion, of prisoners self-harming in the latest 12 months was 11% higher than in the previous 12 months. The number of incidents per self-harming individual in the latest 12 months peaked at 5.5, an increase from 5.1 in the previous year. A small number of individuals who prolifically self-harm have a disproportionate impact on this figure: just over a half (53%) of prisoners who self-harmed in 2023 did so more than once.

The number of self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance [\[footnote 10\]](#) increased by 24% to 3,349 in the 12 months to December 2023 but decreased by 4% in the latest quarter to 854 incidents. The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance has decreased by 0.2 percentage points to 4.7% in the 12 months to December 2023.

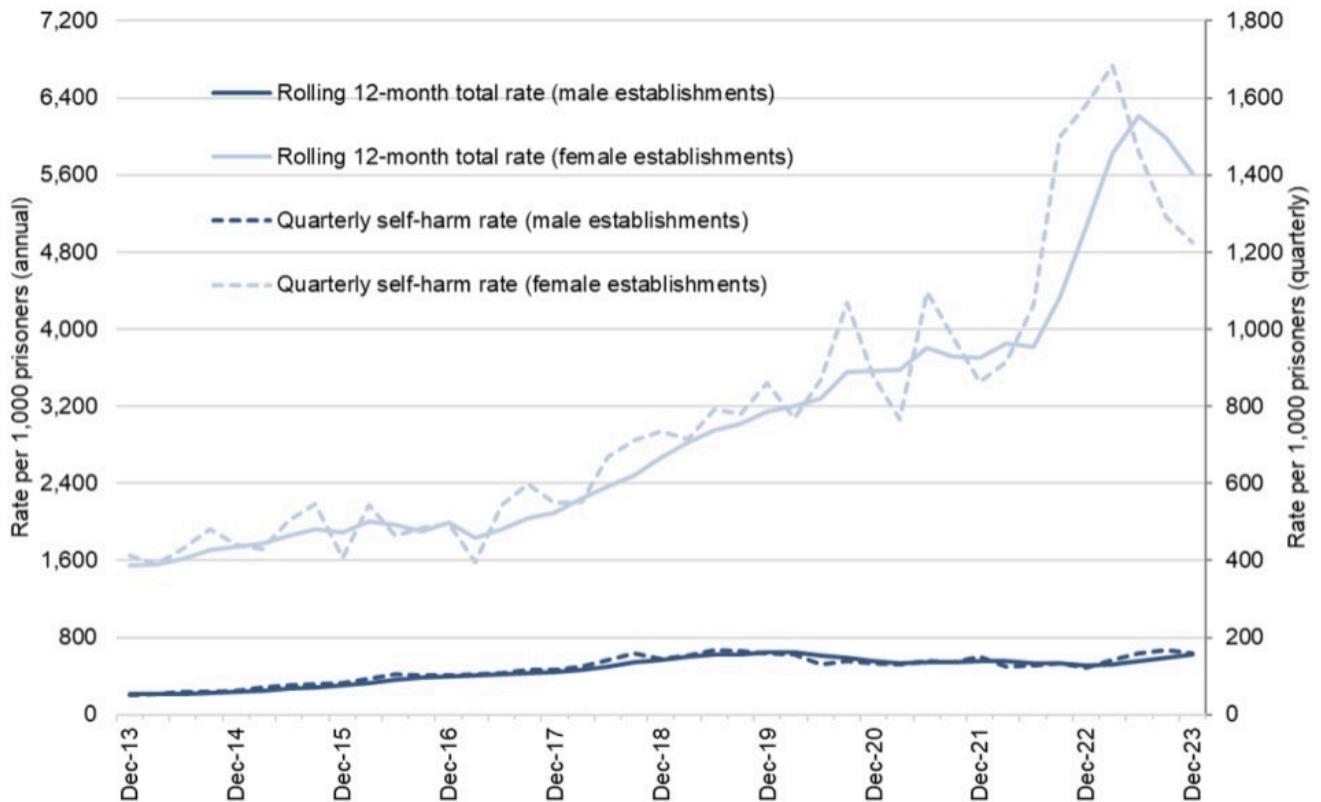
Self-harm levels differ considerably by gender. Although the number of incidents in the female estate is smaller than in the male estate, the rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners is much higher. In the 12 months to December 2023, there were 51,542 incidents in the male estate compared with 19,333 in the female estate, representing a 31% increase in male establishments and a 19% increase in female establishments compared to the previous year. However, the rate of self-harm in the female estate (5,624 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) was nearly nine times higher than in the male estate (628 incidents per 1,000 prisoners), following a 24% increase in male establishments and a 11% increase in female establishments. The number of incidents and rate of self-harm in the female estate, and the number of incidents in the male estate are now at the highest level in the time series.

