

# Research Bulletin



NSW Department of Corrective Services  
Corporate Research, Evaluation and Statistics

## Profile of Violent Behaviour by Inmates in NSW Correctional Centres

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*Inmates who display violent behaviour present significant management and security demands on correctional centres in NSW and pose a potential risk of harm to other inmates, correctional staff and to the general community. The current bulletin provides a preliminary snapshot of the number of sentenced inmates in NSW correctional centres who have displayed violent behaviour and profiles the demographic and criminogenic characteristics of these inmates. It was found that more than half of all inmates serving a sentence of full-time custody on 20 March 2005 are currently convicted of a violent offence or have displayed violent behaviour whilst in custody. Although the majority of these inmates are male, over a third of the sentenced female inmate population are also incarcerated for a violent offence or institutional violence. The most common offence types for which the profiled inmates are serving a sentence of full-time custody were assault related offences and a quarter of the profiled inmates have violently breached correction centre regulations during their current sentencing period. Potential implications for the management and rehabilitation of inmates with violent offences are discussed with reference to identified gender differences in the pattern of violence.*

### KEY FINDINGS

#### *Proportion of Inmate Population*

- On 20 March 2005 the majority of sentenced inmates 54.7% (n=3476) were convicted of a violent offence and/or had violently breached correctional centre regulations.
- The majority of male inmates (55.9%) and more than one third (39%) of female inmates met the current definition of violent.

#### *Violent Offences*

- Male offenders were overrepresented in every category of violent offence and also committed significantly more violent offences compared to female inmates.
- One in three (30.6%) male inmates and one in four (22.9%) female inmates were convicted of an assault related offence (major or other assault) that typically demonstrates a reactive use of violence.
- The proportion of male inmates (22.1%) convicted of robbery or theft offences, typically representative of an instrumental use of violence, was almost double the proportion of female inmates (11.4%).

#### *Breaches of correctional centre regulations*

- Nine hundred and sixty two (15%) sentenced inmates committed 1670 violent breached correctional centre regulations during their current sentencing period.
- The male and female rate of violent breaches was comparable, with 15.3% (n=904) of male inmates and 13.5% (n=58) of female inmates recording at least one violent breach.
- Fighting was the most common breach, committed by 11.6% (n=739) of sentenced inmates.

Offenders who commit violence in both the community and in custody represent a burgeoning proportion of the NSW offender population and present significant management and security demands on the NSW correctional system. However, there is little research or detailed statistics on the number or type of male and female inmates convicted of violent offences held within NSW correctional centres.

Offenders who commit criminal violence are a heterogeneous population for whom the causes and functions of violence are multiple and diverse (Berkowitz, 1993; Blackburn, 1993). Criminologists and psychologists alike have examined male and female patterns of violent offending in an attempt to further understand the differing causal pathways to violent antisocial and criminal behaviour. This understanding is critical for the development of appropriate and responsive rehabilitation programs that aim to reduce the risk of harm these offenders pose to other inmates, correctional staff and to the general community upon their release from prison custody (Day & Howells, 2002).

The aim of the current research is to profile offenders who have been convicted of violent offences and those who commit criminal violence once in custody in NSW correctional centres and attempt to identify two subtypes of offenders: offenders whose offence involves *reactive* violence and those whose offence involves *instrumental* violence (Blackburn, 1993; McEllistrem, 2004).

Reactive violence, also referred to as emotional or affective violence, is usually associated with interpersonal conflict and is thought to be the most pervasive form of criminal violence. As the name suggests, reactive violence is characterised by a lack of planning and no premeditation and is usually accompanied by a heightened emotional and angry reaction to a provocation or conflict. Victims of reactive violence are most often known to the perpetrator and perceived by the perpetrator to have provoked the violence (Berkowitz, 1993; Cornell, *et al.* 1996). Reactive violent crimes may include non-premeditated assaults and homicides that result from interpersonal conflict.

In contrast, instrumental violence, also known as predatory or goal-directed violence, is more purposeful and controlled. Instrumental crime is frequently premeditated and is driven by

additional motivating factors, such as the attainment of property or money (Blackburn, 1993). Instrumental violence is most often perpetrated against victims who are unknown to the offender. This type of violence is characterised by a lack of anger and emotional arousal, the presence of an identifiable goal and little or no provocation from the victim (Cornell, *et al.*, 1996). Individuals who are instrumental in their use of violence are more likely to possess psychopathic personality traits, such as shallow affect, a callous and unemotional disposition and a lack of empathy or remorse (Forth, *et al.*, 1990). Instrumental violent crimes may include robbery and aggravated break, enter and steal, where the perpetrator uses violence as a means to another end, such as attaining property or money.

The distinction between reactive and instrumental violence is not always clear as an act of violence can be motivated by both interpersonal conflict and an additional goal, such as the attainment of property or money. Moreover, offenders with violent offences are not necessarily exclusively reactive or instrumental in their offending (Cornell, *et al.*, 1996; Berkowitz, 1993).

