A Profile of the Prison Population

A study of inmates in Bermuda

Conducted by:

Profiles of Bermuda

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In 2002, the now defunct organisation Work Inc., whose mission was to assist newly-released prisoners with skill enhancement and employment, commissioned a benchmark study of inmates in order to better service their needs.

In 2009, at a community round-table discussion of Bermudians in Aspen, Colorado on race relations, it was highlighted that there was insufficient data on the criminal system. As a result, funding for this project was made possible from a private foundation resulting from participant work at the 2009 Aspen institute for community change seminar, with a view to updating the 2002 Study.
Methodology

- The questionnaire used in 2002 was the basis for the instrument used in 2012. Based on gaps from the previous study, and the evolving inmate population, additional questions, such as if inmates had a parent or guardian that had been incarcerated, were added in 2012.

- Interviewers went into the prison facilities in February and initially completed interviewing in May. As all interviews were voluntary, they were not successful in getting female inmates to participate, even after several attempts. A final attempt was made in August, through arrangement with prison officials, and the questionnaire was self-administered to six females who agreed to participate. That sample was too small for detailed analysis.
The survey instrument contained more than 80 questions which lasted on average between 20 and 25 minutes. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, persons were interviewed privately.

Some 157 persons completed the survey representing 58% of the 271 inmates (based on official records for May, 2012). This compares to the 2002 Study when 52% of the inmate population volunteered to be interviewed. However, the total population had declined from 2002 when it was 338, meaning that there were actually more who volunteered in 2002 (176) than did those in 2012.
The Profile

- While still relatively young, the prison population is ageing (increasing from 32 years in 2002 to 36 years in 2012.) This is a reflection of the general population.

- Nine in 10 inmates (89%) are black and virtually all of those are black males. Similarly, 92% are Bermudian. These figures are essentially the same as in 2002.

- More than 8 in 10 (81%) of inmates have never been married, unchanged from 2002.

- There was a sharp decline in inmates entering prison with no academic qualifications, from more than half in 2002 (54%) to less than one-third (31%) in 2012. Notably, just under two-thirds (63%) who reported having a GED obtained it while incarcerated.
Nearly two-thirds (64%) of inmates had been to prison previously, virtually unchanged from 2002 (65%). However, when using the American definition of recidivism, which does not include persons who have remained out of prison for three years or more before being re-incarcerated, the rate of recidivism falls to 37%, lower than the rate in the United States and the United Kingdom (both at 43%).

Drug offences continue to be the single most reason for incarceration, up in 2012 (from 20% to 28%).

Bermuda was ranked 13th in the world for incarcerations per 100,000 population. Indeed, a number of small island states in the region were on the top 25 out of over 200 countries.
While the two top drugs remained alcohol and marijuana during the decade, alcohol replaced marijuana as the drug of choice, with both seeing increased use. All other named drugs saw a decline in use.

On average, inmates continued to be long-term users of drugs (18 years).

Drug use within prison is on the increase. Those reporting usage within the previous seven days of the survey increased from 9% in 2002 to 16% in 2012. When cross-tabulated against length of sentence, it is estimated that nearly half of all inmates (46%) have used drugs while in prison, compared to one-third (35%) in 2002.

The unemployment rate among inmates prior to coming to prison was 15%, nearly twice the national level of 8% in 2012.
In 2012, inmates were asked if they had a parent who had been incarcerated and 27% responded in the affirmative.

Similar to 2002, just over 1 in 10 inmates (12%) admitted to being sexually abused.

Three percent (or five individuals) admitted to having sexual relations with another person while incarcerated.

Likewise, 3% admitted to being a member of a gang.

Just over three-quarters of inmates (76%) had a positive outlook on life, virtually unchanged from 2002 (74%).

Inmates volunteered that they needed to be treated better, that they needed more programs that would provide them with coping skills outside, and that officers needed to be better trained, among numerous other mentions.
Place of Interview

- Westgate: 72%
- Farm: 22%
- Co-Ed: 6%

Note: Westgate includes the Transitional Living Centre and the Farm includes the Right Living Center.
Reflecting the ageing population, both the average and the median age of inmates increased during the decade.
There were fewer females incarcerated in 2012 and initially they did not want to participate. Eventually, six did respond, about half of those incarcerated.
Race of Respondent