On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2023 decreased by 4% in male establishments and decreased 3% in female establishments compared with the previous three months. The rate decreased by 5% in both male and female establishments over the same period.

The number of incidents per individual who self-harmed in female establishments was almost four times that in male establishments. In the 12 months to December 2023 there was a new peak of 16.0 incidents of self-harm per self-harming female, an increase from 14.7 in the previous 12 months, compared with 4.4 incidents per self-harming male, an increase from 4.0 in the previous 12 months.

The proportion of females self-harming in the latest 12 months was 2% higher than in the previous 12 months, at 351 individuals per 1,000 prisoners. The increase in self-harm in the female estate is driven by both an increase in the number of females self-harming (10% increase to 1,206 individuals), and an increase in incidents per self-harming individual (9% increase to 16.0 incidents per individual). The increase in self-harm in the male estate is driven by an increase in both the proportion of males self-harming (12% increase to 143 individuals per 1,000 prisoners), and the number of self-harm incidents per individual (10% increase to 4.4 incidents per individual).

Figure 3: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2013 to 12 months ending December 2023



Self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased in male establishments by 22%, to 2,969 in the 12 months to December 2023, but the proportion of incidents requiring hospital attendance decreased from 6.2% in the previous 12 months to 5.8% in the latest 12 months. In the female estate 380 self-harm incidents required hospital attendance, a 42% increase from 267 incidents the previous year. However, the proportion of incidents in the female estate requiring hospital attendance was 2.0% in the 12 months to December 2023, up slightly from 1.6% in the previous 12 months.

As Figure 3 shows, over the last decade there has been more variation in the quarterly rate of self-harm in the female estate than in the male estate. This may in part reflect the impact of the small number of individuals who engage in prolific self-harming being greater in the female estate. Fluctuations in the quarterly rates of self-harm in the female estate have been wider since the start of the pandemic.

Key findings from the additional self-harm tables for 2023

Custody Type:

The figures by custody type have been updated for this publication, and are now based on custody type as at the time of the incident. See the “Changes for this publication” section for more details.

In the 12 months to December 2023, in the male estate, the rate of self-harm was lower among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners (587 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 605 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners). However, in the female estate, the rate of self-harm was higher among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners (6,595 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 5,157 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners).

In the male estate, the number of self-harm incidents for prisoners on remand increased by 39%, from 6,218 in 2022 to 8,664 in 2023, with the rate increasing 24%, and the number of self-harm incidents for sentenced prisoners increased by 31%, from 31,019 to 40,713, with the rate also increasing by 24%. Within the sentenced population, the rate was much higher for recalled prisoners (1,068 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) compared to the sentenced population overall (605 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) in 2023.

In the female estate, the number of self-harm incidents for prisoners on remand increased by 21%, from 4,200 in 2022 to 5,094 in 2023, with the rate remaining almost unchanged (decreasing 0.4%), and the number of incidents for sentenced prisoners increased by 18%, from 11,498 to 13,621, with the rate increasing by 14%. Within the sentenced population, the rate was much higher for recalled prisoners (7,248 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) compared to the sentenced population overall (5,157 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) in 2023.

For the overall prison estate, the rate of self-harm incidents for prisoners on remand (886 per 1,000 prisoners) was higher than the rate for sentenced prisoners (777 per 1,000 prisoners). Within the sentenced population, the rate was higher for IPP prisoners (1,446 per 1,000 prisoners) and recalled prisoners (1,311 per 1,000 prisoners) in 2023. The rate for IPP prisoners increased 26% from a rate of 1,145 in 2022, and the rate for recalled prisoners increased 12% from a rate of 1,166 in 2022.

Method:

The most common **method for self-harm** in prison was cutting/scratching: 57% of incidents of self-harm involved cutting/scratching in 2023, down from 59% in 2022, while 19% of self-harm incidents involved self-strangulation in 2023, up from 18% in 2022.

Cutting/scratching increased 28% in the male estate in 2023, and represented 66% of self-harm incidents in the male estate, down from 68% in 2022.

In the female estate, cutting/scratching increased 8%, and represented 34% of self-harm incidents in the female estate in 2023, down from 38% in 2022. Self-strangulation increased 34%, and represented 47% of self-harm incidents in the female estate in 2023, up from 42% in 2022^{[footnote 11](#)}.

