

SHORT JAIL SENTENCE PREFERABLE TO COMMUNITY SERVICE, SAY PRISONERS

Report identifies differing approaches needed for first-time and repeat offenders

Prisoners prefer to do a short **stretch behind bars** than complete a community sentence, because they consider it less of a punishment, according to research by prison governors and **penal reformers**.

The majority of prisoners said they found short jail terms meant little to do and long periods of time in their cells. Many prisoners disliked long waiting lists for **courses** and limited job opportunities in prison.

But the research, commissioned by the Prison Governors' Association (PGA) and the Howard League for Penal Reform showed many **offenders** felt a short prison sentence was easier to complete than a

community sentence, which some considered more of a punishment.

The study was based on 44 interviews with **inmates** serving 12 months or less at three different prisons, and 25 interviews with staff.

The staff interviews revealed many to be upset at the damaging **impact** of short sentences on prisoners' lives, especially where they had lost homes or jobs and when it had led to family breakdown.

The report, *No Winners: the reality of short term prison sentences*, says there are two distinct groups of prisoners – the **'first-timers'**, who were new to prison, and the **'repeat offenders'** – the different types of prisoners have **distinct attitudes** and needs while inside.

The *first-timers* tended to **struggle** with their sentence, especially during the first few weeks, with many **reporting** that they had lost jobs and housing. The *repeat offenders* had little to **look forward to** on their release from prison, and for some their quality of life was better in prison than in the **community**.

Nearly three-quarters of the prisoners had previously served a community sentence and their **views** about them were mixed.

The researchers reported: "Some did not consider them **sufficient**

punishment, while others considered them 'tiring, boring and pointless'. Several said that community sentences were harder to complete than short prison sentences because of the need to keep **appointments** and the length of time over which community sentences are completed."

The study concludes: "Some highlighted that it was hard to **comply** with community sentences because they had to manage their day-to-day lives and the factors that had often led them to **offend** (most commonly drug use). Some also stated that they had previously had poor relationships with **probation officers** and that it was too easy to be broken on a community sentence. This led many prisoners to state a preference for a short-prison sentence over a community sentence on the basis that they are easier to complete."

Frances Crook, of the Howard League, said the study showed that community **penalties** sought to change behaviour, while overcrowded prisons were failing to offer **lasting** solutions to crime.

Eoin McLennan-Murray, PGA president, said the study made a convincing case, "which argues at best for the **abolition** of short prison sentences and at worst for a dramatic reduction in their use".



What is the main point of the article?

What did most of the prisoners dislike about short jail terms?

What did the research by the Prison Governors' Association (PGA) and the Howard League for Penal Reform suggest?

What is a 'community sentence'?

How does it differ from a short prison sentence?

What are the two types of prisoners?



What percentage of prisoners had served a community sentence?

What does the article suggest is more effective at reducing crime?

-Community sentences

-Short term prison sentences