



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

Report Name: *Assaults on staff in Western Australian prisons*

The incidence of staff assault in Western Australian prisons is the subject of a new report released by the Inspector of Custodial Services.

The Inspector, Neil Morgan said:

Staff safety is a paramount consideration and every assault on prison staff is of concern. Fortunately, we found that assaults on staff are relatively infrequent and that serious assaults are rare.

This shows that staff who work in all areas of our prisons are often skilled in dealing with volatile situations, including where prisoners are agitated or distressed, or during high risk activities such as escorts or restraints. They deserve the community's respect.

The report identified key factors that contribute to assaults on staff and made a series of recommendations designed to improve safety. Some prisoners were more likely to be involved in staff assault than others, namely:

- Prisoners with mental health issues or cognitive impairments,
- Female prisoners,
- Prisoners who were the least involved in work or education programs; and
- Prisoners held in more secure facilities than needed.

Mr Morgan recognised when these risk factors overlap, as they do at Bandyup Women's Prison, they produce a cumulative effect.

The prison with the highest rate of assault per prisoner by far is Bandyup. The reason for this is that Bandyup reflects all the key contributing factors: high rates of mental illness; too little for prisoners to do because of serious crowding; poor conditions; limited services and activities; and too many minimum and medium security women in a maximum security environment.

He notes that assaults on staff can have both short and long term repercussions for the victim. Sometimes, staff sustain obvious physical injuries from a strike or kick. Other assaults, such as spitting, have less obvious injuries but are no less harmful, Mr Morgan said:

It can take six months before a staff member can be certain they have not contracted a virus following a spitting incident. The wait can be stressful and can considerably impact the staff member's personal life given the potential risk of infecting others.

Mr Morgan noted that the Department of Corrective Services has done well at ensuring the risk to staff at most prisons is low. However, he emphasised that constant vigilance by the Department is necessary to ensure the number stays low, and said that areas for improvement include:

- Better record keeping;
- Improved systems for analysing assaults and for Departmental learning;
- Improved staff training in the management of prisoners with a high incidence of involvement in assaults, such as those with mental health issues and cognitive impairments; and
- A continual focus on providing a busy structured day for prisoners, with meaningful activities and access to services.

The report is available on the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services website at (<http://www.custodialinspector.wa.gov.au/go/reviews>).
