

## 8. Victimisation and perpetration among Prison Inmates

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### 8.1 Introduction

The subject of violence in various contexts such as the school or the individual's social proximity (such as in partnerships) is thoroughly studied and documented in empirical research (cf. Baier et al. 2009, Krahé et al. 2005). Victimisation in prison, however, remains an underrepresented research area in German criminology (cf. Bieneck 2010). Yet empirical data from other countries underscore that this is a topical issue. Camp and Camp (1997), for example, report that in 1996 there were some 30,000 assaults among inmates in US prisons and just under 14,000 assaults by inmates against prison staff. In Germany, prisons occasionally compile internal statistics on incidents involving violence between inmates. These statistics are rarely aggregated, however, and systematic research approaches remain the exception.

The present study addresses this research gap. An exhaustive survey in prisons of five German federal states is used to gather comprehensive data on experiences of victimisation and perpetration in prison. The project's findings help in quantifying the problem and in the development of suitable intervention measures to significantly reduce violence inside prison.

### 8.2 Violence in prisons: research findings

Querying relevant psychological databases for studies dealing with violence in prison yields a large volume of data for the US and the UK. Power et al. (1997), for example, investigated victimisation among Scottish young offenders. The authors designed a questionnaire that 707 prisoners between the ages of 15 and 21 ( $M = 18.6$  years) completed by marking boxes. The questions asked included how frequently respondents were victims of or witness to aggression and how frequently they themselves engaged in violence against other inmates. The analysis showed that 76 percent of respondents were witness to an assault at least once during their

current sentence, 29 percent of inmates reported being victims and 16 percent said they themselves had bullied others. Victims stated verbal threats and physical assault as the most frequent form of violence experienced.

A study in British prisons by Ireland (1999) arrives at somewhat higher prevalence rates. The study included data on 74 female and 235 male young and adult offenders who had completed the Direct and Indirect Prison Behaviour Checklist (DIPC). The DIPC asks in some detail what forms of violence respondents have inflicted on others or experienced themselves. It also records demographic data on respondents (such as age, sentence length, and offence type) to enable more precise analysis of experienced victimisation. Just under 58 percent of respondents said they had maltreated another inmate at some time. Male bullies outnumbered female bullies (by 61.3 percent to 47.3 percent), although the differing sample sizes need to be taken into account when interpreting the data. Some 52 percent of respondents reported having been a victim of bullying at some time, with equal prevalence for males and females. With reference to the demographic data, younger offenders are significantly overrepresented among bullies. This group stands out both for more frequent verbal abuse and in terms of physical violence.

Figures for American prisons are provided by a comprehensive study by Wolff et al. (2007). The study analysed data on 7,221 men (with an average age of 34.2) and 564 women (average age 35.5) from various prisons in a single US state. Respondents were first asked in general about their experience as victims and perpetrators of violence in the preceding six months and during their entire prison term. They were then asked to state which specific listed forms of violence (such as hitting, kicking, biting or strangling) they were confronted with. The figures on physical victimisation were classified according to whether weapons (such as knives, screwdrivers or similar objects) were used. The overall prevalence rates for the preceding six months were the same for both men and women, with some 21 percent having experienced victimisation. However, women experienced violence without weapons substantially more frequently (14.9 percent) than violence with weapons (9.4 percent). The picture was reversed for the male sample, where 11.7 percent reported violence not involving weapons compared with 14.1 percent for violence involving weapons.

For German-speaking countries, very few publications have so far addressed the topic of violence in prison. The studies have additionally remained superficial and tend to be narrative in character. Heinrich (2002),

for example, presented a paper on the development of violence in prisons in the state of Hesse. The analysis was based on inmates' prison files for the years 1989 to 1998. All files on incidents and charges were included where violence by inmates against other individuals was involved. A total of 1,229 incidents were found to meet the search criteria and were included in the subsequent analysis for the reporting period. As a result Heinrich (2002) points out that the perpetrators were mostly younger prisoners: The individuals involved in violence had an average age of 27, whereas the average age of the Hesse prison population as a whole was 34. Individuals born in countries other than Germany and without German citizenship comprised the largest group of perpetrators. The most frequent form of violence was assault (1,058 incidents), followed by threats with and without the use of weapons (110 incidents). The majority of incidents had causes relating to the individual (including mental disturbances, intoxication or aggressiveness). Subcultural structures (primarily violence as a means of enforcing interests or of gaining power or respect) within prison likewise played a significant part. These findings are meaningful only to an extent, however, because subcultural rules in prisons mean that not every assault among inmates is reported to prison staff. The reported prevalence rates therefore tend to understate the problem of violence in prison.