Location:

The most common **location for self-harm** in prison was in cells and common areas. For males, 70% of self-harm incidents were in cells and common areas in 2023, compared to 74% of self-harm incidents by females.

Males were more likely than females to self-harm in segregation units (11% of incidents by males compared to 6% of incidents by females) and in vulnerable prisoner units (7% of incidents by males compared to 1% of incidents by females), whereas females were more likely to self-harm in health care locations (15% of incidents by females compared to 4% of incidents by males) in 2023.

Time in current prison:

21% of self-harm incidents occurred within the first 30 days in custody, for both male and female prisoners. These figures have remained broadly stable over time.

Frequency:

Just over a half of individuals (53%) who self-harmed in 2023 did so **more than once** during the year. 52% of males and 59% of females who self-harmed during 2023 did so more than once during the calendar year.

12% of self-harming females self-harmed more than 20 times in 2023 (up from 11% in 2022), 7% self-harmed 50 or more times (up from 6%), and 4% self-harmed 100 or more times (remained unchanged).

4% of self-harming males self-harmed more than 20 times in 2023 (up from 3% in 2022), 0.7% self-harmed 50 or more times (up from 0.5%), and 0.1% self-harmed 100 or more times (remaining unchanged).

Age:

The highest rates of self-harm incidents and individuals self-harming were in the younger age groups in 2023, continuing trends in recent years.

The highest rates of self-harm incidents were in the 21-24 (1,385 incidents per 1,000 prisoners), 25-29 (1,306 per 1,000 prisoners) and 18-20 (1,244 per 1,000 prisoners) age groups at the time of the incident. In male establishments, the highest rate was in the 25-29 age group (923 per 1,000 prisoners). In female establishments, the rate was highest in the 18-20 age group (24,449 per 1,000 prisoners).

The highest rates of individuals self-harming were also in the 18-20 (233 individuals who self-harmed per 1,000 prisoners), 25-29 (205 per 1,000 prisoners) and 21-24 (202 per 1,000 prisoners) age groups.

Ethnicity:

The rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners was highest for white prisoners (1,013 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) followed by prisoners from the mixed ethnic group (567) in 2023. The rates were lowest for black prisoners and Asian prisoners (both 243) in 2023. This is consistent with recent years.

In male establishments, the rates were highest for white prisoners (758 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) and lowest for black prisoners (179 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) in 2023.

In female establishments, the rates were highest for white prisoners (6,290 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) and lowest for Asian prisoners (1,368 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) in 2023.

Nationality:

The rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners was higher for British prisoners (888 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than for foreign nationals (322 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) in 2023.

The rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners was higher for British prisoners than for foreign nationals in both male and female establishments, but in male establishments the rate increased for British nationals (a 25% increase to a rate of 664) and remained almost unchanged for foreign nationals (a 0.3% decrease to a rate of 299). For female establishments the rate increased by more for foreign nationals (a 23% increase to a rate of 977) than for British nationals (an 11% increase to a rate of 6,137).

Hospital attendance

The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance was 4.7% in 2023, and 97% of self-harm incidents that resulted in hospital attendance were for a visit to A&E and did not require staying as an inpatient in 2023. These are consistent with recent years.

In male establishments 5.8% of all self-harm incidents resulted in hospital attendance in 2023, down from 6.2% in 2022. While in female establishments 2.0% of all self-harm incidents resulted in hospital attendance in 2023, up from 1.6% in 2022. 97% of self-harm incidents in male establishments and 96% of self-harm incidents in female establishments that resulted in hospital attendance were for a visit to A&E and did not require staying as an inpatient in 2023.

Assaults: 12 months to December 2023

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

In the 12 months to December 2023, there were 26,912 assault incidents, a 28% **increase** from the previous 12 months. Of these, 3,025 were serious assaults, **up 25%**. Rates of assault **increased** by 20% to 315 incidents per 1,000 prisoners, and serious assault **increased** by 17% to 35 in the latest 12 months.

Assaults **decreased** by 3% in the latest quarter to 7,086 incidents while the number of serious assaults **increased** by 3% to 813 incidents.

The rate of assault per 1,000 prisoners remained higher in female than male establishments.