In a profile of serious violent offenders, Cornell, *et al.* (1996) found that almost all offenders had demonstrated a reactive use of violence following an interpersonal conflict or provocation. However, only a small subpopulation (34.0%) of these offenders had also demonstrated an instrumental, goal-directed use of violence. Cornell, *et al.* (1996: 788) concluded that reactive violence "*is the most basic form of aggression among criminal offenders, and instrumental violence should be considered a marker of a more pathological development in the ability to use aggression for goal-directed purposes*"

Empirical investigations exploring the typology of reactive and instrumental violence have traditionally focussed on the male pattern of violent offending, as males are responsible for the vast majority of violent and non-violent crime both in the general community and in prison custody (Bennett *et al.*, 2005; Daly, 1998; Harer & Langan, 2001; Heidensohn, 1997). There is currently limited research exploring gender differences in the use of reactive and instrumental violence. However, research comparing the general pattern of

violent behaviour displayed by male and female offenders has identified notable differences in the circumstances in which males and females use violence and in the motivating factors that give rise to violence (Campbell, 1993; Snell, 1991; Verona & Carbonell, 2000; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999).

Typically, violent crimes committed by female offenders are characterised by a loss of control in response to feelings of anger and hostility following an interpersonal conflict. Female offenders are more often motivated to cause harm to the victim following a conflict and the victims, particularly in homicides, are more likely to be related to the perpetrator (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Verona & Carbonell, 2000). In contrast, male offenders are more capable of committing violent offences without being motivated by anger and where the victim is a stranger (Campbell, 1993; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). Moreover, psychopathic personality traits, which have been strongly associated with an instrumental use of violence, are also much more prevalent among violent male offenders (approximately 31% of sample population) compared to violent female offenders (approximately 11% of sample population) (Grann, 2000).

Psychosocial explanations of gender differences in the use of violence focus on differences in the socialisation of males and females (Campbell, 1993). Males are typically socialised to view aggression and physical force as a means of asserting control and power over others and as strengthening their masculinity. Males learn to view physical provocations as a challenge and quickly realise the benefits, both social and material, that physical dominance can bring. Thus males are likely to engage in violent behaviour more readily and are more likely to learn to use violence even in the absence of feelings of anger.

In contrast, women generally learn non-violent methods of responding to provocation and conflict. Women are more likely to control the display of aggression even when they feel angry as violence and aggression are typically characterised as 'unfeminine' and conflict with the view of women as nurturers. As Campbell (1993: 20) articulates "*the most remarkable thing about the socialisation of aggression in girls is its absence. Girls do not learn the right way to express aggression; they simply learn not to express it*". Therefore, it follows that acts

of physical violence perpetrated by female offenders are more likely to be characterised by a loss of control and strong feelings of anger and are less likely to be motivated by the attainment of social or material gain.

Interestingly, there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of female offenders in countries such as the USA (Snell, 1991). In NSW the number of sentenced female offenders in correctional centres has increased by 49.5% since 1995, while the sentenced male offender population has only increased by 21.7% over the same period (Eyland, 1996; Corben, 2006). Although, this dramatic increase in the female offender population is likely to be affected by changes in legislation and policing strategies, it also highlights the need to better understand the female pattern of offending, in particular violent offending.

### Aim of current study

This study aims to provide preliminary figures on the proportion of violent male and female inmates held in NSW correctional centres. The study also aims to provide basic demographic statistics and provide an offence profile for both male and female inmates with violent offences. The profile will include the following factors:

- Demographics
  - Age at time of conviction
  - Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
  - Country of birth
  - Marital status
- Violence
  - Type of violent offence(s)
  - Whether reactive or instrumental violence
  - Type of violent breaches of correctional centre regulations

### Violent Behaviour

Violence is a complex phenomenon that incorporates a broad and diverse range of individual behaviours. Definitions of violence generally describe the use of physical force and commonly make reference to the intentions of the perpetrator to cause injury or destruction.

More recently, explorations of violence have included psychological and emotional forms of violence. However, consensus on what actions can be classified as violent has not yet been

achieved as violent behaviour can take many forms and can have broad ranging consequences (Riedel & Welsh, 2001; Stanko, 2003). As Blackburn (1993) highlights the term violence can be used to describe “*the infliction of physical injury, verbal derogation, or passive destruction and its effects may range from loss of life to wounded pride*” (p.211).

This study has adopted a broad definition of violence. This definition includes both physical violence towards people and property as well as psychological forms of violence, such as threats of harm and intimidation. Inmates were classified as violent if they were currently serving a sentence of full-time custody for a violent offence or if they had demonstrated violent behaviour whilst in custody.

The offences that were classified as violent in this study can be separated into 3 categories:

1. Interpersonal violent offences: such as murder, assault or intimidation.
2. Violence used in association with another crime: such as armed robbery, aggravated dangerous driving or aggravated break, enter and steal; and
3. Property violence: such as malicious damage to property.

The study also examined breaches of correctional centre regulations. Inmates not currently incarcerated for a violent offence are identified as violent if they have violently breached correctional centre regulations during the current sentencing period.

Breaches of correctional centre regulations were classified as violent if they included:

- Physical violence towards staff or other inmates: such as assault or fighting; or
- Threats of violence: such as threatening or intimidating behaviour.

Therefore, in the current study a sentenced inmate was classified as violent if they met one of the following criteria:

- Currently convicted of a violent offence; or
- Violently breached correctional centre regulations during their current imprisonment episode.