In a similar way to Heinrich (2002), Wirth (2007) presents the findings of an analysis of files on violent offences in prisons in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2005. The offence/offender-based analysis relates to 403 verifiable offences with 518 offenders. All reported incidents of note involving violence were surveyed, including sexual coercion/rape, murder and manslaughter, assault, participation in a brawl, threats, coercion, robbery or extortion. The core findings of the analysis underscore that violence among inmates that comes to official notice is predominantly a situational phenomenon that rarely features any identifiable background planning. The majority of cases did not result in bodily injuries requiring treatment (less than 10 percent of incidents had serious consequences). The offenders primarily showed indications of social marginalisation, more rarely had a fixed place of abode, more frequently had no school leaving qualification and more frequently were of foreign origin.

A broad-based, more comprehensive study of victimisation in prisons by Ernst (2008) draws on data relating to 2,215 adult males in 33 prisons in the states of Bavaria, Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. The response rate – the number of usable questionnaires as a percentage of questionnaires handed or laid out – came to 29.6

percent. Respondents were selected for the survey by cluster sampling. The survey took place over a long period from February 2005 to April 2006, largely because of differences in approval procedures from state to state. More than a third of respondents were young adults and the overall age range extended from 18 to 84. The questionnaire developed for the study was issued solely in German. Inmates with only limited command of the German language were consequently excluded from participating. This limitation may distort the results to the extent that inmates whose ability to communicate and make themselves understood and who are restricted by language difficulties are no less liable to become victims of assault.

The dependent variables in the study by Ernst (2008) comprise victimisation and perpetration of threats, extortion and assault in the preceding six months. 25.6 percent of respondents reported having suffered victimisation in the period concerned. Most instances related to threats and assaults. The analysis points to the conclusion that not all inmates are at equal risk of victimisation. The great majority suffer victimisation one to five times, whereas a small number exceed ten times. The question of whether the victim group with the greatest victimisation risk has certain recurring features is not answered by the study, however. No less than 17.6 percent of respondents report also being perpetrators of violence. There is a significant overlapping of victims and perpetrators. Moreover, it is reported that violence occurs less often in daytime release prisons than in secure prisons. Findings on the perpetrators are, among others, as follows: The perpetrator rate drops with increasing age; non-German prisoners are more often violent; drug users are more often seen to be perpetrators of violence; inmates condemned as violent offenders show violent behavior more frequently, the same is true for people who had already been in prison before their present sentence and who are seen to “basically condone violence” (Ernst 2008a, p. 370).

The aim of the following study was to supply current data on the extent of violence and aggression in prisons against the background of the state of research in Germany to date. The emphasis of the study was placed on adult prisons. In contrast to other studies in the past, unrecorded cases of violence were to be considered, not just reported crimes. It therefore seemed adequate to use an anonymous, standardized survey. Following enquiries to the Ministries of Justice in various states, five states finally agreed to participate: Brandenburg, Bremen, Lower Saxony, Saxony and Thuringia.

The study had two further aims: First, in contrast to earlier studies, the violent behavior of various immigrant groups was to be examined in detail. To this end, inmates were questioned on their ethnic backgrounds; furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into 18 languages in order to include those immigrants whose knowledge of German was not sufficient for a questioning in German. Second, attention was to be paid to possible factors influencing violent behavior, whereby limitations were necessary here in order not to make the questionnaire too extensive. A few individual features were selected. Prison features were also investigated because some studies point out that these features are relevant for violent behavior in prison, too. Among others, Hinz und Hartenstein (2010) state that the “climate of the institution” (p. 181) is an important environmental variable as regards aggressive behavior and one which can be influenced practically. The study of Ortmann (2002) also points to the role of prison features such as the staff-prisoner relationship or the relationships among prisoners.