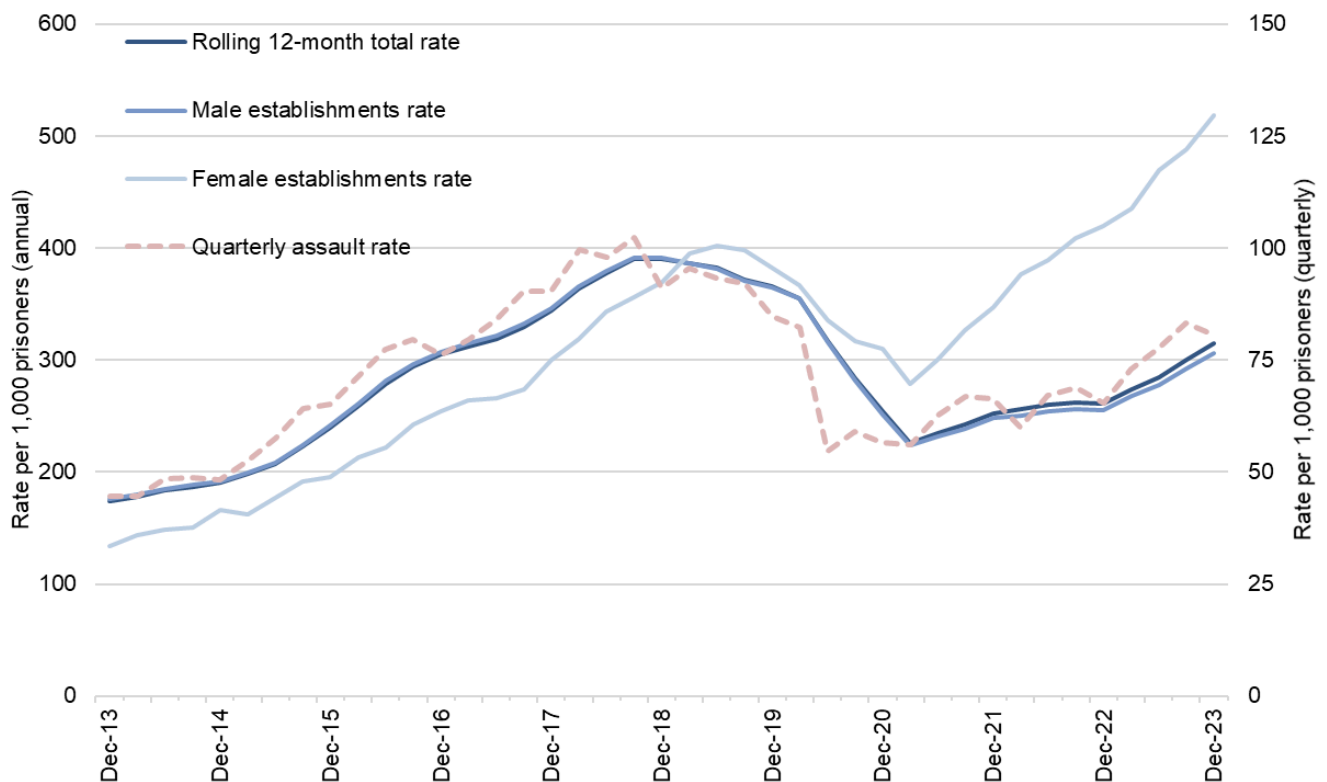
The rate of assault in male establishments **increased** by 20% from the previous 12 months, while the rate in female establishments **increased** by 23%. Assault rates for the 12 months to December 2023 remained higher in female establishments (518 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in male establishments (306 incidents per 1,000 prisoners).

Assaults on staff increased from the previous 12-month period.

There were 9,204 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2023, a 27% **increase** from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff **remained almost unchanged** at 2,517 incidents.

In the latest 12 months, the rate of assaults on staff per 1,000 prisoners **increased** by 20% to 108 incidents per 1,000 prisoners. During this period, the rate in male establishments **increased** by 19% to 101 assaults per 1,000 prisoners and **increased** by 25% to 255 assaults per 1,000 prisoners in female establishments.

Figure 4: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total assaults by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2013 to 12 months ending December 2023, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to December 2023, assault incidents increased by 28% to 26,912 (a rate of 315 incidents per 1,000 prisoners). The rate of assaults in the latest 12 months was 20% higher than in the previous 12 months. The number and rate of assault incidents still remain lower than pre-pandemic levels.

In the latest quarter there were 7,086 assaults, down 3% from the previous quarter. The number of assaults and the quarterly rate remain lower than their peak in the July to September 2018 quarter. This reflects that quarterly numbers and rates of assaults were already falling before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the considerable decrease in the early stages of the pandemic (April to June 2020) associated with changes in prison regimes and activity in the criminal justice system. Following the start of the pandemic there have been two years of increases for assault incidents, with larger increases in 2023 than in 2022.