It is acknowledged that there are limitations in using the type of offence or type of breach (of correctional centre regulations) to classify modes of violence. The main limitation is that an offence type, such as ‘common assault’, or a breach, such as ‘use of threatening language’, can be the resulting charge or conviction for a broad range of behaviours and offers limited insight into the circumstances surrounding the incident or the motivations of the perpetrator. On this basis, it is important to recognise that the findings of this study will only offer preliminary insights into the types of sentenced inmates with violent offences incarcerated in NSW correctional centres and caution is recommended when drawing inferences from these findings.

The profile presented in the current study was restricted to inmates who were sentenced to full-time custody (i.e. periodic detainees and community based offenders were excluded) with no appeals pending. Inmates on remand were excluded from the current profile as they have not been convicted of the offences with which they have been charged. These inmates were also excluded because of the transient nature of the remand population. Inclusion of this population would not provide an accurate profile of the stable population of inmates with violent offences in NSW correctional centres.

**Table 1 Representation of sentenced male and female inmates classified as violent in full-time custody (as at the 20 March 2005)**

	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Inmates with violent behaviour	3309	55.9	167	39.0	<b>3476</b>	<b>54.7</b>
Inmates with non-violent behaviour	2612	44.1	261	61.0	<b>2873</b>	<b>45.3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5921</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6349</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## The data

This study is based on data extracted from the NSW Department of Corrective Services' Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS). A snapshot of NSW sentenced inmates was taken on the 20 March 2005. This snapshot identified 3476 inmates who met the current definition of violent.

## Results

### Proportion of total sentenced inmate population

It is often assumed that the majority of inmates in prison have displayed violent behaviour either in the community or whilst in custody. In NSW the total sentenced inmate population within full-time correctional centres on the 20 March 2005 was 6349 (NSW Department of Corrective Services, 2005). The majority 54.7% (n=3476) of these sentenced inmates met the criteria for classification as violent.

### Gender proportion

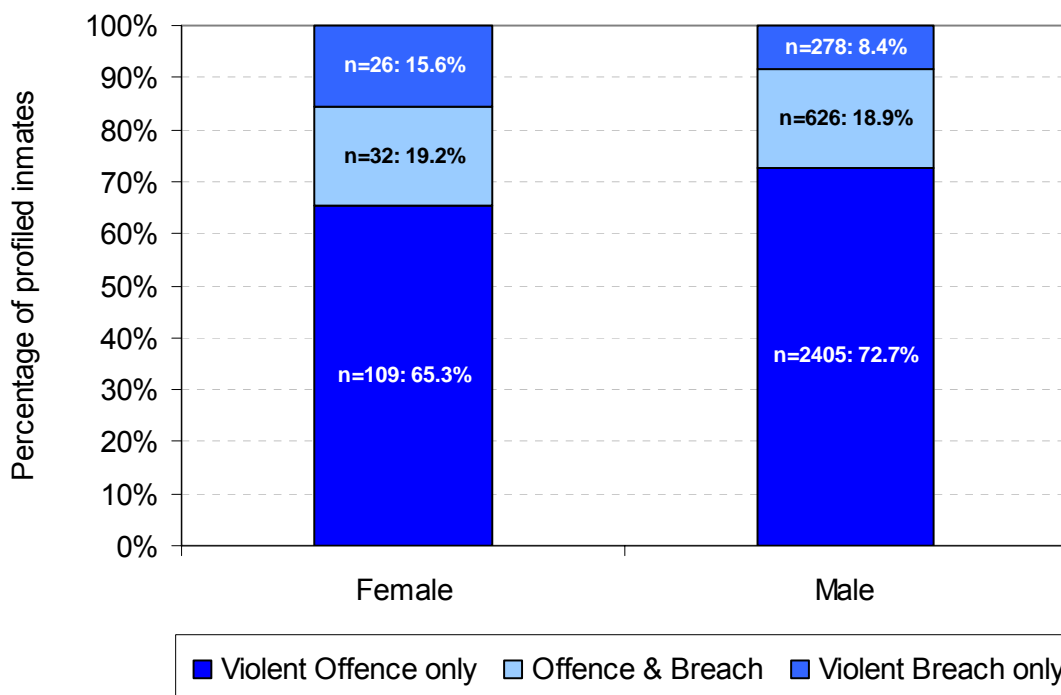
The majority of sentenced inmates in NSW correctional centres are males. Of the 6349 sentenced inmates incarcerated in NSW on the

20 March 2005, 5921 (93.3%) were male and only 428 (6.7%) were female (Offender Population Report, March 2005). This gender difference is even greater within the sub-group of profiled inmates. Of the 3476 inmates identified as having displayed violence, 3309 (95.2%) were male and only 167 (4.8%) were female.

As can be seen in Table 1, a significantly higher proportion of the male inmate population met the current definition of violent compared to the female inmate population ( $\chi^2=55.023$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The majority of male inmates 55.9% (n=3309) incarcerated in NSW meet the current definition of violent. However, only around one-third of female inmates 39.0% (n=167) meet this definition. Thus, the majority of sentenced female inmates in NSW correctional centres were serving a sentence of full-time custody in relation to a non-violent offence and had not violently breached correctional centre regulations during their current period of imprisonment.