### 8.3 *The sample*

In 2011 and 2012, the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony carried out questionnaire surveys in a comparable manner in 48 prisons in five states. The states concerned are Brandenburg (survey carried out: January/February 2012), Bremen (March 2011), Lower Saxony (April/May 2011), Saxony (April to June 2012) und Thuringia (April/May 2012). At the time of questioning, 11,884 people were in the prisons, of whom 5,983 took part (response rate: 50.3 %). Surveys were not carried out in men’s and women’s prisons in all states; moreover, juvenile prisons were not included in all states. The following analyses therefore apply primarily to males in adult prisons. Data for 4,436 men are available. In addition, 460 women and 1,087 people in prisons for adolescents/young offenders were questioned.

The male persons in adult prisons are on average 35.9 years old.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat more than every fourth person questioned comes from an immigrant community (26.6 %). In order to determine a participant’s origin,

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1 In the questionnaire, ages were grouped together. In order to calculate an average age, the various categories were replaced by average values (“between 14 and 17 years” = 15.5 years, “between 18 and 21 years = 19.5 years, etc.). The last category

details of the origin of his natural mother and his natural father (“Which country does ... come from”) and of the participant’s own nationality were used. Participants are considered to be German if both their parents are of German origin and they themselves are German citizens. If a non-German origin/nationality was reported, the person concerned is considered to be an immigrant, whereby in the case of contradicting details the origin of the mother was counted. The largest group of immigrants in the survey is from the former Soviet Union (5.5 %), the second-largest group from Poland (5.1 %); a Turkish origin is the third-most frequent (3.5 %). In the three East German states, the proportion of immigrants among the prisoners is only about half as high as in the two West German states (Brandenburg 18.2 %, Saxony 16.2 %, Thuringia 12.2 %; Bremen 40.0 %, Lower Saxony 35.2 %).

Of the men in adult prisons, 55.8 % have either no school qualification or a low school qualification (junior high school at the most). Two thirds of those questioned are in closed prisons, 13.6 % on daytime release, 16.4 % in custody; 4.8 % are in a different kind of prison (e.g. remand pending deportation). Almost a third of those questioned (32.5 %) is serving a sentence because they have committed, among other things, a crime of violence. A further 11 % are in prison because of, among other things, a sexual offence. The remaining prisoners are not in prison because of either a violent or sexual offence and have therefore, for example, committed theft or a drugs-related crime.<sup>2</sup>

Of the men questioned, 54.5 % had served at least one prison sentence before their present sentence. Correspondingly, the majority (76.7 %) has

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(“older than 55 years”) was replaced conservatively by 56 years. The average age presented is therefore a slight underestimation in as far as those questioned in this category were certainly also older than 56 years. The proportion of over 55 year-olds the random sample is 6.3 %.

- 2 In the questionnaire, it was possible to give several answers concerning the crime for which one had been sentenced. With regard to the central question of the survey, that of victimization and aggression, multiple answers were combined in a variable as follows: If “sexual offence” was reported, this was recorded as the offence for imprisonment. If not “sexual offence” but “violent offence” was indicated, the latter was coded. If neither of these offences were named but a different offence instead, this was recorded in the group “other”. It should be pointed out here that 1,302 participants gave no details of the crime for which they had been sentenced, the results for this variable are therefore to be interpreted with caution. In the case of the other survey variables, rates of missing data are normally half as high at the most.

at least one previous conviction (not counting the current sentence). Somewhat more than half of those questioned (54.8 %) are serving a sentence of three years at the most; 9.5 % report a sentence of more than ten years. Most of the men (76.7 %) filled out the questionnaire in their own cells, 19.1 % in the common room and 4.2 % in a different place.