The number of incidents in male establishments increased by 28% from 19,669 to 25,131 in the 12 months to December 2023 (a rate of 306 per 1,000 prisoners). The rate of assaults in male establishments in the latest 12 months was 20% higher than in the previous 12 months.

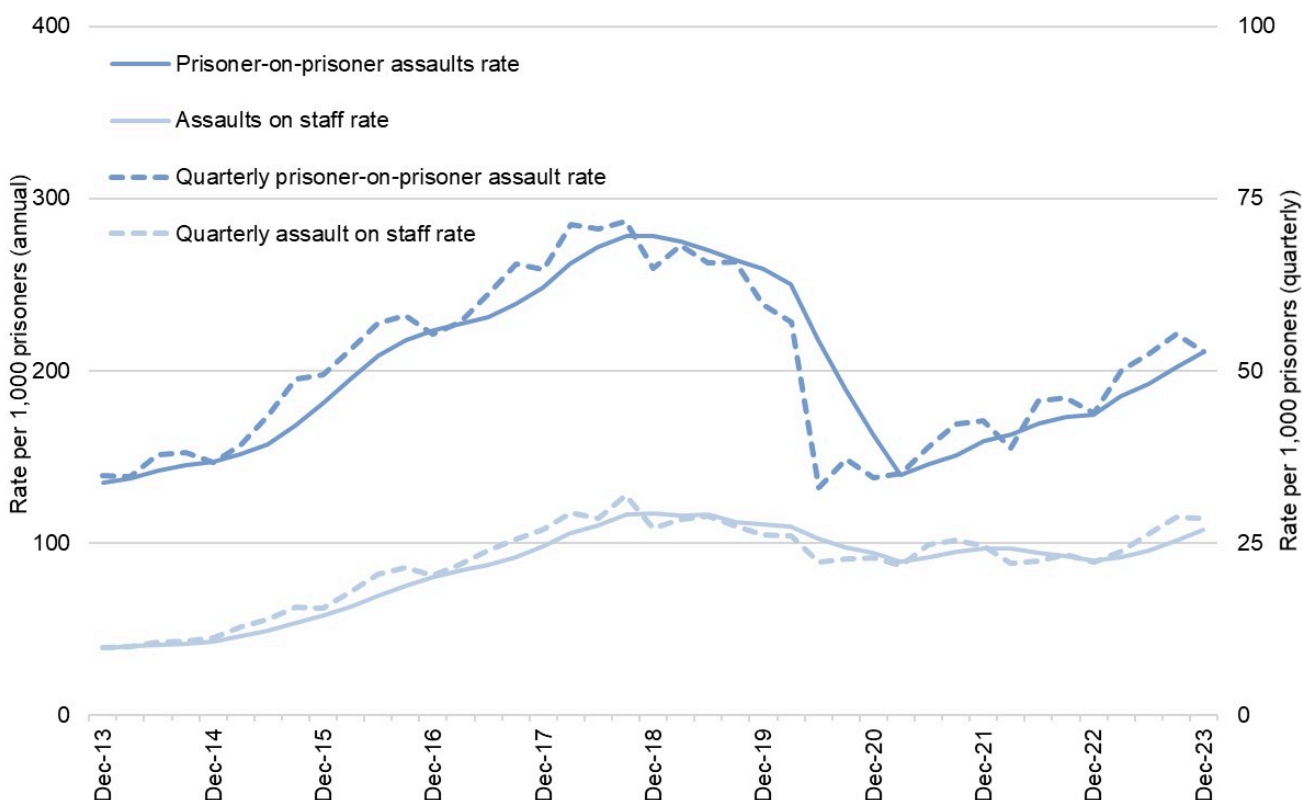
The number of incidents in female establishments increased by 32% from 1,346 to 1,781 incidents in the 12 months to December 2023 (a rate of 518 per 1,000 prisoners). The rate of assaults in female establishments in the latest 12 months was 23% higher than in the previous 12 months. The rate and number of incidents in the female estate are now at their highest level in the time

series^[footnote 12], while remaining lower than pre-pandemic in male establishments.

Assault rates have been higher in female establishments than in male establishments since the 12 months to December 2019, with the difference extending each year, after previously being higher in male establishments.

In the latest quarter, the number of assaults in male establishments decreased by 3% from 6,789 to 6,576, and the number of assaults in female establishments increased by 6% from 479 to 510. During this period the rate of assaults decreased by 3% to 81 assaults per 1,000 prisoners, comprising a 4% decrease in male establishments (to 78 assaults per 1,000 prisoners) and 4% increase in female establishments (to 141 assaults per 1,000 prisoners).

