

High risk of death for young people after release from prison

31 July 2013



Young people just released from prison are up to 20 times more likely to face death than those in the community, a new study has found.

Associate Professor Stuart Kinner from the University of Melbourne and Dr Kate van Dooren from the University of Queensland looked at approximately 42,000 records of people released from prison in Queensland between 1994 and 2007. They were followed up for up to 14 years and deaths were identified in the National Death Index.

"Between 1994 and 2008, we identified that 363 people died within a year of release from prison. We found that the risk of death for people leaving prison is four times that of people in the wider community", said Associate Professor Kinner.

As expected because they are less likely to experience the effects of chronic disease, young ex-prisoners, those aged 18 to 25, were less likely than older ex-prisoners to die.

However, the increase in risk of death after prison was greatest for this group: around six times higher among [young men](#), and more than 20 times higher for [young women](#).

Of those young people who died after release from prison, nearly all were preventable deaths due to drug-related causes or [suicide](#).

"On any one day there are almost 30,000 [adults](#) in prisons in Australia, and up to 60,000 cycle through prisons each year. Release from prison is associated with a large increase in risk of death, and this increase is greatest for young people."

Nearly all of these tragic deaths are preventable argues Associate Professor Kinner. There is a clear and compelling need for increased support for young people as they transition out of prison and back to their communities.

"People are sent to prison as punishment not for punishment, and after release it's in everybody's interests to support individuals to successfully integrate into their communities. These are not just 'offenders', they are young people, someone's children, partners and in some cases, parents. For these vulnerable young people, a [prison](#) sentence shouldn't be a death sentence."

"These tragic and [preventable deaths](#) clearly show that we can do a lot more to support this transitional process".

Provided by University of Melbourne

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