## 8.4 Findings

### 8.4.1 *Extent of victimization and aggression*

Based on Ireland (1999), a number of behaviors from the perspective of both victims and perpetrators were recorded in the questionnaire, whereby it was to be estimated how often these behaviors had been experienced/perpetrated during the last four weeks and the last calendar year. As the last four weeks are a reasonable timeframe in which to recollect details, only these prevalence rates are to be reported below. Furthermore, only behaviors which are classified as physical violence are included. Threats, verbal abuse or similar behaviors, which were also recorded in the questionnaire, are not reported here. Table 8.1 shows which statements in the questionnaire were combined to the indexes “sexual violence”, “physical violence” and “extortion”. The individual items were combined in the indexes via the maximum. The highest frequency for a behavior therefore determines the index value.<sup>3</sup> If, for example, a participant was seldom forced to satisfy other prisoners with his mouth but had, for example, never been forced to have sexual intercourse, the participant receives the value “seldom” on the index “sexual violence”.

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3 Possible answers were “never”, “seldom”, “sometimes” and “often”. As a cross was only very rarely made beside the category “often” (at the most by 1.4 % of those questioned on the offences considered here), a distinction is made only between participants who have experienced/perpetrated something and those for whom this is not true. Therefore only prevalence rates - not incident rates - are reported and inasmuch the question answered as to what proportion of the participants has at least rarely experienced/perpetrated at least one offence of the relevant index.

Table 8.1 *Victimization and perpetration indexes*

Index	Victim items	Perpetrator items
Sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I had to satisfy other prisoners with my mouth.</li> <li>• I was forced to have sexual intercourse/anal intercourse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I forced other prisoners to satisfy me with their mouth.</li> <li>• I forced other prisoners to have sexual intercourse/anal intercourse.</li> </ul>
Physical violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was pushed deliberately.</li> <li>• I was beaten by hand/fist or kicked.</li> <li>• I was tormented/tortured.</li> <li>• I was beaten with an object.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I pushed other prisoners deliberately.</li> <li>• I beat other prisoners with hand/fist or kicked them.</li> <li>• I tormented/tortured other prisoners.</li> <li>• I beat other prisoners with an object.</li> </ul>
Extortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I had to pay for other prisoners' purchases.</li> <li>• I had to ask family/friends to send other prisoners money.</li> <li>• I was instructed to send other prisoners money when I left prison.</li> <li>• I had to give up some of my purchases.</li> <li>• I was forced to give other prisoners my telephone card/my PIN code.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I forced other prisoners to pay for my purchases.</li> <li>• I forced other prisoners to have their family/friends send me money.</li> <li>• I asked other prisoners to send me money when they left prison.</li> <li>• I forced other prisoners to give me some of their purchases.</li> <li>• I forced other prisoners to give me their telephone card /their PIN code.</li> </ul>

As Table 8.2 shows, experiences of violence in prisons are not unusual: 16.8 % of those questioned in men's prisons report having experienced physical violence in the last four weeks, 10.6 % to having carried it out. Extortion is somewhat rarer, sexual violence very rare: About every 50<sup>th</sup> person questioned reported having experienced sexual violence. The results coincide with those of Ernst (2008, 2008a). In women's prisons, the victim rates for physical and sexual violence are clearly lower; the rate for extortion is slightly higher. Seen from the point of view of the perpetrators, the differences between male and female prisons are smaller. This allows the interpretation that fewer perpetrators may have taken part in the survey in men's prisons than in women's prisons. When comparing the rates, it should be noted that prisons for women were not included in all states; the data between men and women are therefore not completely comparable. What is very clear is that in prisons for adolescents/young people the highest prevalence rates from the point of view of both victims and perpetrators are to be observed. Prison violence is therefore especially an issue in prisons for younger age groups.