With the Black Bermudian population at 63% (2010 Census) and the White population at 24%, Backs continue to be overrepresented in the Criminal Justice System.
The vast majority of inmates (92%) are Bermudian and this has remained virtually the same over the decade.
Of those responding, just over one-third (35%) of foreign nationals were from Canada, with just under one-third (29%) Americans. N=17.
More than 8 in 10 respondents had never been married, virtually unchanged over the decade. Just under one-quarter (23%) of those who had been married were divorced while in prison.
There was a dramatic drop in the number of inmates who reported that they had no qualifications over the decade, and a concomitant increase in those who had obtained a GED.
Of those who had academic qualifications in 2012, just over one-third (36%) obtained them while in prison. Of those that had obtained a GED, some 63% had done so while imprisoned.
Rate of Recidivism (generally)

When asked if they had been imprisoned previously, two-thirds indicated that they had, unchanged over the decade.
In the United States, recidivism rates are only calculated for those who reoffend within three years. Using this definition, Bermuda’s rate falls to nearly half of the general rate.

The average and the median number of incarcerations remained virtually the same over the decade. In 2012, one inmate had reported that they had been incarcerated 34 times.

The median number of times spent in remand was one, while the average was two.
Drug offences continued to top the last for the reason of incarceration, up significantly from 2002. Down by almost half were Breaking and Entering offences.

*Not separated in 2002.
Bermuda is 13th highest for incarcerating its people. Notably, a number of small island states top the list. Source: wikipedia.org
When asked if they were under the influence of drugs while committing their crime, just over half of the inmates responded in the negative.

Note 2002's data does not add to 100% as non-respondents were not included.
What drugs were used?

- More than half (56%) of those who reported being under the influence of drugs were using alcohol.
- Note numbers exceed 100% due to multiple response.
Was the crime planned?

With three-quarters of crime being unplanned, this suggests that the public may be able to prevent certain kinds of crime, such as Breaking an Entering.
How was the crime committed?

In 2012, just over three-quarters of inmates (77%) committed their crimes by themselves, up significantly from the 68% who did so in 2002.
Longer sentences have been reflected in the sharp fall-off in those incarcerated for one year or less, and large increases for those who have to serve five years or more. However, the median length of time to serve for both studies was 3½ years.
More than 4 in 10 repeat offenders (42%) had indicated that they were out of prison for 3 or more years before being re-incarcerated. These persons were removed when the rate of recidivism was calculated using international norms.
Eight in 10 inmates had been employed prior to going to jail, with 82% of these working full-time. While 20% were not employed, a portion were not looking for work. Those looking for work, or unemployed, amounted to 15%, nearly twice the national average in 2012 of 8%.

Reasons given or not looking for work included: gave up, didn’t want a job, didn’t need a job, medical reasons and family obligations.
While working, nearly 4 in 10 inmates (37%) held jobs in the construction sector. Just over 1 in 20 (6%) worked for themselves.

The year when many were last working was in 2011.
### Drugs ever used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Drug</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack Cocaine</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herion</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cocaine</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not used drugs</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCD/Hallucinogens</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbiturates</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opiates/Methadone</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCP</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While marijuana and alcohol remain the drugs of choice, alcohol has replaced marijuana as the top drug. With the exception of other drugs, these two were the only ones to see increased usage over the decade. Both forms of cocaine use had declined significantly over the period.
On average, inmates had been using drugs for nearly two-decades, or about half their lives.
When last used drugs

- When these results are cross-tabulated with length of sentence, it is estimated that nearly half (46%) of inmates use drugs while in prison. This compares to the one-third (35%) of inmates calculated to have used drugs in prison in 2002.
More than 4 in 10 inmates reported that it was not too difficult to get drugs in prison. The 2012 figure of 42% is nearly the same as the 46% calculated to actually use drugs in prison.
Nearly 4 in 10 (37%) of inmates stated that they had been in a drug rehabilitation program previously. When asked how long they were able to stay clean or sober, the average was two years, while the median was one year.

When asked if they would be willing to enroll in a drug rehabilitation program (whether or not they had been in one previously) one-third (32%) stated that they would.
Just over 4 in 10 (42%) of inmates had no children. Of those who did in 2012, both the median and average was two. There was very little variation in the median ages in 2012 compared to 2002.
In 2012, 54% of those who had children lived with them prior to incarceration. This compares to 43% in 2002. For just over half of those who had children (52%), one of their children were living with them. Just under 3 in 10 (29%) had two children living with them, while nearly 1 in 5 (20%) had three or more living with them. Since incarceration, 81% of those children lived with their mother/father, 9% were old enough to live alone, 7% lived with their grandparents, while 3% lived with someone else.