This profile found that male and female inmates displayed different patterns of violent behaviour in the community and in custody. As Figure 1 shows, the profiled male inmates were more likely to be convicted of a violent offence and

**Figure 1** Proportion of profiled male and female inmates convicted of violent offence and violent breaches of correctional centre regulations





not display any violence once in custody (through violent breaches of correctional centre regulations). Nearly three quarters of the profiled male inmates had a current conviction for a violent offence without a corresponding violent breach of regulations (72.7%, n=2405). In contrast, the profiled female inmates were more likely to commit violent behaviour once in custody compared to male inmates. Over fifteen per cent (15.6%, n=26) of the female inmates had violently breached correctional centre regulations in the absence of a current conviction for a violent offence, almost double the percentage of the male inmates (n=278, 8.4%).

## Offender profile

### Demographic profile

The demographic characteristics of the 3476 profiled inmates are displayed in Table 2. This profile reveals that the majority of the inmates:

- were born in Australia (72.6%)
- reported to have never been married (66.2%)
- have a non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) background (73.3%), and
- Were under 35 years of age at the time of offence (73.9%).

**Table 2 Demographic characteristics of male and female violent sentenced inmates (as at the 20 March 2005)**

	Male (n=3476)		Female (n=167)		Total (n=3643)	
	Number	%	Number.	%	Number	%
<b>Aboriginality</b>						
Aboriginal	827	25.0	72	43.1	<b>899</b>	<b>25.9</b>
Non-Aboriginal	2456	74.2	93	55.7	<b>2549</b>	<b>73.3</b>
Unknown	26	0.8	2	1.2	<b>28</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3309</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3476</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Country of birth</b>						
Australia	2407	72.7	116	69.5	<b>2523</b>	<b>72.6</b>
Other	799	24.1	39	23.4	<b>838</b>	<b>24.1</b>
Unknown	103	3.1	12	7.2	<b>115</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3309</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3476</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>						
18-24	1124	34.0	54	32.3	<b>1178</b>	<b>33.9</b>
25-34	1318	39.8	71	42.5	<b>1389</b>	<b>40.0</b>
35-44	623	18.8	32	19.2	<b>655</b>	<b>18.8</b>
45-54	198	6.0	8	4.8	<b>206</b>	<b>5.9</b>
55-65	39	1.2	1	0.6	<b>40</b>	<b>1.2</b>
65+	7	0.2	1	0.6	<b>8</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3309</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3476</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>						
Never Married	2199	66.5	101	60.5	<b>2300</b>	<b>66.2</b>
Married/De Facto	886	26.8	53	31.7	<b>939</b>	<b>27.0</b>
Separated/Divorced	176	5.3	8	4.8	<b>184</b>	<b>5.3</b>
Widowed	26	0.8	3	1.8	<b>29</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Unknown	19	0.6	2	1.2	<b>21</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3309</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3476</b>	<b>100</b>

Only a minority of the inmates included in the current profile (n=899: 25.9%) identified as Aboriginal or ATSI. There was a significant association between ATSI and gender ( $\chi^2=27.2$  df=1,  $p<0.001$ ). As can be seen in Table 2, almost half of all violent female inmates (n=72 43.1%) were ATSI, while only a quarter of the profiled male inmates (n=827: 25.0%) were ATSI.

## Violence profile

### Violent offences

Of the 3476 inmates included in the profile 3172 (91.3%) are currently convicted of a violent offence. More than half of the inmates were serving a full-time custodial sentence for multiple violent offences (n=2139: 67.4%). The number of violent offences ranged from 1 to 44 offences, with an average of 3.1 violent offences. As can be seen in Table 3, male inmates were significantly more likely to be serving a sentence for multiple violent offences compared to female inmates ( $\chi^2=15.6$ , df=4,  $p<.01$ ).

Table 4 displays the type of violent offences for which the profiled inmates were in custody on the 20 March 2005. (NB. Offence type categories are consistent with the NSW Inmate Census, [Corben, 2006]). In Table 4 inmates may appear more than once across categories in instances where the inmate has multiple offences in different categories. However, where an inmate has multiple offences in the one offence category they are only counted once.

The most common violent offences for which the profiled inmates were sentenced to full-time custody were major assault (n=1095: 17.2%) and other assault (n=1070: 16.9%), with approximately a third of all profiled inmates sentenced for one of these offence types. Major assault includes offences that cause or attempt to cause bodily harm to the victim, such as assault occasioning actual bodily harm (AOABH) or maliciously inflict grievous bodily harm. Other assault includes less serious assaults such as common assault.

Other interpersonal violent offences were also common, with 8.7% (n=554) of the profiled inmates serving a sentence for an offence against good order, such as contravening an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) or stalking and intimidation.

A considerable percentage of the sentenced inmates included in the profile had used violence in association with another offence. Over 10% (n=691: 10.9%) were serving a sentence for robbery with major assault, 6.2% (n=394) for other robbery and 8.5% (n=540) used violence during a theft, such as a break and enter or car theft. A smaller number of inmates (n=440: 6.9%) were serving a sentence for offences involving property violence, such as malicious damage to property.