*Table 8.2 Violence prevalence rates per prison group (in percent)*

	Victims			Perpetrators		
	physical violence	extortion	sexual violence	physical violence	extortion	sexual violence
Men's prisons	16.8	11.4	2.1	10.6	6.1	1.4
Women's prisons	11.4	12.7	1.1	9.6	4.0	1.4
Prisons for young offenders and young adults	32.4	19.6	3.3	31.2	17.9	3.2

Table 8.3 shows the prevalence rates for victims of both physical and sexual violence and for extortion for various groups of participants. Furthermore the rate for physical violence is presented. The older a participant in the survey is, the less likely he was to be a victim of violence (exception: sexual violence) and a perpetrator of violence. Clear distinctions are found for the different kinds of prison: Those questioned on daytime release report the least number of violent attacks; Ernst (2008, 2008a) und Wirth (2007) report comparable results. This would seem, on the one hand, to be a result of differing opportunity: If the prisoners are not in the prison during the day, they cannot experience or perpetrate violence – they are less exposed to those conditions of imprisonment which promote aggression. On the other hand, the composition of prisoners should also differ from the composition of prisoners in other prisons. This is confirmed if one looks at previous convictions: The percentage for people on daytime release is the lowest (44.2 %; regular prisons: 58.8 %).

Differing rates of violence are also noted with regard to the offence for which the prisoner was sentenced. The highest rate for victims of physical violence is found for people imprisoned for a sexual offence. The highest perpetrator rate is noted for violent delinquents, which also confirms the results of Ernst (2008, 2008a) und Wirth (2007); as regards victim prevalence for sexual violence there are no differences for the groups observed. Participants who have already been in prison once report experiences as a victim of violence more frequently; they are also more often perpetrators of violence. Here it is also to be assumed that this is a specific group of prisoners so that it is not ultimately a repeated sentence which is responsible for the differences but, for example, personality factors.

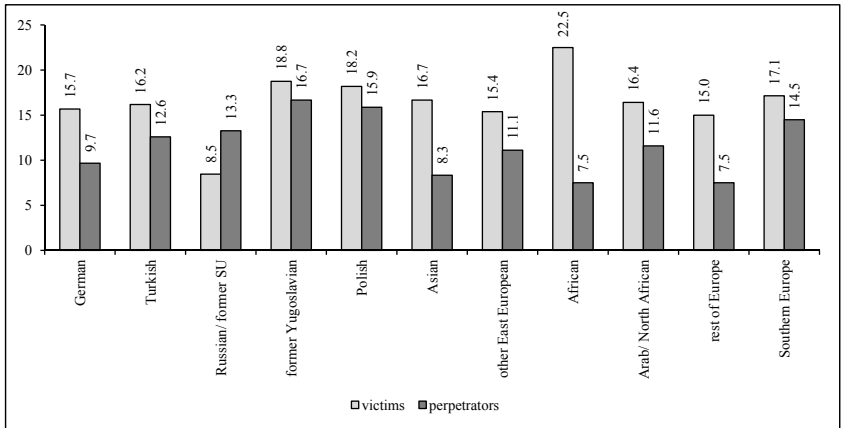
At the bottom of Table 8.3, the victim and perpetrator rates for German and immigrant prisoners are shown. According to these rates, immigrants are somewhat more often victims of sexual violence and also more often perpetrators of physical violence. The disadvantage of considering immigrants as a homogenous group is that the differences which exist between

Table 8.3 Violence prevalence rates for selected groups (only men’s prisons, in percent, bold: significant at  $p < .05$ )

	Victims			Perpetrators
	physical violence	extortion	sexual violence	physical violence
Up to 30 years	<b>17.9</b>	<b>12.7</b>	1.7	<b>15.2</b>
Up to 50 years	<b>15.2</b>	<b>10.1</b>	1.5	<b>8.8</b>
Over 50 years	<b>12.8</b>	<b>5.7</b>	1.6	<b>3.2</b>
Custody	<b>16.6</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>12.4</b>
Closed prisons	<b>17.1</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>11.3</b>
Daytime release	<b>8.7</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>5.2</b>
Other	<b>19.4</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>10.0</b>
Sexual offence	<b>20.3</b>	<b>8.9</b>	1.5	<b>4.5</b>
Violent offence	<b>13.8</b>	<b>6.8</b>	0.7	<b>13.2</b>
Other offence	<b>16.1</b>	<b>12.0</b>	1.9	<b>9.6</b>
Previous conviction: no	14.9	9.9	<b>1.2</b>	<b>6.7</b>
Previous conviction: yes	16.8	11.0	<b>2.0</b>	<b>13.5</b>
German	15.7	10.1	<b>1.2</b>	<b>9.7</b>
Immigrant	15.6	11.2	<b>1.9</b>	<b>13.1</b>