More than 8 in 10 inmates expressed a desire to have more contact with their children in both 2012 (84%) and in 2002 (89%). With regard to actions, just over one-third made contact with their children weekly, compared to 3 in 10 (30%) in 2002. Other the other hand, less than 2 in 10 (17%) never made contact with their children, down by almost half from the 31% who reported same in 2002.

A full 25% of inmates who had children, required some assistance from Child and Family Services.
Three-quarters of inmates (77%) engaged in religious activities during the preceding week of the survey, almost unchanged from 2002 (76%). The median amount of time spent in those activities was three hours compared to two hours in 2002. When asked how helpful that activity was to them, inmates expressed their views as follows:

- “It allows me to get away from ignorance.”
- “It helped me to ease my guilt over the crime that I committed.”
- “It gives me a broader understanding of my situation in life.”
- “Prayer helps inside these walls for strength to keep me going.”
- “It gives me more insight and knowledge about God’s word.”
- “It strengthens my spirit and keeps my thoughts positive.”
- “It made me realise that God has a plan for me; it has brought me closer to God.”
- “It gives me more insight into the Bible.”
Violent activity

- In 2012, just over one-quarter of inmates had been involved in a fight or had been hit or punched (26%). In 2002, just over 1 in 5 (21%) had been involved in violent behaviour.
Since 2002, the level of inmates enrolled in courses and training had increased significantly. In 2002, 4 in 10 (43%) of inmates were taking educational courses. In 2012, that figure increased to 54%.

The completion rate was also higher in 2012 (64% compared to 36% in 2002.) Some of the course that inmates were taking included:

- Air-conditioning/Refrigeration
- Anger management
- Auto-body
- Carpentry
- Carpet cleaning
- Computer skills
- Construction
- Creative writing
- Culinary Arts
- Drug education/Rehabilitation
- Electrician course
- GED (math, English, science and social studies)
- Horticulture
- Life-Skills
- Parenting
- Thinking for a change
- Welding
In 2012, significantly more inmates reported living with their mother than they did in 2002. In the 2010 Census, however, only 12% of Bermudian households comprised of single parents compared to 61% in this survey. Those reported living with both parents (21%) were also down, but that figure was inline with the 22% of two-parent households reported in the 2010 Census.
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While there has been an increase in the number of inmates who reported a physical or mental condition that limited their ability to work, there was a decrease in those reporting reading and hearing difficulties.
Similar to the 2002 Study, just over 1 in 10 (12%) inmates admitted to unwanted sexual contact. Also similar to the 2002 Study, the persons were generally known to the victim and the abuse occurred before the victim was 18 years old. The average age when the act occurred was 12 years and the median age was 9. There was a directional increase in the percentage who stated that the abuse occurred more than once (4%).
Sexual activity in prison

- Just 3% of inmates (5 individuals), reported having sexual relations while incarcerated.

- Of those five individuals, three engaged in opposite sex relations, while one engaged in a same-sex relation. The other person declined to state what kind of relation it was.
Just 3% of inmates (5 individuals), stated that they belonged to an organised gang.

Gathered intelligence, however, would indicate that that number is much higher.
Just over three-quarters (76%) of all inmates had either a very positive or somewhat positive outlook on life, virtually the same as in the 2002 Study. Less than 1 in 10 (6%) had a negative outlook.
Why do you feel that way?

The above is a wordle.net content analysis of the responses given. The larger the word the more frequent the mention. Inmates were clearly concerned about their lives, positive things going forward and family. This analysis was verified by textanalyser.net, which give more details. Supporting verbatim comments to follow.
Outlook on life verbatim comments

- “Always look to the good in life and stay away from the bad.”
- “Through self-discovery and actualisation, I’ve learned to harness this positive energy.”
- “I’ve had a life-changing experience and this has only made me stronger.”
- “Through the years I’ve learned the value of life, and what’s important to me in order to be prosperous in life.”
- “I’m looking forward to spending more time with my son and establishing my own business.
- “There’s more to life than being a trouble-maker and being behind bars.”
- “People are falling away from God and religion. I am not going to care any longer – my prayers are never answered.”
- “The way I have been institutionalised, I don’t know if I am going to be able to break the cycle.”
- “This is a negative-minded place and nothing has been positive toward me.”
Again, a wordle.net content analysis of all the responses given. In this analysis, inmates referred to themselves and their needs the most. They also referred to the phone system, the officers, particular the need for them to be better trained. To a lesser extent, they highlighted the need for conjugal visits. Supporting verbatim comments to follow.
‘Anything else?’ verbatim comments

- “A lot of innocent guys are getting punished in jail for one person; separate the bad apples so that the better ones can give themselves a chance.”