A small portion of the profiled inmate population were serving a sentence for a homicide related offence, 398 (6.3%) for murder and 120 (1.9%) for manslaughter and 51 (0.8%) for attempting or conspiring to murder.

**Table 3** Number of violent offences for which male and female inmates are convicted (as at the 20 March 2005)

<i>Number of violent offences</i>	Male (n=5921)		Female (n=428)		Total (n=6349)	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
1	974	16.4	59	13.8	1033	16.3
2	699	11.8	42	9.8	741	11.7
3	463	7.8	17	4.0	480	7.6
4	264	4.5	6	1.4	270	4.3
5+	631	10.7	17	4.0	648	10.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3031</b>	<b>51.2</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>3172</b>	<b>50.0</b>

**Table 4 Number of full-time inmates currently convicted for violent offences (as at the 20 March 2005)**

<b>Offence Type</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
Murder	386	6.5	12	2.8	398	6.3
Attempt/Conspiracy to Murder	50	0.8	1	0.2	51	0.8
Manslaughter	112	1.9	8	1.9	120	1.9
Robbery with Major Assault	666	11.2	25	5.8	691	10.9
Other Robbery	385	6.5	9	2.1	394	6.2
Major Assault	1042	17.6	53	12.4	1095	17.2
Other Assault	1017	17.2	53	12.4	1070	16.9
Sexual Assault	231	3.9	0	-	186	2.9
Theft <sup>a</sup>	521	8.9	19	4.4	540	8.5
Property offences <sup>b</sup>	420	7.1	20	4.7	440	6.9
Driving/Traffic <sup>c</sup>	156	2.6	6	1.4	162	2.6
Against good order <sup>d</sup>	533	9.0	21	4.9	554	8.7
Other Offences <sup>e</sup>	340	5.7	7	1.6	347	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3031</b>	<b>51.2</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>3172</b>	<b>50.0</b>

NB. Percentages do not add up to total as offenders are represented across multiple offence categories

<sup>a</sup> Only violent theft offences are included in the Table, this includes Hijack Motor Vehicle, Steal from the Person.

<sup>b</sup> Only violent property offences are included in the Table, this includes malicious damage to property and malicious damage.

<sup>c</sup> Only violent driving/traffic offences are included in the Table, this includes aggravated driving causing grievous bodily harm and aggravated driving causing death.

<sup>d</sup> Only violent offences against good order are included in the Table, this includes Contravene Apprehended Violence Order (AVO), Contravene Domestic Violence Order (DVO) or offences involving threats and intimidation.

<sup>e</sup> Only violent other offences are included in the Table, this includes offences involving the possession of firearms and other weapons.

As can be seen in Table 4, male offenders are over represented in every category of offence type. The rate of male inmates in custody is almost double that of the female inmates across all offence types with the exception of assault related offences.

### Reactive and Instrumental Violence

The offence types displayed in Table 4 were aggregated into five offence types (homicide, assault, robbery and theft, property and other) in order to conduct preliminary analyses of reactive and instrumental violent offending among the profiled male and female inmates.

Inmates with multiple convictions in more than one offence category are only counted once in that offence category. However, inmates with multiple convictions across different offence categories are counted once in each offence category.

There are limitations in using offence type alone to identify reactive and instrumental violence. Therefore, the current study has adopted a conservative approach to classifying reactive and instrumental violence and the following analysis is intended as a preliminary profile only.

Homicide offences are not easily classified as reactively or instrumentally violent as they can result from an interpersonal conflict, which would be an example of reactive violence, or they can occur during a robbery or break and enter, in which case it would be an example of instrumental violence.

As can be seen in Figure 2, considerably more male inmates are currently serving a sentence for a homicide related offences (n=527: 8.9%) compared to female inmates (n=20: 4.7%).



Assault offences (major assault and other assault) are commonly perpetrated in response to an interpersonal conflict (Kevin, 1999). In an examination of the contexts in which assaults are perpetrated, Kevin (1999) found that more than ninety per cent of inmates interviewed had committed an assault following an interpersonal altercation and the victims were most often known to the offender.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the most common offence type for which the profiled male and female inmates were sentenced to full-time custody was an assault related offence. Almost one third of male inmates (n=1814, 30.6) and one quarter of female inmates (n=98: 22.9%) were serving a sentence for an assault related offence.

The gender difference across offence types is most prominent in the robbery or theft category. Almost one quarter of male inmates (n=1271: 22.1%) were sentenced to full-time custody for this offence type, almost double the rate of female inmates (n=44: 11.4%). Robbery and theft related offences typically reflect an instrumental use of violence as there is a clear goal orientation for the use of violence, i.e. the attainment of property or money.