the individual groups of immigrants do not become visible. For this reason, the victim and perpetrator rates for physical violence for the various groups are shown in Figure 8.1. Two groups are especially noticeable: Africans taking part in the survey show the highest victim prevalence and the lowest perpetrator prevalence. By contrast, prisoners of Russian origin report most rarely on being victims while their perpetrator prevalence is higher than average. Similarly high perpetrator rates are found for the Polish participants and for those questioned from former Yugoslavia. It is basically true that the larger a group of immigrants becomes, the more its perpetrator rates rise and its victim rates fall. This could be an indication that in prisons subcultures form along the line of ethnic backgrounds; the larger a subculture is, the more easily it can assert itself physically against others and does not have to fear attacks from other groups.

Fig. 8.1 *Prevalence rates of physical violence for ethnic groups (in percent)*



#### 8.4.2. *Analyses of the worst experience of violence*

After reporting victimization, the participants of the survey were to describe their worst experience of violence with other inmates in the prison in which they currently were. They were to describe this experience in their own words; these freely written texts were then combined in categories. However, the majority of the participants (87.5%) did not give any details of their worst experience at all. The rest reported mostly verbal attacks. Furthermore, the participants did not just report experiences as a victim but also experiences as a perpetrator or witness. For the following analyses, only those participants who gave details of an attack of physical violence were selected. This applied to 141 participants.

Those surveyed with a worst experience of physical violence indicated more frequently that the attack had been carried out by one perpetrator (47.5%) and more rarely by two to three perpetrators (35.0%) or by more than three perpetrators (17.5%). As regards the place in which the attack took place, only 76 participants of the survey gave details. Their own cell or a different cell was cited most frequently (13 cases each). The corridor/the stairs or the work area were the areas which were mentioned second-most frequently (11 cases each).

A total of 74 participants informed someone of their experience, 51 kept the experience to themselves; 16 gave no details here. The inmates confided most frequently in department/prison staff (47 cases), followed by department managers (34 cases) und family/friends (28 cases). They also quite often spoke to other prisoners (25 cases) and doctors/medical staff (24 cases). A total of 32 of those surveyed stated that they had submitted an account of their experience in writing. These were mostly addressed to a department manager, a lawyer or the prison governor.

There were basically three reasons for not telling anyone about the experience: 26 of those surveyed stated that they did not want to be seen as a traitor: 23 were of the opinion that one does not do that in prison and 21 were afraid of further attacks. Furthermore, 12 prisoners stated that they had been threatened not to give anything away. All the same, nine victims of violence were of the opinion that they would not have been believed anyway.

All prisoners, i.e. not just those with a worst experience, were asked whether they avoided certain places in prison if possible in order to escape danger. This was confirmed by more than every fourth inmate (29.1 %). However, this percentage refers to only 2,410 of those questioned, i.e. almost half gave no details here.

With reference to those prisoners who stated that they avoid certain places and who made at least one valid reply to the answer options presented in the questionnaire (N= 676), it was found that other cells are avoided most often (50.4 %). Almost half of the participants who avoid places keep away from the prison yard in their free time (42.9 %). Other places which are often avoided are the washroom (33.7 %), sports rooms/sports ground (28.1 %), the group living area/department (22.5 %) and leisure rooms (20.6 %).