Figure 5: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2013 to 12 months ending December 2023, with quarterly rates



There were 18,023 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults^[footnote 13] in the 12 months to December 2023 (a rate of 211 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 29% from the 14,020 assaults in the previous 12 months. The rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the latest 12 months was 21% higher than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 4,648 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 4% decrease from 4,829 in the previous quarter.

There were 9,204 assaults on staff^[footnote 14] in the 12 months to December 2023 (a rate of 108 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 27% from the 7,224

assaults in the previous 12 months. The rate of assaults on staff in the latest 12 months was 20% higher than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 2,517 assaults on staff, remaining almost unchanged from 2,506 incidents in the previous quarter.

The proportion of assaults on staff^{[footnote 15](#)} remained unchanged at 34% of all incidents in the 12 months to December 2023, having previously steadily increased from 22% in the 12 months to December 2013 to a peak of 38% in the year to December 2021. In the 12 months to December 2023, the proportion of assaults that were on staff remained higher in female establishments (49%) than in male establishments (33%).

In male establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased by 28% to 17,104 incidents (208 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2023, and the rate increased by 21%. Assaults on staff increased 27% to 8,326 incidents, and the rate increased by 19% to 101 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners.

In female establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased by 32% to 919 incidents (267 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2023, and the rate increased by 23%. Assaults on staff increased by 34% to 878 incidents (255 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2023, and the rate increased by 25%. In the 12 months to December 2023, the rates of both prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff in female establishments reached a new peak.

Serious assaults

Of the 26,912 assault incidents, 3,025 (11%) were serious.

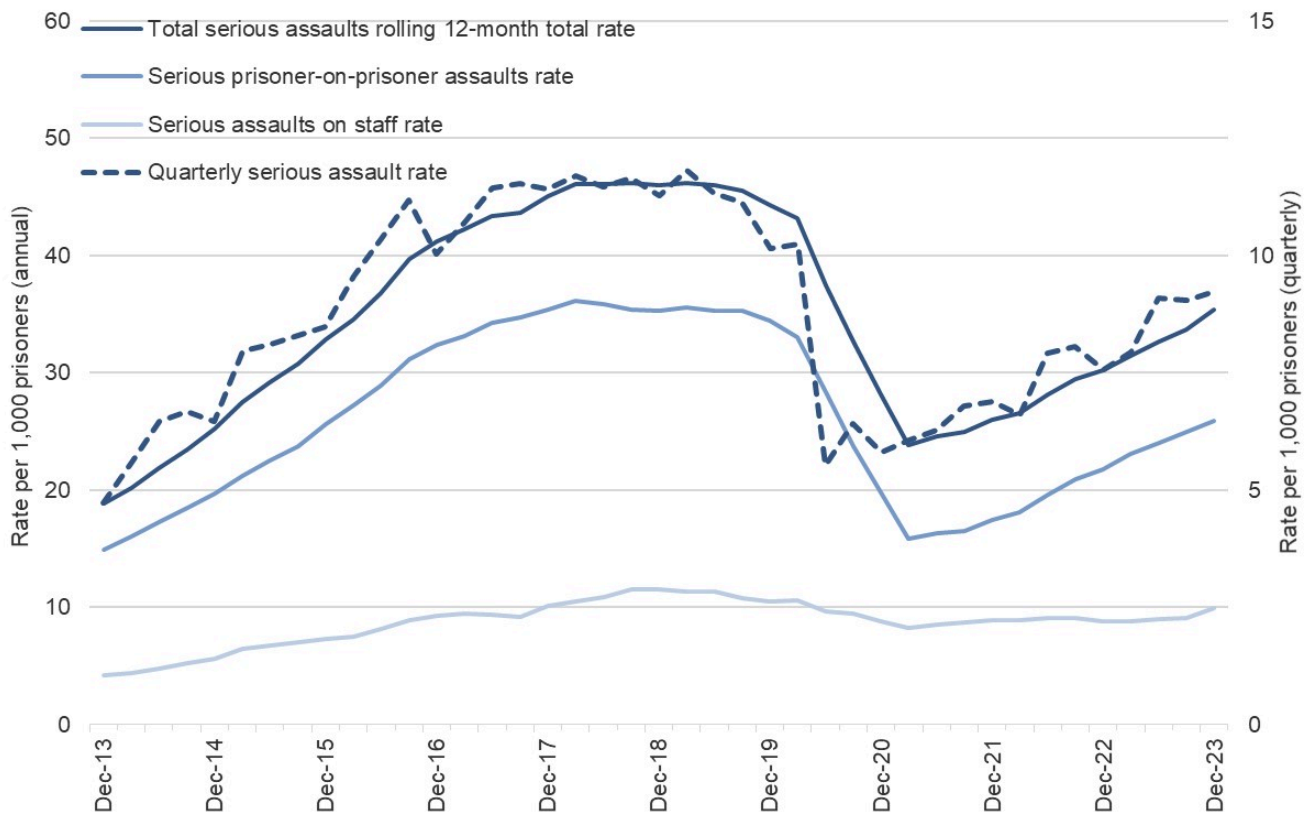
In the 12 months to December 2023, there were 3,025 serious assault incidents, a 25% **increase** from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assaults **increased** by 17% over the period.

Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults **increased** by 26% to 2,212, and serious assaults on staff **increased** by 20% to 852 in the 12 months to December 2023.

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 6: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total serious assaults, serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, and serious assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2013 to 12 months ending December 2023



In the latest 12 months, 11% of assaults were serious assaults. This is slight decrease from 12% in the 12 months to December 2022 and has remained broadly consistent throughout the time series. The proportion of all assaults that were serious remained higher in male establishments (12%) than in female establishments (8%).

In the 12 months to December 2023, there were 3,025 serious assaults (a rate of 35 per 1,000 prisoners), a 25% increase from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assaults in the latest 12 months was 17% higher than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 813 serious assaults, a 3% increase from the previous quarter.

There were 2,212 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (a rate of 26 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2023, a 26% increase from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the latest 12 months was 19% higher than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 580 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, the same as the previous quarter.

In the 12 months to December 2023, the rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults remains higher in the male estate (a rate of 26 per 1,000 prisoners) compared to the female estate (24 per 1,000 prisoners). However, this is considerably closer than they have been previously in the time series^{[\[footnote 16\]](#)} and represents an increase on the previous 12 months of 17% in the male estate and 91% in the female estate.

There were 852 serious assaults on staff (a rate of 10 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2023, a 20% increase from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assaults on staff was 13% higher than in the previous 12 months, and the rate increased by more in female establishments (a 36% increase, to 15 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in male establishments (an 11% increase, to 10 incidents per 1,000 prisoners). In the latest quarter, the number of serious assaults on staff increased by 13% to 245 incidents.

Key findings from additional assaults tables for 2023

The annual assaults tables include a further breakdown of the assaults figures, often including a breakdown by prisoner role within each incident. A definition of each of the roles is shown below:

- **Assailant:** This refers to assault incidents in which there is a clear aggressor (assailant) and victim. Such incidents arise from offences of GBH and ABH.
- **Fighter:** This refers to assault incidents in which there is no clear aggressor or victim. Such cases arise from offences of affray.
- **Victim:** This refers to assault incidents in which there is a clear aggressor (assailant) and victim. Such incidents arise from offences of GBH and ABH.

Age:

Prisoners in the 18-20 year **age-group** had the highest rates of incidents where they were involved as assailants (833 per 1,000 prisoners), fighters (894 per 1,000 prisoners) and victims (384 per 1,000 prisoners).

In general, the rate of incidents is higher where those involved are from the younger age-groups.

Custody type:

The figures by custody type have been updated for this publication, and are now based on custody type as at the time of the incident. See the “Changes for this publication” section for more details.

Prisoners on **remand** had higher rates of assailants, fighters and victims than sentenced prisoners in 2023. The rate in both the remand and sentenced populations increased for assailants, fighters and victims in latest 12 months, but they increased more in the sentenced populations.

For assailants the rates per 1,000 prisoners increased 5% for prisoners on remand, from 321 in 2022 to 336 in 2023, and increased 26% for sentenced prisoners from 159 in 2022 to 201 in 2023.

For fighters the rates per 1,000 prisoners increased 18% for prisoners on remand, from 253 in 2022 to 299 in 2023, and increased by 31% for sentenced prisoners from 121 in 2022 to 159 in 2023.

For victims the rates per 1,000 prisoners increased 13% for prisoners on remand, from 169 in 2022 to 190 in 2023, and increased by 29% for sentenced prisoners from 87 in 2022 to 111 in 2023.