Property offences are difficult to classify as reactive or instrumental as the motivation for the use of violence could be either interpersonal

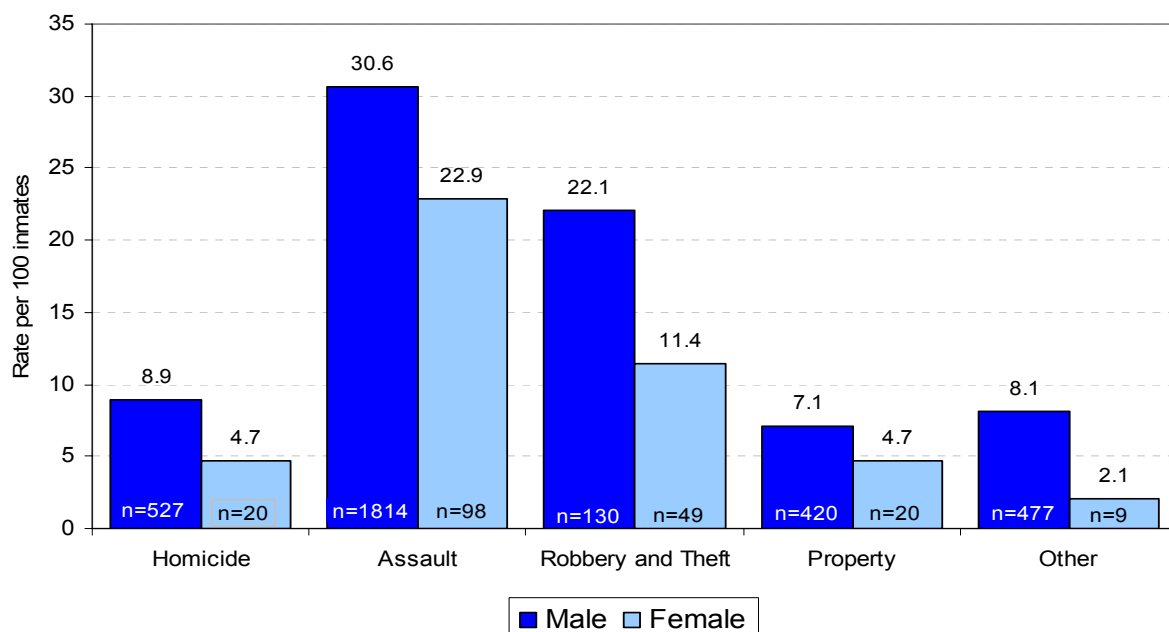
conflict or a more extrinsic motivation. The proportion of inmates serving a sentence for a property offence was comparable for male (n=420: 7.1%) and female inmates with violent offences (n=20: 4.7%).

‘Other’ offences include weapons offences and sexual assaults. These offence types could be viewed as instrumentally violent as the use of violence is typically associated with achieving power or control over another person or situation. As can be seen in Figure 2, a considerably larger proportion of the profiled male inmates (n=477: 8.1%) were serving a sentence for these offence types compared to the profiled female inmates (n=9: 2.1%).

### Violent Breaches of Correctional Centre Regulations

Violent behaviour is an important management and security issue in the custodial environment. In NSW, incidents of violence that occur within correctional centres are managed in one of two ways. More serious violent behaviour, such as murder and serious assaults are reported to the police (NSW Department of Corrective Services, 2006), who proceed with criminal charges. These inmates are not charged with breaching correctional centre regulations. Less serious violent behaviour, such as threatening language or less serious assaults are dealt with internally, where inmates are charged with

**Figure 2 Violent offence types for which male and female inmates are currently convicted as a percentage of all inmates (as at the 20 March 2005)**



breaching correctional centre regulations (Sections 51 to 65 of the *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999*). The incidents of violent breaches of correctional centre regulations included in this profile are likely to disproportionately over represent the less serious incidents of violence that are managed by the Department of Corrective Services. An important consideration when exploring rates of institutional violence is that charges for breaching correctional centre regulations are only pursued if the offender is clearly identified. Therefore, the rate of institutional charges may be an under representation of the number of violent incidents perpetrated in correctional centres.

Nine hundred and sixty two (n=962) sentenced inmates in custody on 20 March 2005 have violently breached NSW correctional centre regulations during their current period of incarceration. Of these inmates 904 (94.0%) were male and 58 (6.0%) were female. These 962 inmates have committed a total of 1670 violent breaches during their current period of incarceration. The number of breaches per offender ranged from 1 to 25, with an average of 1.7. As can be seen in Table 5, approximately fifteen per cent of all inmates (15.2%, n=962) have violently breached correctional centre regulations during the current sentencing period.

As can be seen in Table 6, the most common violent breach of correctional centre regulations by inmates was fighting whilst in custody (11.6%, n=739). Assault and the use of threatening behaviour were less common, with 5.2% (n=327) and 1.7% (n=107) of inmates breaching these regulations.

The rate of male and female inmates who breached correctional centre regulations was comparable, with 15.3% (n=904) of male and 13.5% (n=58) of female inmates breaching regulations. The proportion of profiled female inmates breached for assaulting another inmate or staff member during their current sentencing period (5.8%, n=25) is slightly higher than the proportion of the profiled male inmates (5.1%, n=302: ).

It is important to note that the rate of violent breaches of correctional centre regulations by inmates in NSW has been steadily decreasing. As can be seen in Figure 3, the annual assault rate has decreased by 45.5% from 2000-2001 to 2004-2005 with 25.3 assaults per 100 inmates reported in 2000-2001 compared to only 13.8 per 100 inmates reported in 2004-2005. (NB. These figures include remand inmates) (Report of Government Services, 2006).

The reason for the steady decline in violent breaches is the subject of further research being conducted by the NSW Department of Corrective Services. Possible reasons for the observed decline are improved case management of inmates and the development of more rigorous and controlled static and dynamic security methods in correctional centres.