#### 8.4.3 *Factors influencing aggression*

Various factors which are considered to influence violent behavior were also recorded in the questionnaire. Table 8.4 shows some of the selected factors and the results of a multivariate explanatory model which contains these factors (binary logistic regression). The data of 3,525 participants

are included in this model; the explained variance (Nagelkerkes  $R^2$ ) is 33.5 %.<sup>4</sup>

Parental violence was recorded via the frequency of the experience of light violence (e.g. handled me rough/shoved me, gave me a clip around the ear) and severe violence (e.g. punched/kicked/bit me, thrashed me/beat me up) (cf. Straus 1979). Three groups of participants are distinguished: People without experiences of light or severe violence, people with rare experiences of light violence (at the most “sometimes”) and people with frequent experiences of light or severe violence. Of the group of prisoners, 46.7 % stated that they had frequently experienced light or even severe violence in their childhood. Comparative data for the rest of the population are unfortunately not available here. However, in a survey of ninth-grade students carried out all over Germany in 2007/2008, only 17.4 % of the students stated that they had frequently experienced light or severe parental violence (Baier et al. 2013). Prisoners therefore seem to constitute a group of the population with especially negative experiences as far as their upbringing is concerned. For the prisoners in this survey, the experience of parental violence proves to be a significant factor which influences their own violent behavior; both groups with experiences of violence show a rate of violence which is approximately 1.5 times as high as the rate of violence for prisoners without experiences of violence.

A significant influence also arises from the three factors drug consumption, affinity for violence and victimization. That 16.8 % of those surveyed had experienced physical attacks in the last four weeks, has already been reported. 16.5 % report drug use, 22.7 % a high affinity for violence. In order to measure the affinity for violence, six items were used (e.g. “You sometimes have to hit someone who wants to run you down”, “If someone picks a fight, then he deserves to be beaten”; cf. Mills et al. 2002). The statements could be agreed or disagreed with using comments from “1 – does not apply at all” to “4 – applies fully”; average values over 2.5 therefore indicate a high affinity for violence. With reference to drug consumption, it was asked whether cannabis had been smoked, drugs had been injected or whether other drugs apart from cannabis had been taken during the last four weeks.

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4 Table 8.4 shows the correlations between the explanatory factors and aggression by means of the Exp(B)- coefficients. Values over 1 indicate that a factor increases the risk of aggression, values under 1 that a factor reduces this risk.

Table 8.4 Factors influencing aggression

	in %	Exp (B), binary logistic regression
Parental violence in childhood: never	29.6	Reference
Parental violence in childhood: seldom light	23.6	1.508 *
Parental violence in childhood: frequent light/severe	46.7	1.435 *
Drug use	16.5	4.926 ***
Affinity for violence	2.7	2.558 ***
Victim of physical violence	16.8	2.795 ***
Positive relationship between prisoners and staff	52.6	0.791 *
Positive relationship among prisoners	58.3	1.054
Adequate leisure activities	38.8	1.027
Negative prison climate	31.2	1.158

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

The participants of the survey were also to assess various dimensions of the prison in which they were (cf. Liebling 2004). Based on this, the following four scales can be constructed as below:

- Positive relationship between prisoners and staff: Those surveyed were to reply to a total of six comments (“1 - does not apply at all” to “4 – applies fully”) such as “I feel that staff treat me with respect” or “The relationships between staff and prisoners are good”. Somewhat more than half those surveyed considered this relationship to be good.<sup>5</sup>
- Positive relationship among prisoners: Three items such as “The prisoners look after one another here” or “It is relatively peaceful among the prisoners” were used; 58.3 % of the prisoners considered the relationship to be more or less good.
- Adequate leisure activities: Three comments such as “One has sufficient opportunities to do sports in this prison” or “One has sufficient opportunities to be creative in this prison” were to be assessed. Only somewhat more than a third of those surveyed agreed with these comments (38.8 %).
- Negative prison climate: The participants were asked to comment on three statements such as “There are a lot of threats / violent confronta-

5 Values over 2.5 are classified as agreement in the case of the four prison-related scales.

tions here” and “One is treated unjustly and unfairly here”. A total of 31.2 % of the prisoners agreed with these statements.

