Self-harm ‘four times more likely’ in female prisoners

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Self-harm is a serious issue for women in prison, according to an Oxford University study of all prisons in England and Wales between 2004 and 2009. Almost a quarter of female prisoners cut, scratch, or poison themselves. Although women compose only 5% of the prison population, they carry out half of all self-harm incidents. The study also found that prisoners who engage in self-harm are at “substantially greater” risk of suicide than other inmates. This is particularly true for male inmates. “Suicide prevention initiatives should be changed to include a focus on prisoners who are self-harming, especially repeatedly,” said Dr Seena Fazel, joint study author from Oxford’s department of psychiatry. In a comment article about this study it was suggested that multi-agency collaboration would be valuable, rather than suicide being solely the concern of health care staff. Andy Bell, deputy chief executive of the Centre for Mental Health, said that “Women should have access to mental health support and advice at every police station. It should start when they are arrested, particularly if there are signs of self-harming or poor mental health. We have to intervene early to stop the journey.”


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