**Table 5 Number of violent breaches of correctional centre regulations by male and female inmates (as at the 20 March 2005)**

<b>Number of violent breaches</b>	<b>Male (n=5921)</b>		<b>Female (n=428)</b>		<b>Total (n=6349)</b>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
1	618	10.4	34	7.9	652	10.3
2	159	2.7	14	3.3	209	3.3
3	61	1.0	4	1.0	92	1.4
4+	124	2.1	6	1.4	129	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>15.2</b>

**Table 6 Violent breaches of correctional centre regulations by profiled male and female sentenced inmates (as at the 20 March 2005)**

<b>Regulations Breached</b>	Male (n=5921)		Female (n=428)		Total (n=6349)	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Assault	302	5.1	25	5.8	327	5.2
Fighting	699	11.8	40	9.3	739	11.6
Threatening Behaviour	99	1.7	8	1.9	107	1.7

NB. Percentages do not add up to 100 as offenders are represented across multiple breach categories

## Discussion

Inmates convicted of violent offences and violently breaching correctional centre regulations constitute a large percentage of the sentenced offender population in NSW. While the current study found that male inmates are significantly overrepresented in both the general inmate and violent inmate populations, it also found that on the snapshot day (20 March 2005) over a third of the sentenced female prison population met the current definition of violent.

Consistent with previous research (Bennett, et al. 2005,; Daly, 1998; Heidensohn, 1997), the findings of the current study indicate that male inmates are responsible for the majority of violent offences processed by NSW criminal courts. Male inmates were not only overrepresented in every category of violent offence types, but they also committed on average, significantly more violent offences compared to female inmates.

However, contrary to previous overseas findings (Harer & Langan, 2001), this gender difference was not evidenced when incidents of violence in the NSW custodial environment were examined. In a US study, Harer and Langan (2001) found a higher rate of less serious violence-related misconduct incidents, such as less serious assault, fighting and threatening behaviour, in the male prison population compared to the female prison population. The current study found that the rate of minor institutional misconduct was similar for the profiled male and female inmates. Interestingly, the rate of assault in custody was slightly higher in the profiled female inmate population compared with male population.

This preliminary profile of the pattern of violence displayed by sentenced inmates in NSW correctional centres indicates prominent gender differences in the environments in which violence is committed. The male pattern identified in this study demonstrated a more pervasive use of violence in the community, while the female profile was characterised by comparatively higher incidences of violence in custody. These findings suggest that there may be gender-specific features of the custodial and community environments that facilitate or contribute to the use of violence, over and above the influence of individual traits or characteristics.

The differences in the rate of institutional violence observed in the male and female inmate populations may reflect differences in the management of male and female inmates or differences in the reporting of violent incidents. Psychosocial theories of violence may explain the unexpectedly high rate of institutional violence among female inmates as resulting from a change in gender specific social norms in the custodial environment (Campbell, 1993).

It should be noted that the observed decrease in the rate of assaults committed in NSW correctional centres over the last five years suggests that violence in custody can be influenced by environmental factors and can potentially be reduced through effective management and security in correctional centres. However, further investigation into the elements of the custodial environment that promote or prevent the display of violence by both male and female inmates is required to accurately and effectively guide policy and management development.

The classification of *reactive* and *instrumental* violence assists in understanding the population of inmates who display violence both in the community and in custody, including the multiple causal factors and the diverse range of motivations that give rise to violent behaviour (Blackburn, 1993; Berkowitz, 1993; Cornell, et al, 1996).

The current study found that the most common offence type for which male and female inmates in NSW correctional centres are currently convicted are assault related offences that would typically be characterised as *reactively* violent. Only a minority of inmates have a current conviction for an robbery or theft offence that demonstrates a more *instrumental* use of violence. This profile is consistent with previous research by Cornell, et al (1996) which concluded that reactive violence is the most pervasive form of criminal violence and that instrumental violence is only displayed by a smaller subpopulation of inmates.

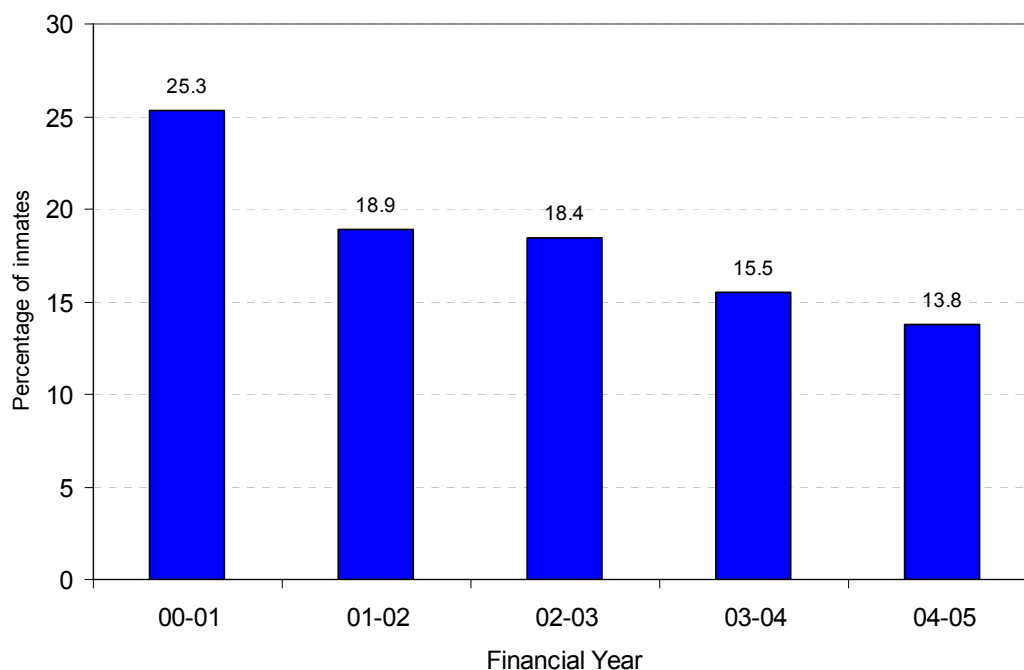
Interestingly, the current study found differences in the gender proportion of inmates that were sentenced to full-time custody for reactively and instrumentally violent offences. Instrumental, goal-directed violent offences were more prevalent in the male inmate population compared to the female inmate