As important as these assessments undoubtedly are in evaluating the quality of prisons, they are mostly irrelevant in terms of violent behavior. It is, for example, not the case that people who are more satisfied with the leisure facilities available resort less often to violence. There is, however, one exception: Prisoners who assess the staff-prisoner relationship as positive are significantly more rarely perpetrators of violence. Such inmates possibly feel more accepted and appreciated as a person when staff treat them in a positive way. This causes less frustration which finds expression in aggressive behavior towards other prisoners.

### 8.5 *Discussion*

The survey proves first that physical violence is not unusual in prisons: Every sixth adult male inmate reports attacks of violence, some of which are severe (e.g. beaten by hand/fist or kicked), every 50<sup>th</sup> sexual attacks. The quotas in women’s prisons are somewhat lower, in juvenile prisons clearly higher. That there are attacks in such a context is not surprising; whether, however, quotas are high or low cannot be finally judged here as comparative data from earlier surveys or from other contexts (e.g. adolescents in schools) would be helpful. It should be pointed out that the quota is not equally high in all prisons: There is at least one prison in which the victim rate is 5.2 %, in another prison it is 34.8 %.<sup>6</sup> This proves that there are ways of reducing violence in prisons further.

Second, indications of which factors can be considered to this end can be taken from the analyses of the factors of influence. In particular, the result that a positive relationship between prisoners and staff helps reduce violence, should be of relevance for practical work in the prison system. Each prison could easily determine the current state of these relations itself using a short questionnaire. The prisoners could also be asked for their ideas on improving this relationship. As far as the other prison-related factors are concerned, the analyses show no significant correlations with physical aggression. However, it may prove worthwhile in future to exam-

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6 Only prisons in which more than 20 inmates gave details of physical aggression were included in this comparison (N = 34).

ine the effect of other factors starting with the size of the prison through its facilities (state of the building, leisure rooms, video cameras) to other social-climatic conditions.

The finding that drug consumption is connected with higher rates of violence also points to an important area of prevention. Detecting and preventing drug use (and dealing) should be an issue for those who organize the penal system. That experiences of parental violence and an attitude which condones violence also encourage violence in prisons confirms findings for other populations. The results permit the conclusion that in initial talks more attention should be paid to the upbringing of prisoners and appropriate therapeutic help should be offered; furthermore, people who are more likely to use violence should be better identified and shown methods to improve their conflict-solving or self-control competences.

Third, the study showed interesting differences with regard to the various groups of prisoners. In this differentiated form, the findings on the ethnic groups are the first of their kind to date. Although there are initially hardly any differences between Germans and immigrants, a breakdown of the immigrant group shows differing results, e.g. that African prisoners are especially often victims of violence while Polish inmates or inmates from the former SU or Yugoslavia have an especially high perpetrator rate. The bigger an ethnic group is in prison, the more able it is to assert itself violently. Prisons must be sensitive to this formation of subcultures.

That older participants and participants from day release prison have lower victim and perpetrator prevalence rates is not surprising. What is interesting is that those prisoners surveyed who are serving a sentence for a sexual crime are more often the target of attacks from others. This apparently confirms that these prisoners are at the bottom of the prison hierarchy and are therefore more often targeted; on the other hand, these people become perpetrators very much more rarely than, for example, prisoners who have been sentenced for a crime of violence.

The various findings give an insight into the extent of violence in prisons. The method of standardized surveying does though reveal some disadvantages which should be mentioned here. It should be noted that in spite of a response rate of over 50 %, it cannot be ruled out that there is a disproportionally high number of victims and perpetrators of violence under the non-participants who did not want to tell anybody about their experiences. That at least four out of ten victims of violence stated that they had not confided in anybody and this mostly because they did not want to be seen as a traitor or similar shows that the willingness to give informa-



tion, even when anonymity is guaranteed, is lower than for other groups of the population. Moreover, the ability of the prisoners to read and concentrate may well be lower than for other groups of the population, which limits the extent to which they can be questioned. Therefore more studies which look at the methodological possibilities and limitations of standardized surveys in prisons are required in future. On the other hand, doubts about this approach are not appropriate: The correlations alone which have been found between the factors of influence and the perpetration of violence and which were partly to be expected in this form, indicate that the results of the survey are valid.

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