- “Bring back smoking, phone calls (better system needed), nutritional and more variety in foods. Most women prison officers have something against men; (they) bring their personal problems to inmates, they need to be more professional.”

- “Conjugal visits for guys doing ten years or more; treat inmates according to how they carry themselves.”

- Corrections officers need training in how to deal with people.”

- “Evaluate prison as a whole, especially prison officers who are being paid for work they are not qualified for.”

- “Further educational programs past GED for inmates; need an authority to watch prison officers, internal affairs.”

- “Empower individuals; more classes, more proficiency and better communication from case workers etc.”
‘Anything else?’ verbatim comments cont’d

- “We need programs for employment and housing on release. Also more contact with families; more programs to learn skills to help on the outside.”

- “There is no need for life sentences. How can you punish a human with a life sentence when you punish a child for less? One event doesn’t define me as a person. Pressure is placed on inmates’ families.”

- “The prison doesn’t tackle the main problems like physical, sexual and emotional abuse.”

- “Society has alienated a lot of black males and made them to feel incompetent. Blacks are in charge but not (in charge of) money. Prison officers are in fear. Women officers have too high estrogen levels.”

- “The community needs to make prison less attractive than living in society. Psychological evaluations on inmates (should be conducted) at the time of entry. Lock down the prison. Incorporate more family interaction.”

- “The whole system needs to be rebuilt from scratch. There are double standards and favourtism. A lot of racism from officers, such as when I was called a ‘white boy’ and blamed for 400 years of slavery. The canteen needs to be revamped.”
Conclusion

On the face of it, it seems that little has changed since the 2002 Study, and in many respects that would be true. However, there are some things learned in this Study that require attention.

For starters, while the general rate of recidivism remained unchanged, it falls drastically when those who were incarcerated after three years or more are excluded. It would be quite revealing to find out how that group managed to survive that long and why they finally succumbed to crime again. What role, if any, did the current recession play in that?

The ageing prison population is cause for concern. Prisons in other jurisdictions are encountering the same phenomenon, as well as the increasing healthcare costs associated with it. And with sentences increasing, the prison population has the potential of ageing even more. This will impact on security as a population that has ‘nothing to lose’ increases.

There are less inmates coming into the prisons with no qualifications and they are clearly receiving the attention that they need and successfully obtaining their GED. However, concomitant to the ageing inmate population, the prison may have to consider educational programs beyond the GED, and different types of vocational programs to meet the changing needs of inmates.
The alleged increase in drug use within the prison has to be cause for concern. Nearly half of inmates are estimated to be using drugs within prison and this figure is supported by nearly the same proportion who contend that it is not too difficult to obtain drugs while in prison. While stricter security measures can be put in place, what can be done about ‘low security risk’ items such as fruit, that could easily be fermented? A thorough analysis of the various types of drugs found over the years, where they were found and the times when they were found, would give some insight into the measures that have to be put in place to reduce and eliminate their use.

Inmates had much to say when asked for their open-ended opinion. Much of the comments centred around the way that they feel that they were treated. They generally felt disrespected, and even more so by female officers, and stated that officers were in need of interpersonal training.

Inmates also were dissatisfied with the phone system and wanted that changed. It is perhaps not surprising in an era where more rights are being demanded that inmates would also like more rights. Quite frequently they mentioned conjugal rights generally and home visits for those who were married. They also mentioned the need to spend more time with their family, in particular their children.

Bermuda’s ranking as one of the world’s top incarcerators is perhaps something not to be proud of, even as others in the region are doing similarly. The issues of alternatives to incarceration and restorative approaches to justice may have to be looked at again.
This report is an update from the benchmark 2002 Study. It also provides just an overview of the wealth of data collected in 2012. Very much like a census, analyses can done on a finite scale. What we have attempted to do with this overview is to address the salient issues and measure progress, or lack thereof, compared to the 2002 Study. That we feel we have accomplished. We further stand ready to assist the Department of Corrections specifically, and the Ministry of Public Safety in general, in providing further analysis that may assist them in reaching their goals.