Ethnicity:

Prisoners from the black and mixed **ethnic** groups had the highest rates of assailants, fighters and victims. For black prisoners there were 391 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 368 fighters and 147 victims. For prisoners from the mixed ethnic group there were 374 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 317 fighters and 157 victims.

The rates for white and Asian prisoners had the lowest rates for assailants, fighters and victims. For white prisoners there were 202 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 150 fighters and 123 victims. For Asian prisoners there were 175 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 169 fighters and 127 victims.

Sexual assaults:

There were 447 **sexual assaults** [\[footnote 17\]](#) recorded in custody in 2023, a 32% increase from 338 sexual assaults in custody in 2022. Over the same period the rate of sexual assault incidents per 1,000 prisoners increased 24%, from 4.2 in 2022 to 5.2 in 2023.

In female establishments, sexual assaults doubled, from 27 in 2022 to 54 in 2023, with the rate increasing 87% from 8.4 to 15.7. In male establishments, there was a 26% increase, from 311 in 2022 to 393 in 2023, with the rate increasing 19% from 4.0 to 4.8.

Weapons:

There were 7,005 **assaults where weapons were recorded** in 2023. This represents 26% of total assaults, which, after a decrease in 2022, is the highest proportion in the time series.

Of those assaults that involved a weapon, 29% involved spitting (down from 31% in 2022), and 12% involved a blunt instrument (up from 11% in 2022).

Injuries:

There were 2,661 **serious injuries** as a result of assaults in prison in 2023, a 20% increase from 2,224 serious injuries in 2022.

Of those serious injuries, 20% were cuts requiring sutures in 2023, 20% resulted in a black eye, 13% resulted in extensive or multiple bruising, 13% resulted in a fracture, and 12% were from bites. These proportions are all similar to 2022 figures.

There were also 13,015 minor injuries as a result of assaults in prison in 2023, a 24% increase from 10,513 minor injuries in 2022.

Hospital attendance:

0.3% of assault incidents required attendance at hospital as an inpatient. 2.2% required treatment for concussion or internal injuries. These figures remain broadly stable to previous years.

Further information

National Statistics status

National Statistics are [accredited official statistics](https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/accredited-official-statistics/) (<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/accredited-official-statistics/>)^[footnote 18] that 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.

These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in March 2013. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics'.

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.

Future publications

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.

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.

Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office: Tel: 020 3334 3536 Email: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/media-enquiries> (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/media-enquiries>)

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

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Email: OMSQ-SiC-publications@justice.gov.uk

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Next update: July 2024

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>)

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1. The time series for assault incidents starts in 2000, and self-harm incidents starts in 2004.
 2. Rates reflect the changes in the number of incidents, as well as the changes in prison population over time. More information can be found in the accompanying guide. Data on population statistics are published in the Offender Management Statistics Quarterly publication <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly> (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>).
 3. See Guide to Safety in Custody Statistics for a summary of how rates are calculated.
 4. 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.
 5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly> (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>). Quarterly population data to December 2023 is published in Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin, England and Wales Quarterly.

6. The comparability over the year of other measures that are based on self-harming individuals (such as the number of incidents per self-harming individual, or the proportion of incidents requiring hospital attendance) are not affected by changes in population size.
7. Data on deaths are published three months ahead of assaults and self-harm, therefore, the annual publication Deaths in prison custody for 1978 to 2022 is published in the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September 2023.
8. Seasonal effects refer to variation in timeseries data that occur at regular intervals (typically intervals shorter than a year e.g. monthly or quarterly).
9. The time series for assault incidents starts in 2000, and self-harm incidents starts in 2004.
10. An incident of self-harm requiring hospitalisation does not only reflect the seriousness of the incident. This also depends on the healthcare facilities at the establishment, which vary across the estate.
11. There was a change in the definition of Self-strangulation that saw noose making removed from self-harm reporting from April 2020. Please see the Guide to Safety in Custody statistics for further information.
12. The time series for assault incidents starts in 2000, and self-harm incidents starts in 2004.
13. This figure includes any prisoner-on-prisoner assaults where there may also have been an assault on staff.
14. 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
15. Some assault incidents may be recorded as both a prisoner-on-prisoner assault and an assault on staff, so the sum of the two categories may exceed the total number of assaults
16. The time series for assault incidents starts in 2000, and self-harm incidents starts in 2004.
17. Sexual assaults are any assault where the victim believes it to have been of a sexual nature, and where all of the following occur – they intentionally touch another person, the touching is sexual, the victim does not consent to the touching, they do not reasonably believe the other person consents, and the touching can be with any part of the body or with anything else.
18. Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

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