population. However the significance of this difference is not known. Almost one quarter of the male inmate population were convicted of robbery or theft offences where violence is used to achieve an additional goal, such as money, property or power. In contrast, only around 10% of female inmates are currently convicted of these offences, (robbery and theft) which are not typically motivated by interpersonal conflict.

Offences that are typically reactive or emotionally motivated, such as assault, were also more prevalent among male inmates. However, the gender difference was much smaller with 30.6% of male inmates recording this type of violence compared to 22.9% of female inmates.

The use of reactive violence should be examined with reference to the level of provocation and the degree of escalation that precedes the behaviour (Bennett, et al, 2005). Social cognitive theories of violence would argue that the use of reactive violence by male perpetrators would require considerably less provocation from the victim and would escalate much more rapidly than violence used by female perpetrators. Potential gender differences in the perception of provocation and the degree of escalation in the use of violence should be considered in the treatment of violent

**Figure 3 Annual rates of assault per 100 inmates (sentenced and remand) in NSW correctional centres**



male and female inmates as it has implications for the risk of violent re-offending and for the potential dangerousness of inmates. Future research should consider differences in the provocation and escalation of violent offences by male and female inmates.

The findings of the current study have implications for the delivery of treatment programs targeting male and female inmates convicted of violent offences. Programs targeting the use of violence by male inmates may need to extend beyond the management and control of anger and aggression and focus on a more developed pathological ability to use violence in the absence of anger for goal-directed purposes (Cornell, et al, 1996). Moreover, the apparent pervasiveness of instrumental violent offending may also reflect a prevalence of psychopathic personality traits in the male offender population (Forth, et al, 1990; Grann, 2000), which will need to be considered in treatment. However, the findings suggest that addressing instrumental motivations for violence may not be as applicable in the female population. A focus on skill development in the management of anger and aggression may prove more effective for this population.

The current study has found that the typology of reactive and instrumental violence can be applied to both the male and female NSW inmate populations. However, further research exploring the circumstances and motivations for the violent behaviour is needed to more fully understand this offender population. This research will also provide more insight into the gender differences in the use of reactive and instrumental violence.

Further research exploring the impact of additional factors, such as drug and alcohol use (Kevin, 1999), mental illness (Blanchette, 1997), and prior physical and emotional abuse (Leschied, Cummings, Van Brunschot, Cunningham, & Saunders, 2000) is essential in guiding the development of treatment programs that effectively address the criminogenic risks and needs of male and female inmates who demonstrated violent behaviour.

It is necessary to highlight limitations in the methodology used in this study. Firstly, the classification of reactive and instrumental violence was based on the offence type, as categorised by the NSW Department of Corrective Services, for which the inmates were serving a sentence of full-time custody. This

method offers limited insight into the motivations or circumstances surrounding the violent behaviour and thus restricts the inferences that can be drawn from the findings. A more accurate and reliable typology of violent behaviour could be derived by analysing the cognitive styles of inmates with violent offences, including motivations, skill deficits and emotional regulations (Serin, 1994) and the specific details of the violent offence. A more extensive analysis of the cognitive styles of violent male and female inmates will provide a more accurate and in depth understanding of this population and this methodology will be considered for future research.

A second limitation of this study is that the pattern of reactive and instrumental violent offending is restricted to current offences. The inclusion of previous convictions and acts of violence that did not result in a criminal conviction will provide a more robust profile of male and female inmates who display violent behaviour. The next stage of research exploring inmates with violent offences will examine current and past violent offences in more detail to establish a better understanding of the use of reactive and instrumental violence by male and female inmates in NSW.

In conclusion, inmates who display violent behaviour constitute a significant portion of the sentenced inmate population in NSW. The preliminary findings presented in this study highlight prominent differences in the display of violence. Effective management and targeted treatment of these inmates, both male and female, is essential to reduce the risk of harm posed to the community, correctional staff and other inmates. Further research exploring the specific environmental and individual factors that give rise to the use of criminal violence both in the community and in custody will assist in developing and delivering effective treatment programs.



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